

# Towpath Times



Miami Erie Canal Corridor Authority

Volume 2 • Number 1 • January, 1999

## What's New

### • Membership Meeting

The first annual MECCA membership meeting will be held Wednesday, Jan. 13, beginning at 7 p.m. The meeting will be held in the Canal Room (basement) of the St. Marys City Utility Building (106 E. Spring St.).

All MECCA Members and interested person are encouraged to attend to discuss the accomplishments of the previous year and the plans for 1999. Immediately following the membership meeting, There will be a MECCA Board of Trustees meeting.

### • Strategic Planning

For the past several months the MECCA Board of Trustees has been meeting in special strategic planning sessions, which have been facilitated by Dee Hammel of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

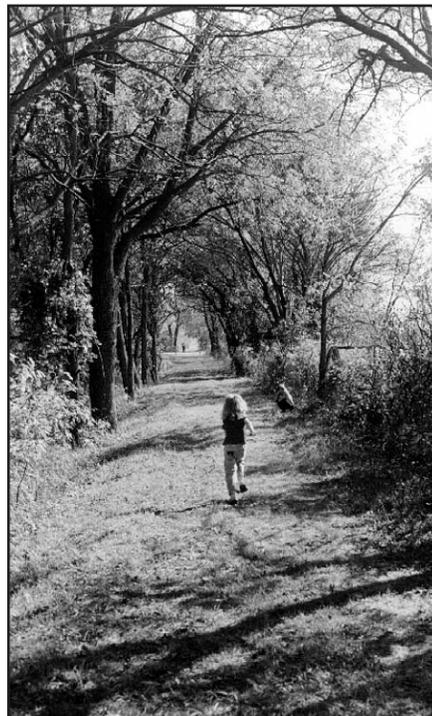
Although not completed, the strategic planning to date has been extremely useful to the Board in developing a mission and vision. More about the planning will be published in later newsletters. The Board would like to thank Dee Hammel for her professional and valuable assistance in this process.

### • Canal Dredging

The ODNR canal improvements in Spencerville are under way, including the dredging of the canal. According to officials from the Division of Water, everything remains on schedule. As dredging continues, structural improvements to a lock and a side spillway in Spencerville will begin in the spring. Other canal improvement projects will most likely go to bid this year.



*About 10 miles of towpath were accessible to hikers with bus transportation.*



*Division of Water personnel had the towpath trail in excellent condition for the Historic Canal Walk.*

## Historic Canal Walk a Hit

A beautiful October day, brought out hundreds of hikers for the first ever Historic Canal Walk. This event combined the annual Walk With Nature, held annually north of St. Marys, and the annual Canal Walk from Lock 2 to St. Rt. 219. This year's hike went from Lock 2 to 40-Acre Pond, and was sponsored by The St. Marys Kiwanis Club, the New Bremen/New Knoxville Rotary and MECCA.

Bus transportation was provided by the St. Marys City School District as several drivers volunteered their time. Hikers could be bused to or picked up at 40-Acre Pond, Memorial Park in St. Marys, the St. Rt. 219 intersection with the canal or at Lock 2. Historical and interpretive displays were available along the trail staffed by persons from the Auglaize County Historical Society, Miami-Erie Canal Society and the Division of Water.

The special hike was held to commemorate Auglaize County's 150th birthday, but since it was so successful, we hope to make the extended hike an annual event. Thanks to all those who volunteered to make this a big success and a lot of fun.



*A popular attraction was Lock 8 between St. Marys and New Bremen.*



*Photo of Lock One in New Bremen shortly after it was converted from a wooden lock to a concrete lock. This is one of many photos being gathered to include in a book MECCA hopes to publish about the Miami-Erie Canal.*

## Work Progressing on Canal History Book

### Next Committee Meeting Planned for Thursday, January 14

Work continues toward the publication of a historical book about the Miami-Erie Canal. This MECCA project is beginning to take shape as a committee of volunteers continues to grow.

The committee will be meeting Thursday, Jan. 14 at 7 p.m. at the St. Marys Community Public Library meeting room. As always, anyone interested is encouraged to attend.

