
Towpath Times

Miami-Erie Canal Corridor Association

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Continuing to Share the Corridor Vision

By L. Neal Brady
Executive Director

During my few months as your Executive Director, I have had the great pleasure to talk with many individuals about what the canal corridor means to them.



I have heard numerous stories from adjacent landowners of how their family settled in the area during the construction of the canal. Where and how they lived, who the family's members married and where the old homesteads were located.

There are other stories of the local businesses that thrived when the

canal was in full operation -- the busy sawmills, the processing plants, the fisheries, the mills and the store fronts that brought prosperity to the region.

The local residents relay these stories with a true passion for the canal and its existence. These stories and events solidify the concept of the Miami-Erie Canal Heritage Corridor.

I have also communicated with many individuals and families that enjoy and use the canal trail regularly. They have shared of how often they walk the trail and from what staging area to what destination of interest they reach. They are appreciative of the work the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Water Staff completes in assuring the trail is accessible and maintained.

I share information of the numerous plans and projects in the communities and on the trail, such as the crushed stone trail enhancement between St. Marys and the U.S. Rt. 33 bypass, and the gem of a compacted stone trail between Minster and New Bremen. There are also plans for opening and enhancing other sections of towpath in Shelby, Allen, and Auglaize Counties.

These trail users are encouraged that the corridor development will increase the recreational opportunities for them. The MECCA Vision states the organization exists to preserve and enhance the Miami and Erie Canal as a viable resource. I have found many individuals who share this vision.

The canal has been and will always be a vital and active part of each community and family along the canal.

Let's continue to share the Vision.

Andy Hite Elected MECCA President

By Andy Hite

President, MECCA Board of Trustees

It is an honor, and at the same time very humbling, to be elected to serve MECCA as its new President. I feel very confident that the coming year will see many positive things accomplished.

My predecessors have positioned this organization to keep moving forward toward our goals. It is now up to us to continue the vision of connecting the corridor from Delphos to Piqua. Much has been done, but there is still much to be completed.

Neal Brady, our Executive Director, is only one person; it is the responsibility of each Board Member, Committee Member, as well as our General Membership, to come together and function as a group to preserve, promote, and improve the Miami and Erie Canal.

There are few places in the nation that have the historical and cultural resources that MECCA has at its fingertips. It is up to each of us as gongoozlers to help promote the stories of the contributions that the canal has made to this region. Think what our towns, cities, and counties would be like today if Miami and Erie Canal had not brought the world to our doorsteps in the nineteenth century.

It is my hope that in the coming year each community along the corridor sees itself as not only an important piece of a wonderful mosaic of history, but also as an equally important part of a magnificent whole called the Miami and Erie Canal. For without all of us working together to accomplish MECCA's goals, the dream of many will not become a reality.

New Bremen's Ice Harvest Comes to Life

Editor's Note: *The following article is an excerpt from "The Ice Industry" written by Janet Fledderjohn in 1974. Much of the article is a first hand account from Forest Combs who, as a teenager, assisted his father William with the ice harvests along the canal. William Combs was the last canal boat captain on the Miami-Erie Canal route between St. Marys and Dayton. He spent over 30 years navigating the canal and 37 years in the ice carryout business in New Bremen along the canal.*

The information and accompanying photographs for the article were provided by the New Bremen Historical Society.

