

Network News



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Lake Levels: A Grand Balancing Act

Gary Catt, Network Issues Committee Member

Anxious Cayuga lakefront owners have seen lake levels creep higher and higher since last fall. Seasoned watchers have determined correctly that the lake is unusually high. Given the capriciousness of Finger Lakes weather, they believe a good rain or heavy snow-storm may bring severe flooding of their properties. Sadly, they are correct.

The man in charge of juggling the levels of all connected Finger Lakes is only vaguely optimistic that he might out-engineer Mother Nature as the howl of winter turns to the weep of spring. For several months now, Howard Goebel has been trying to outwit the weather and outmaneuver the persistent cascade of gully washing rain and quick melt snow that has plumped the lake fat beyond it's normal stage for winter. Goebel is the canal hydrologist for the New York Canal Corporation which — depending on how you examine it — controls the water level of Cayuga Lake. In the ebb and flow of angst and accusation that revolves around the unstable levels of Cayuga Lake, Goebel is the point man.

In mid-January, Goebel was oozing relief when asked about the potential for flooding. "I feel a lot better today than I did in December," he said. "We still need the level to drop about two feet and we'll hit that, I hope." At that point, Goebel said, if the weather cooperates, he anticipates a normal lake level by spring. But he's not making any promises. Besides coping with the swings of weather, Goebel has to navigate the whims of the Seneca Power Corporation, which owns the hydroelectric station on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal that connects the lakes of the same names.

Goebel said the management of Cayuga Lake levels became especially tricky last fall after the hydro station in the canal began releasing bloating water supplies flowing east from Seneca Lake. The surge came at a time just prior to the warm weather and rains of December, which complicated the annual take down of the lake levels. "We have no control of the hydro station," said Goebel, "they do their own thing." He said there's minimal communication between the Canal Corporation



Six floodgates, left, contain the waters of Cayuga Lake at the confluence of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal which enters lake from lower left. The lock, at right, is used for boat passage.

WATERSHED STEWARD'S MESSAGE

Our Place Along the Canal

By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward

The Erie Canal, and its successors, brought opportunities and challenges. During the 1800's development opportunities followed the flow of commerce along new water passages, as glimpsed in *Seneca Falls: Waterlink to the World* (page 8). Challenges came when the artificial water connections allowed rain falling in distant uplands to raise local water levels, as noted in our cover story *Lake Levels: A Balancing Act*.

Additionally, canals linked us to the ocean, causing ecological havoc by allowing invasive species such as sea lamprey to gain access to the lake, a problem referenced in *DEC Reports Lake Activities*. To understand these and other matters of interest to our watershed, it is helpful to review how water connects us to others.

The big picture reveals the Cayuga Lake watershed nested in larger watersheds — first the Oswego River Basin and then the Lake Ontario Basin, which drains via

the Saint Lawrence Seaway to the ocean. Let's look more closely.

Cayuga Lake receives water from many upland streams such as Lively Run in Interlaken and Salmon Creek in Lansing. At the very north end, the lake receives water from Keuka and Seneca Lakes via the Cayuga-Seneca Canal. Cayuga Lake waters drain north to the low-gradient Seneca River before dropping more quickly via the Oswego River into Lake Ontario. These rivers, as well as Cayuga and Seneca Lakes and their connecting canal, comprise part of the New York State Barge Canal, a modern version of the ambitious Erie Canal. One purpose of our spring conference (see *Announcements* page 6) is to explore our place in this larger landscape and to highlight our portion of the canal. I hope you'll join us. 🐦



The Network at Work

Through sharing information, forging partnerships and increasing local involvement, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network protects and improves the health of the water resources upon which we all depend. In a watershed this large, nearly 800 square miles, and this diverse there are so many topics on which we can offer programs. This year we have selected four areas for special focus: our rich fisheries, the vital role of agriculture, the impairment at the south end due to excess sediment and phosphorus, and ways we can reduce the flow and contaminant level of stormwater. You'll see more about these topics in this and future *Network News*.

