

~ In 1824 a group of entrepreneurial businessmen in Milan undertook a survey for a possible canal route linking the Village of Milan to the navigable waters of the Huron River. The Milan Canal Company was granted a charter by the state of Ohio in 1827 with capital stock in the amount of 700 shares at \$50.00 each for a total of \$35,000. Local people invested in individual stocks while the wealthy businessmen purchased large blocks.

~ The canal was designed to be wide enough for lake vessel navigation which eliminated the need for ships to unload at Huron. The three mile long, forty feet wide and seven-eight feet deep canal was completed in 1839, six years after the Milan Canal Company entered into contract. The original estimate for of \$5,800 had inflated into a total reaching over \$83,000.

~ A celebration for the opening of the canal was held on July 4, 1839. Five hundred people watched Captain Moran sail the *Kewannee* into the Port of Milan.

~ Warehouses capable of storing 400,000 bushels of wheat soon lined the canal basin. For the next ten years the Milan Canal, Port of Milan and the Village of Milan flourished. At one point fourteen general stores were operating around the square. On May 18, 1847 six hundred wagons lined up for six miles to unload 20,000 bushels of grain. Milan had become the second largest inland sea grain-shipping port in the world.

~ Shortly after the opening of the canal, a group of industrious men began to take advantage of the plentiful supply of white oak in the area building ships. From 1841-1863 over seventy-five schooners and other wooden ships were constructed around the basin and canal. The last vessel built in a Milan shipyard was the Mystic in 1866.

~ Shipbuilders were not paid monthly, but received what was due after the vessel was launched. In the meantime, credit slips were given which could have been used in certain stores. The ending difference was often less than one dollar and the worker had to take another job immediately.

~ Commerce began to slow with the encroachment of the railroads and the increased size of sailing vessels. Milan was bypassed for towns like Bellevue and Sandusky. Farmers took their grain to other towns for shipment by rail causing a swift decline in canal shipments. Fires began to breakout, destroying the north side of the square in 1850, the Exchange Inn in 1852 and the Merry & Gay shipyard in 1866. When the dam on the river broke in 1867 the canal drained and was never repaired. The Milan Canal had ended.

The Canal Era

Milan:

MILAN CANAL HISTORY

1823 – Huron Harbor Co. formed by citizens of Milan & Huron to improve the harbor at the mouth of the Huron R. for safe entrance of vessels from the lake.

1824 – Milan undertakes a survey of a possible canal route from the village of Milan to the navigable waters of the Huron R. – River navigable up to point where Abbott's Bridge (Fries Landing) crosses Mason Road Bridge

1825 – Erie Canal opens to east from Buffalo to Hudson R. in New York.

1827-28 – Two schooners built at Abbott's Bridge:

Louisa Jenkins – Built by HN Jenkins, sails to Buffalo w cargo.

Mary Abbott – Built by Benj. Abbott, 1829, sails to Buffalo, takes down masts,

navigates the Erie Canal to Albany, puts back up masts & sails down the Hudson R. to NY City, discharges cargo, picks up new cargo & comes back, (first Huron River vessel to do this).

Mid 1820's – First grain shipped from Milan Twp in small quantities by Neebham Standart, a Milan businessman.

Late 1820's – Ralph & George Lockwood built a warehouse below Abbott's Bridge at Lockwood's landing on the Huron River.

1827 – Milan Canal Co. receives its charter from the State – shares cost \$50.00 each.

WHY A CANAL AT MILAN TO SHIP GRAIN?

Milan located at border of a sandy belt that all wagon roads cross to reach lake ports. Roads north of belt bad in fall when grain coming to market. Roads below clay & OK.

- Wagon Transportation expensive – only got 10 mi./day with wagon & team.
- Grain to Milan came from as far south as the National Rd. near Zanesville &

Columbus.

- Wheat grown there received \$24 – 36 per 40 bundle loads – growing grain & spending weeks transporting (man, wagon, 4 or more horses).