The committee will begin the task of looking for old photos, stories and anecdotes related to the canal. Rather than a narrative history, the book will be a collection of short stories, photos and

historical facts. Volunteers are still welcome to do research, write stories, do typing and help edit content. When the weather breaks, the committee hopes to make several field trips to various historical societies and libraries in western Ohio.

MECCA hopes to self publish the book and use the proceeds as a fundraiser. Anyone willing to share materials or information for the book can attend any of the committee meetings, or send it to MECCA at P.O. Box 722, St. Marys, Ohio 45885. All photos and anything else requested will be returned.

### Walkpath Phase 1 Started

Craig Hirschfeld, a member of the Walk Path Steering Committee said Phase 1 of the approximate three mile walk path, starting near Minster Park, and ending at Lock 1 Park in New Bremen has begun!

Jutte Excavation, a local contractor, is currently clearing away shrubs and trees which are in the line of construction. Then the bed of the towpath will be graded and prepared for the gravel which will complete this phase. The walkpath is actually the Miami-Erie Canal towpath, linking Minster and New Bremen.

A committee of local citizens has been working to have this happen for approximately seven years. Completion of Phase 1 is scheduled for June 1999. At that time, bids will be let for Phase 2, which includes an underpass from the towpath to the YMCA. Congratulations to all those who worked so long and hard to get this project moving.

### MECCA Donations Tax Deductible

The Miami-Erie Canal Corridor Authority (MECCA) is a non-profit, tax exempt organization and contributions to MECCA are deductible for tax purposes. MECCA is still in its infancy and good things are developing for the future, but adequate financial resources are crucial to keeping MECCA's goals and objectives before the public and governmental bodies.

MECCA's immediate objective is to obtain "National Heritage Corridor" status. This designation will open many doors for MECCA to obtain funding for canal corridor projects to preserve the canal's historical significance and create educational and recreational opportunities for the public along the corridor.

Funding for the effort to obtain "National Heritage Corridor" status is needed. As we begin a new year in 1999, please consider making a worthwhile and deductible gift to the Miami-Erie Canal Corridor Authority. Contributions can be sent and made payable to MECCA at P.O. Box 722, St. Marys, Ohio 45885.

# Canal Boat Brought Back to Life in Delphos

**I**n the summer of 1987 a group of young boys in Delphos undertook a project of great historical interest, the excavation and preserving the remains of a 19th century canal boat, the Marguerite.

The Marguerite was constructed about 1850 in Toledo as a passenger packet. She plied the waters of the Miami-Erie Canal, hauling passengers from Toledo to Cincinnati and back again for nearly 40 years. As railroads siphoned off much of the canal's passenger traffic, the Marguerite continued as a freighter, hauling cargo from western Ohio's farmland to waiting steamships on Lake Erie and the Ohio River.

Finally, as the canal fell into disuse, the Marguerite was purchased by a group of Delphos businessmen and remodeled into a floating RV. They used the boat on hunting and camping trips with plenty of room on the boat for all member of the party. However, with many of the canal bridges being welded or pinned shut the Marguerite was hemmed in, confined to a block long section of canal in downtown Delphos.

In 1909, after the death of one of her owners, the Marguerite was permanently moored. There she wallowed until time and the elements sent her hull to the muddy canal bottom. After being stripped of most of her interior wood work and other useable lumber, the grand old dame was accidentally burned to the waterline in the late 1910's. There she rested, hidden and forgotten for nearly 60 years.

In 1976, to celebrate the nation's bicentennial, the Miami-Erie Canal was dredged and repaired through Delphos. During the dredging the backhoe came across a huge, wooden structure buried in the silt. After an investigation and a call to Columbus, the dredging continued around the immense artifact. The Marguerite was undisturbed any further but the dredging continued leaving the hull on a several feet high ledge providing all the elements for future disaster. The shelf under the hull began to erode allowing the timbers to shift, exposing many of them to the destructive forces of air and weather. Further damage

occurred in 1980 when a group of Boy Scouts unknowingly removed several of the ribs of the boat during a canal clean up project.