Reflecting back on our work in 2003 we see what can be done by people who live, work and play here. You help protect the watershed when you volunteer, join us by becoming a member, or increase your knowledge by participating in our programs. As a community-based organization, our work succeeds when people appreciate our water resource treasures and understand their role in protection. Here is a small sampling of what has been accomplished thanks to your support.

- 2,400 pounds of trash was removed from Fall Creek.
- Nearly 300 people better understand how to protect

their drinking water wells and received discounts on water tests for bacteria and nitrate.

- 250 Seneca Falls school youth learned how pollution causes problems for stream critters as well as people while another 265 youth explored the lake environment aboard the Floating Classroom.
- Elected officials and involved citizens received training and software that showcases the role municipalities can play in protecting streams, reducing runoff and encouraging care of septic systems.
- At our annual conference on the latest research in the watershed, scientists increased their awareness of monitoring being done by others.
- Youth educated residents not to dump down storm drains waste such as paint, used motor oil or kitty litter because storm drains flow directly to our waterways.

These and dozens of other efforts are why your membership is vital — it allows us to protect our precious water resources. Members support the continuation of this work, plus are kept informed on what's happening in the watershed through this quarterly publication, *Network News*.

To join, contact the office at 607-532-4104 or visit our website at www.cayugalake.org. 🐦

Cayuga Lake Watershed Network

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DEC Reports Lake Activities

Each year New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) uses a number of means to keep a tight scope on the health of NY fisheries. Each regional office files a report of its efforts. Below is a summary of activities in the Cayuga Lake watershed taken from *Region 7 Fisheries Annual Report 2002-2003*.

Cayuga Inlet Fish Way Monitoring

The Cayuga Lake Inlet fish way passed a total of 403 rainbow trout and 5,964 white suckers upstream while 305 adult sea lampreys were captured and killed to prevent spawning. Some rainbows were sent to the fish hatchery at Bath, NY for the production of Finger Lakes Wild and hybrid eggs. After spawning, the adult rainbows were returned to the Inlet.

All rainbows were examined for sea lamprey attacks. Sea lamprey is a non-native primitive fish that attaches to and feeds mainly on salmonids (trout and salmon). The wounds from sea lampreys were well below the threshold for concern. Cayuga Lake Inlet is the principal spawning and nursery habitat for lampreys, which live in the lake as adults. Sea lamprey control is done primarily by removing adult lampreys at the fish way and preventing their access to spawning habitat further upstream.

DEC staff assisted USGS staff by collecting male rainbow trout at the fish way. The fish were transported to the Tunison Laboratory and injected with thiamine to evaluate if adding the vitamin increases sperm viability and reproductive success.

Finger Lakes Zooplankton Sampling

Water chemistry and zooplankton samples were taken twice annually (mid-May and mid-August) to monitor zooplankton densities and size distribution in the Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles and Otisco Lakes. This sampling gives baseline information on these small animals that form the bottom of the food chain that feeds fish. Tracking zooplankton over a number of years gives clues about their fish predators.

Cayuga Lake Angler Diary Program

Each season avid anglers voluntarily submit fishing diaries to DEC detailing their catch including the species caught, its size and details of the fishing trip. They are referred to as cold or warm cooperators depending on whether the fish they catch are species that prefer warm or cold water. All of the following references are to fish caught within the legal limits.

Fifty-five coldwater cooperators caught 2,253 salmonids in 1,164 trips for an average of 1.9 fish per trip. Salmonids were caught at an average rate of 3.0



Unidentified angler at lower Taughannock Falls braves the cold, high water.

hours per fish. These cooperators were successful in catching at least one salmonid in 79 percent of their trips. By species, the catch breaks down as follows: 1,534 lake trout, 110 rainbow trout, 201 brown trout, and 408 landlocked (Atlantic) salmon. Average catch rates for these species were 1.3, 0.09, 0.17, and 0.35 fish per trip while harvest rates were 0.80, 0.08, 0.14, and 0.29 fish per trip, respectively. Catch and harvest rates are different because some anglers intentionally release the fish they catch.