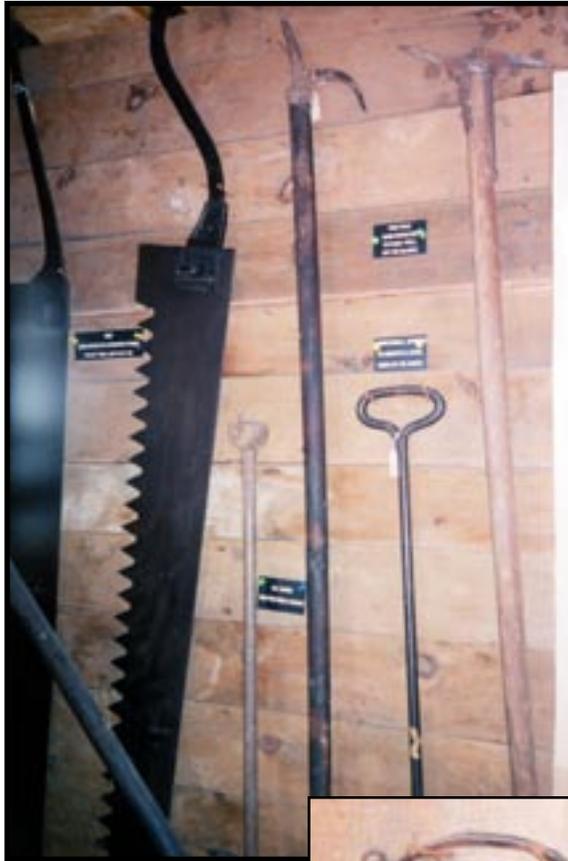
After a week of cold, zero temperature, the crop would be "ripe."

"You could hear the ice cracking or thumping in the quiet of the night as it froze," Forest Combs said. "Ice was tested for thickness by using a six-foot drill, like an auger, and was measured each day... until ready."

The news was sent out by word of mouth or telephone or whatever that harvesting time was scheduled. One cutting of the pond would fill the icehouse, consequently, this happened but once a year. Earlier records indicate two or more cuttings if the product was not the best (only four or five inches thick) or when four icehouses existed or when New Bremen may have stocked other Star Brewery warehouses.

"Dad never put it up until it was seven to nine inches thick; sometimes it was thicker," Combs explained.

Then father and son went out at four o'clock in the morning to start ahead of the men who came at daylight. The oval pond would be divided in half, lengthwise, so the last half of the pond



Often the night before a post with a flag tied on would be centered at the far south end of the pond and another placed at the center of the west side. Sometimes by lantern, the first score in the ice was made toward the flag. As one plows a field to get a straight row, one person would lead the horse and other would guide the marker. After scoring the initial groove, a guide was attached to ride in the previously cut line so all subsequent groove lines would be straight. They worked from the center of the pond out -- north and south, then east and west the same way to mark 22-inch squares.

would free underneath to make it thicker. Sometimes the pond required snow removal by hand or light horse with a big scraper. Snow was pushed over to the sides and a couple of workers would shovel it off the bank.

It would take at least 25 people and one or two horses three days to reap the crop, working from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with an hour off for lunch. And then the Combs would spend another half day fixing the doors, installing the last of the insulation, putting away equipment and finalizing details.



Tools used during the Ice Harvest are on display in the New Bremen Historical Society Museum.

New Bremen's Ice Harvest

The plowing phase was similar to marking, only it made a deeper cut. Again it was important to hold the plow upright and straight so the final split would present a flat edge for stacking.

Standing directly over the groove and straddling the groove, 12 blocks were sawed off in a section; that is, two deep in a row of six. The saw was worked up and down in the groove with both hands, from the water's edge inward toward the sawer. Then by stroking up and down and hitting into the cuts twice, the spuder split the ice the last couple of inches. These sections were then pushed out on the water or to the waterway. Thus it was easier for the pike polers to maneuver the sections over to the east bank for relaying to the north end of the pond.

Those along the bank worked from the wooden platforms extending over the ice. Water always washed underneath because of the waves made by pulling the cakes toward the edge; therefore the ice would melt at the edge of the bank and it would not be safe at this point.

When the 12-block section came up to the end of the pond, other spuders standing a little short of the waterbox split the ice pack down the middle lengthwise into two rows of six --

along with a pike poler -- lined them up in a single row. A final spuder split the single 22-inch cakes for entry into the waterbox.

After floating the square of hard water into the submerged waterbox, forcing the forward blocks up the run a short end to dry, a cable was attached to six or seven cakes.