In 1987 the Columbian Squires, a Catholic youth organization, undertook a project to clean up the weed and brush infested tow path of the canal in Delphos. Also part of the project was a historical survey of the canal inside the city limits. It was during this survey that the group rediscovered the remains of the Marguerite protruding above the waterline. The old timbers piqued the interest of several young members of the group and they began to research the life of the Marguerite.

During this research they also discovered that the remains of the boat were being slowly destroyed by the elements. Ambitious plans to recover the remains were soon on the drawing board. Various Ohio state agencies were contacted concerning the project. Permission was soon obtained to undertake the recovery project and the necessary regulations were met. Unfortunately, the only support from the state came in the form of encouragement. No physical or financial help would be forthcoming.

After the lowering of the water by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and a coffer dam built around the site, the first task at hand was a archaeological recording of the site. The site was partitioned and photographs were taken. Taking advantage of the low water, the boys undertook a survey of the canal bed in the city limits, searching for artifacts. They recovered numerous glass and ceramic artifacts, some dating back to the early years of the canal.

Also discovered were more wooden timbers resembling the newly uncovered timbers of the Marguerite. They had stumbled across the remains of a boat that was sunk during a fire at a Delphos ashery, a fertilizer production plant. The boat had been cut through during the 1976 dredging and was in a serious state of decay. Unable to undertake another excavation project, the Squires photographed and record-

ed the site and left it to future archaeologists.

The next step of the Marguerite recovery was removing the actual timbers from the canal bed. The timbers, submerged for over 80 years, had turned a consistent black color, were extremely slippery, waterlogged and quite pliable. Each timber was carefully labeled, recorded and stacked on the canal bank to drain off some of its watery weight. Finally, the fully excavated hull was loaded onto a flat bed wagon and transported to a nearby barn for chemical treatment and storage.

The wood was stacked to allow free air movement. The wood was also treated with chemical preservatives to prevent rot and stabilize the wood. The preservation continues to this day and the wood is turned every six months to prevent warping. The Marguerite awaits safely in storage until a suitable exhibition site can be found for her 72-foot by 15-foot hull.

The recovery of the Marguerite and the discovery of her sister canal boat keep alive the potential that other canal boats and structures lie buried in the bed of the canal or her feeder reservoirs awaiting future recovery. Perhaps the upcoming repair and maintenance of the Miami-Erie Canal will uncover other treasures.

In 1992 the Marguerite II was constructed by the Delphos Canal Commission to serve as a traveling ambassador for Delphos and the Miami-Erie Canal. The Marguerite II was modeled after her famous predecessor with certain adjustments made to allow her to travel Ohio's Modern canal -- the highway. Since her maiden voyage from Toledo to the Tallstacks Riverboat festival in Cincinnati, the Marguerite II has traveled thousands of miles across the state educating Ohioans about their rich canal history.

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*By Bob Ebbeskotte*

*-- Bob is a MECCA Board Member and a Member of the Delphos Canal Commission*

# Support the Miami-Erie Canal Corridor Authority Become a Member Today

**E**stablished in 1996, The Miami-Erie Canal Corridor Authority (MECCA) is a non profit corporation working toward the creation of a heritage corridor and recreational greenway along the Miami & Erie Canal. The Authority is working toward the creation of educational programs and developing strong working relationship among corridor stakeholders to preserve and interpret the natural, historical and recreational resources throughout the corridor.



## Membership Benefits

- Quarterly Issues of a Newsletter
- Invitations to public meetings
- Invitations to programs and events
- Support the goals of MECCA

## MECCA Miami-Erie Canal Yard Sale -- \$10 a Square Yard

Mail to: MECCA; P.O. Box 722; St. Marys, Ohio; 45885

I Would Like to Buy \_\_\_\_\_ Square Yards for a Total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Minimum Membership \$10 for individuals; \$20 for families

I Would Like a Corporate/Business/Organizational Membership at:

Sponsor \$50       Partner \$100       Corridor Partner \$250

I would like to make a one-time tax-deductible contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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