Nine warm water cooperators caught 134 smallmouth bass, 163 largemouth bass, four northern pike and 48 pickerel in 117 trips for an average of 3.0 warm water gamefish caught each trip. Only 38 smallmouth bass and six largemouth bass were kept by the warm water cooperators. The largest smallmouth and largemouth bass caught by these cooperators were 19.5 inches and 18.5 inches, respectively. Most largemouth bass were caught at the north end while most smallmouth bass were caught at the south end. Myers Point and Taughannock Point also produced fair numbers of smallmouth bass.

Stream Reclassification Surveys

Thirty-eight (38) streams not currently protected as trout streams in Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties were surveyed in the summer of 2002 for the presence of trout. Streams classified as C(T) are commonly referred to as trout streams or protected streams and they have a natural trout population or support trout. Wild trout were documented in 18 of the streams surveyed. Of these 18 streams, young-of-

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Plans to Curtail Clean Water Act Abandoned

Isolated wetlands and small streams nearly lost protection as two federal agencies reconsidered the limits of their authority. A Supreme Court ruling called into question the power of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers to regulate waters that were nonnavigable, isolated and contained within a single state.

Excluding these from protection under the federal Clean Water Act could have had sweeping water quality consequences since small streams and wetlands are highly effective at removing nutrients and other contaminants. The proposed changes could have reduced protection of one-fifth of the nation's wetlands, which trap pollutants and reduce flooding by letting water slowly soak into the ground. Clean Water Act protection has clearly made a difference since its passage in 1972 when only 34 percent of our nation's rivers and streams were fishable. After only twenty years of protection, that number had doubled and continues to grow.

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, that strives to protect the watershed that starts south of us, referred to proposed changes as "the largest threat to the Clean Water Act in three decades." A reverse in thinking was applauded when EPA and the Corp dropped their consideration of new rules that would limit the Act's scope. The "administration has reaffirmed and bolstered protection for wetlands, which are vital for water quality, the health of our streams and wildlife habitat," EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt announced in December of 2003. The agencies had received over 110,000 comments, overwhelmingly opposed to the change and asserting the public's interest in clean water. The news is a reminder that citizen involvement does make a difference. 🐾

Annual Essay Contest: How Does The Cayuga Lake Watershed Affect Your Life? We Want To Know!

Do you enjoy fishing or boating in pure, cool, water? What is the community's role in promoting healthy fisheries? How much pleasure do you take listening to a waterfall or hiking in the countryside? What natural beauty of the watershed do you feel is unique to your region? Perhaps you're concerned about the impact of erosion along your favorite stream.

Write an essay about how our watershed affects *your life* and you could win one of our cash prizes.

Entries are now welcome in our 4th Annual Essay Contest. The theme is: "How the Cayuga Lake Watershed Affects My Life." Your ideas may inspire others to a greater appreciation of the Cayuga Lake watershed — our community resource. Winning essays will be published on the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Website, with excerpts in *Network News*.

The essay contest has three categories:

- Students grades 6-8, 500-word limit (1st prize \$75, 2nd prize \$30)
- Students grades 9-12, 1000-word limit (1st prize \$150)
- Adults, 2000-word limit (1st prize \$275)

Electronic submission encouraged.