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- Canal saved 1+ day's haul.
- Canal shipping costs for 40 bundles for 100 mi. would be 1.68 cents/mi.
- By wagon – load costs – 18 cents/mi. for 40 bu/100 mi.

1833 – Hamilton Colton builds a warehouse by Lockwood's warehouse at their landing down river on the Huron, just below where Mason Road crosses.

1833 – Canal Company enters into a contract to construct the Canal.

1830's – Ebenezer Merry's millrace for his grist & saw mill had to be moved when the river was changed to build the canal basin – It was said he used Black laborers from Sandusky to do this –

in fact a small population of African-Americans lived in the town for many years and lived mostly together at one end of town. They had their own Baptist church and there was a separate schoolhouse next to the regular one.

1836 – Bids taken to build 3 locks – but in end only 2 needed. Total change in River slope, fall was 7 feet 6 inches. The covered bridge was built over the Huron River and would be there until 1882, when it was sold and the Zenas King Iron Bridge was built.

The Canal took 6 years to construct because of bad financial conditions in the country, not enough capital to finance. Original estimate of \$5,800 to build the Canal turned into \$83,392.

- 1839 - July 4th – The Kewanee w Capt. Moran was the first vessel to enter the Canal.
- Crowd of 500 people
 - Cannon salute
 - Presentation of US flag made by ladies of Millan represented by Miss Maria Butman.
 - Ride for crowd on Schooner and canal boat Waterwitch.
 - Party later at Eagle Tavern.

Statistics on Canal

3 miles long – fall of 7 ft

2 locks, 110 ft. long each

40 ft. wide,

First was 1 mile from turning basin, the other at the place where the canal entered river.

4 ft. deep at first, changed later to 7-8ft. to accommodate ships of greater draft.

Turning Basin – 1200 ft. long, 250 ft. wide at greatest width

Dam across river at Millan to back up water into basin & canal, feeder channel under road by toll gates

Warehouses built around basin and the two warehouses of Lockwood & Hamilton were moved from Lockwood's landing down river to the basin, making about 11 by 1849. Business increased so dramatically that general stores were crowding all around the Square to keep up with business generated by the farmers on the one hand and the ship crews on the other. At one point there were 14 general stores all around the square, most of the stores had a connection to the warehouses, so the farmers were given either some cash or more likely, credit in the stores in the form of chits or tickets that they could use to buy merchandise.

EXPORTS

Wheat

Wool

Flour

Pork

Cranberries

Potatoes

Feathers

Corn

Lumber

Grindstones

Barley

Hides

Hickory nuts

Ashes

Rags

Oats

IMPORTS

Shingles

Plaster

Beer

Salt

Cedar Posts

Coal

Pig Iron

Fish

1847 – A Boom Year – Same year Thos. Edison born. May 18, 1847, 20,000 bundles of grain received at warehouses. It was estimated that there had to be over 600 wagons to bring it in.

They would have been backed up over 7 mi. to the Blue Fly Inn which was down at the intersection of Rte. 601 and Rte. 18. For the entire year, 917,800 bu were shipped which would fill up the entire space of Edison HS. The farthest place a vessel went - Schooner Mitchell sailed to Oregon from Milan by going around S. America. Cargo included 2 lumber wagons.

1847 – The Milan/Richland Plank Rd. built to have better roads for the wagons.

1848 – The Monroeville Plank Road was started. The toll gates seen in photos of the head of the Canal basin were the gates of the Plank Road to Norwalk

1849 - A group of citizens in Milan, including the mayor, tore down the gates of the toll road in a protest against charging Milan citizens tolls to cross the river to go to the mills. A trial ensued.

1850 – July – August The Great Eastern & Western RR is proposed through Northern Ohio. Many townspeople lobbied to have Milan as a point on the route, for increased trade with Ohio & the interior of the country. To their great disappointment, this RR and the Junction RR