"And they really slid because it was

hook was set down on the frozen product. The cable hooked between the johnny hook prongs and was placed about three to four inches down from the top of the backside of the last ice cake (not from the bottom where it would hit the rungs). The cable rested lightly over the other cakes of ice and ran upward through a pulley above the doorway of the icehouse and then back down to a horse. The johnny hook man waved and the horse was led forward,

westward away from the icehouse, pulling the cakes up the run. At first only one horse was required, but two horses were sometimes required when it became steep over the 35 to 40 foot end from the pond to the icehouse.

"Ben Tangeman hauled logs, and he was almost always there with his team," Combs said. "Emil Topp's horse was used, too, and Kirm Brandt's horse once or twice."

The johnny-hook man moved up alongside the ice on an adjacent scaffolding. At the top of the run, the ice cakes were dropped into the icehouse on straw beds. Next the johnny hook man

would run the cable back down the steps and prepare for the next load.

"Sometimes the back one would tip up and they'd all go down into the waterbox and then he (the johnny hook man) would get a bath," Combs said.

Inside the icehouse were three setters and tree pike polers. Setters used ice



The New Bremen Historical Society Museum, located at 122 N. Main St., contains many canal-era artifacts, including a shovel that was used to dig the canal (right).

The museum is open every Sunday during the months of June, July and August from 2 to 4 p.m. or by appointment.



cold," Combs said. "They could come right out of the water and the bottom of the ice was awful slick because it was soaked from the bottom up. The top may have had a little crust of snow on it."

By pulling the cable with one hand, allowing a bit of slack and holding the handle in the other hand, the johnny

New Bremen's Ice Harvest

tongs to grab the blocks and pack them in place. After the first layer of 22-inch squares was flat all over the floor in both section of the warehouse, the other ice was pushed over to the setters in the corners by pike polers. Each setter had his own pike pole poler to watch for the ice coming from the run. From then on, the ice cakes were stacked edgewise; that is, on the eight or nine-inch ends.

The Icehouse

The icehouse was 40 x 100-foot with 12 to 15 inch thick walls, and a roof built in two sections, made of clapboard and barn siding, and was packed with sawdust for permanent insulation. A doorway ran from the

bottom to the top on the south side (toward the ice ponds). Another was on the east side where loading took place when Rabe's pond was the source, but in later years where the ice was removed and sold.

The doors, also constructed with double walls, had 12-inch wide boards laid horizontally and consisted of three sectional lengths. As the layers of square ice heightened in the storage, another section of door would be put in place until the top was reached. Ice was taken out in reverse; that is, from the top down.

The false attic at the rooftop was stuffed with very thick, fresh straw over the top layer of ice for additional

insulation. Straw was sometimes placed between the layers of ice, but as recalled Forest Combs, they merely placed layer of ice on layer of ice.

The icehouse had no windows and required very little new sawdust -- only for the doors, the rest was permanent. Sawdust was free from Gus Weiss Sawmill or Fort Loramie Sawmill just for hauling it away.

The icehouse held about 155,000 pounds of ice, and hopefully it lasted through September or the warm summer months. Men were paid by the hour and in the Depression years (1929-1933) it was not so high - about \$3.50 a day, while men with horses earned \$5.00 to \$6.00 a day.

ODNR Nets Trail Enhancement Grant

Oct. 21, 2002 ODNR Division of Water was notified of a Director of Natural Resources recommendation to receive \$75,000 from the Recreational Trail Program to fund a trail enhancement project.

The proposed project will improve the towpath surface starting at High Street in St. Marys across from the municipal power plant North to the U.S. Rt. 33 bypass, approximately one mile in length.



Towpath near St. Marys will be enhanced with crushed limestone.

The 10-foot wide crushed limestone path and educational signage will enhance the operation and maintenance of the canal hydraulics and provide additional recreational opportunities.

The next step in the process included an archaeology study for the area to identify impacts on any historical structures or note significant events. The Ohio Historical Society / Ohio Historic Preservation Office on September 17, 2003 concluded there will be no adverse effect on the historic properties in the project scope.