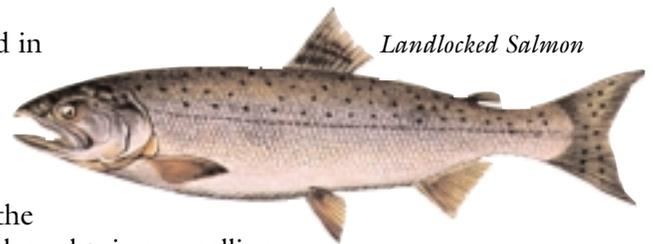
Email: jlpipher@astro.pas.rochester.edu. Otherwise, essays should be sent to Judy Pipher, 2429 Lower Lake Rd., Seneca Falls, NY 13148, post-marked no later than April 2, 2004. For more information, contact the Network office (607-532-4104) or jlpipher@astro.pas.rochester.edu. Winners will be announced during Water Week, in early May 2004.

Funding for the Annual Essay Contest is provided by Goulds Pumps-ITT Industries. 🐾

DEC Reports Lake Activities continued from page 3

year trout were found in 15 indicating natural reproduction is occurring. The presence of wild trout in these streams, given the severity of the 2002 drought, is compelling evidence that these streams warrant additional protection. DEC will present this and other data collected in recent years the next time watershed reclassification hearings are scheduled in an attempt to give these streams protection under Article 15 of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

For information on getting involved with the Angler's Diary program, contact Robert Ratham at DEC Region 7 office in Cortland, 1-607-753-3095. 🐾



Landlocked Salmon

The Science of Volunteer Monitoring

By Stephen Penningroth, Community Science Institute

Trumansburg and Taughannock Creeks are getting more attention these days thanks to a group of dedicated volunteers and a creative partnership. The story begins in 2002 with Tim Reap, a Schuyler County resident with a passion for streams and the critters that live in them. Tim attended water quality monitoring workshops presented by the Community Science Institute (CSI) through funding from NYS Department of Environmental Conservation with additional support from the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network. There Tim learned how regular monitoring provides essential information about water quality in a timely fashion, similar to routine checkups that help in the early detection and treatment of medical problems. Intrigued, Tim placed an ad in the Trumansburg Free Press setting a meeting to discuss stream monitoring. The people who attended formed the Taughannock-Frontenac Water Quality Group.

When the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District learned of the group, they collaborated with Tim to seek grants to fund a year's worth of monitoring activities, including purchase of monitoring equipment, training and laboratory tests through CSI. After completing training on how to accurately test the creek's water chemistry, the group collected samples from four locations on Trumansburg and Taughannock Creeks during June, July and October. Stream samples were analyzed for eight parameters: temperature, pH, conductivity, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, phosphate, and ammonia.

Wanting to assure the quality of their results, in October they sent samples to CSI to verify the results they had obtained and also to test for several additional parameters requiring specialized laboratory equipment, including suspended solids, bacteria, and low-level phosphorus and nitrate. CSI's analyses showed that while most of the data were good, some of the most difficult tests were incorrect. This alerted the volunteers to the need to "warm up" by performing the challenging tests on calibration standards first, before analyzing stream samples. Tim Reap observes: "While the test kits

and meters are fairly simple to use, it is easy to make mistakes. It is important to follow the procedures carefully, and it is very important to have a good quality

assurance system in place, which is where CSI has proved invaluable. Our group is beginning to appreciate the complexity of watershed chemistry. Our next challenge is to understand what all the data mean." Still enthusiastic, next spring the Taughannock-Frontenac Water Quality Group will receive training and begin sampling for benthic macroinvertebrates, those aquatic critters such as dragonfly larvae whose presence indicates good water quality.

CSI is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to empower grassroots monitoring of water resources in the Cayuga Lake watershed and beyond. CSI believes that monitoring is the key to watershed protection and, that for monitoring to be an effective tool, it is essential that data be scientifically credible. In addition, when monitoring is conducted by citizens, schools and other groups of volunteers, and the results are communicated to stakeholders and government agencies, the protective effect for waterbodies is magnified many times. CSI therefore has developed strategies and services to assure that the quality of data produced through the involvement of volunteers is scientifically credible. We offer customized training workshops for volunteer groups, certified water quality testing, and facilitation of volunteer monitoring partnerships. For information about CSI and our Cayuga Watersheds Initiative, visit www.communityscience.org.

