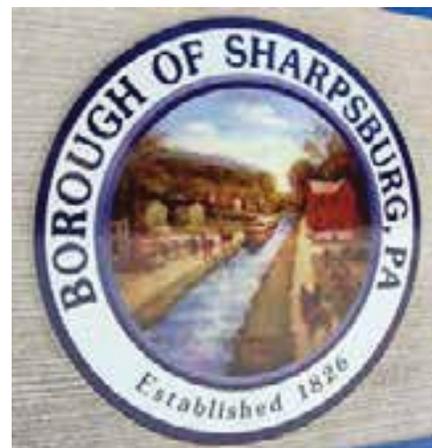


# Sharpsburg's Canal

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY MELANIE LINN GUTOWSKI



Sharpsburg's former canal, with its mule track and packet boat, is immortalized on the borough's seal.

Sharpsburg's former canal ran along the borough's North and South Canal streets (left).

**Y**ou may have driven down Sharpsburg's North and South Canal streets many times, but did you know they mark the former site of an actual waterway? The borough had its own lock on the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal, the state's system of freight and passenger transportation before the rise of railroads.

The state legislature approved the westward expansion of the existing canal system in 1826, bringing the canal from Johnstown to Pittsburgh.

Construction was delayed in the Alle-Kiski valley because of controversy over the exact canal route. Pittsburgh officials favored using the hilly eastern bank of the Allegheny River so the canal would come directly into downtown, but Nathan Roberts, an engineer who had previously worked on the Erie Canal, recommended using the western bank with its flatter land.

The canal was laid from Allegheny City (now the city's North Side) to Pine Creek in Etna, through Sharpsburg and up to the Kiskiminetas

River in Freeport. Packet boats were towed along the canal by a pair of mules led along an adjoining track.

The canals were a vital economic engine – nearly all of the salt used in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio during this period was imported from New York state on the Main Line. Other lucrative products included farm produce, lumber, whiskey and meat. Sharpsburg became a valuable location for light industry and trade businesses with its convenient access to downtown Pittsburgh.

At its completion in 1834, the Main Line consisted of 1,250 miles of canals throughout the state, though the system was quickly made obsolete by the expansion of the railroads. Sharpsburg's canal was sold to the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1861, and the first train came through the town in 1864. The last remaining portion of the state system was in use until 1943. ■

*Melanie Linn Gutowski is a local historian and the author of Pittsburgh's Mansions.*

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