Clearing, grubbing and bank stabilization prior to the installation of the all weather stone trail will begin this spring by the Division of Water Miami and Erie Canal staff St. Marys.

MECCA Trustee Profile

Richard Millhouse



Richard has spent over 15 years in the parks and recreation field. He started as a seasonal worker at Lake Loramie State Park, where cleaning the canal from the Lake to Lock 2 was part of his annual duties.

By 1994 he had moved to a part time position with the Shelby County Park District, where mowing and cleaning the Locks at Lockington was now part of his job. In 1995 he had become the first full time Park Ranger at the Park District and by 1998 was promoted to Park Director.

Although the Park District no longer maintains the Locks, Richard had long ago gotten Canal Fever. Aside from maintaining various sections of the canal trail, he also grew up on the canal -- namely Leighty Lake in Newport. He had long since developed a love of the historic corridor and has a strong interest in preserving and developing the canal for recreational purposes. In that light, Richard took on the task of working with ODNR to acquire, through a management/maintenance lease, a 5-mile stretch of the Miami-Erie Canal in Shelby County.

That was accomplished in January of 2000. By 2002 Richard, his staff and many volunteers had been able to clear over 95 percent of the towpath for foot traffic. The canal trail development will be an ongoing project for the Park District. Richard has been involved with MECCA for some time, but due to a Park District Board member stepping down from MECCA, he has decided to pick up the torch and become a Board member to keep the Shelby County Park District active in MECCA's growth and development. "I am very excited to be a board member of MECCA and am grateful for the opportunity to serve the organization," stated Richard.

"Boatman's Breakaway" Planned

The Delphos Canal Commission is hosting the Annual "Boatman's Breakaway" on March 7, 2004 at 5 p.m. at the Delphos' Eagles Building, 1600 E. Fifth St., Delphos, Ohio. The event is \$20 per person, payable to D.C.C. , P.O. Box 256, Delphos, Ohio 45833. Reservations are due Feb. 28th. Late reservations or cancellations call, Dorothy Hoffman at 419-692-9217. A delicious dinner and a great evening are in store for you!

6-Mile Creek Project Update

Work continues on the final project of Phase II Natureworks. 6-Mile Creek Aqueduct, five miles North of St. Marys on St. Rt. 66, is being renovated to protect and enhance the original canal structure.

Jutte Construction Company of Fort Recovery, OH has continually been hampered by Mother Nature's rains, washing away progress while several necessary design changes done on site during construction also has delayed finishing.

Still different aspects of the project are complete -- anti-seepage walls, dredging of the canal bed, concrete repairs and sealing, placement of a footbridge across the canal and stop log mechanism installation to allow raising and lowering of the Miami and Erie Canal water levels.

The rehabilitation, when complete, will include bank stabilization, grading, seeding and installation of a water mixer to protect the aqueduct from freezing.

The other Phase II projects were dredging in Spencerville, renovation of the Tumbles in St. Marys and Lock 14 repairs. Careful consideration has been taken to keep the historical "nature" of the canal structures in tact while upgrading the structural integrity.

With the help from the weather, work will continue to completion in the near future.



TAX-DEDUCTIBLE GIVING TO MECCA

Many people consider making charitable contributions for income tax purposes. Remember, MECCA is a tax-exempt entity and contributions to it are tax deductible. Contributions can be in cash or "in kind". Appreciated stock can be given to a charity and the donor gets a charitable deduction for the fair market value of the stock on the date of the gift. If you are considering charitable gifts please consider a contribution to MECCA to help it continue promoting the historic canal corridor.

Miami Erie Canal Corridor Association (MECCA) Membership Form



Please check membership level desired

\$10 Individual.....	_____	\$20 Family.....	_____
\$50 Sponsor.....	_____	\$100 Partner.....	_____
\$250 Corridor Partner	_____		
One-time tax deductible contribution of	_____		
Total amount enclosed	_____		

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ email _____

Clip and Mail This Form to: MECCA • P.O. Box 722 • St. Marys, Ohio • 45885

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