The Fall Creek Watershed Committee, featured in Summer 2003 and other previous issues of *Network News*, is another citizen-based monitoring group with whom CSI works closely. The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network also assists watershed groups by reviewing grant proposals and posting on its website www.cayugalake.org information about the groups' activities.

People interested in the Taughannock-Frontenac Water Quality Group may contact Tim Reap at 607-594-2986 or tjreap@lycos.com. Residents of other watersheds may contact Steve Penningroth at 607-387-3820 or director@communityscience.org.

Editors note: see *Announcements* for a notice about a new group monitoring in Six Mile Creek and also potentially in other watersheds. 🐾



Tim Reap, Taughannock-Frontenac Water Quality Group leader (left) and Steve Penningroth, CSI Executive Director

Network members receive a 15% discount from CSI for certified water tests. For drinking water, the cost to Network members is \$15 for a Total Coliform/E. coli test, which provides a count of bacteria. A nitrate test costs \$13. Pick up free sampling kits at the CSI lab, 284 Langmuir Building, 95 Brown Road, near the Ithaca Tompkins regional airport; at ShurSave in Trumansburg; or at the Network office in Interlaken. Call the CSI lab at 607-257-6606 or visit www.communityscience.org for more information.



This view of Cayuga Lake, from the north looking south, is a reminder of the large amount of water that passes through the gates near Mud Lock.

and the plant operator because there's no central authority to enforce better management. So, said Goebel, he works in a vacuum, opening and closing his one source of control, the Mud Lock floodgates at the northern end of Cayuga Lake, to slough water downstream without, hopefully, causing unnecessary flooding along the Seneca River and Cross Lake.

It's a manipulation that is made more difficult because there is only a slight difference in grade between Mud Lock and the Seneca River, which carries the flow toward Syracuse and the Erie Canal. Consequently, even if the gates were thrown wide open at any one point, the outflow from Cayuga Lake would be minimal. And then there's the low-lying areas along the river and Cross Lake where homes dot the flood plain – a situation, which further complicates the process.

If the winter freeze continues, Goebel feels he will successfully complete the juggling act and stabilize levels. Then, on the other hand, a rapid warming and a good dose of rain may have lakefront owners rooting in closets for their hip boots. 🐾

Editor's note: A US Geological Survey publication "Managing the Water Resources of the Oswego River Basin in Central New York" details the lay of the land and how it affects lake levels. Network members contact the office for a free copy. Available to non-members for \$1.00.

Announcements

For more information or to register contact the Network office at manager@cayugalake.org or 607-532-4104, unless otherwise noted.

Providing Safe Drinking Water

February 24, 1:30-4:30 pm

OR

March 3, 6:30-9:30 pm

4-H Acres, 418 Lower Creek Road, Ithaca

Many small rural businesses, such as convenience stores, restaurants, campgrounds, and mobile home parks provide drinking water to their customers. Business owners, managers, and employees will learn how to prevent potential liability and costly clean-ups of drinking water plus increase understanding of their roles in protecting public health and the environment. Free thanks for funding from Tompkins County Health Dept. Pre-registration required. Please indicate which day you will attend.

Spring Conference

The Network is busy planning a spring conference to be held at the north end of the watershed. Tentatively scheduled for April 17, we are excited about offering topics related to our place along the canal. Dynamic speakers and discussion leaders are being recruited for topics such as:

- Canal Planning: the Erie Canal Heritage Corridor and the Cayuga-Seneca Canal revitalization plan
- Weeds Watch Out: water chestnuts and weed management
- Seneca Meadows: an update
- Boating
- Fisheries
- Your vision for the Cayuga-Seneca Canal
- Wild About Wetlands – their values and functions

- Water Underground: groundwater movement and concerns

Members will be mailed a flyer with details. Information will also be available on our website, www.cayugalake.org.

How Well Is Your Water

Education on protecting residential drinking water wells and a discount on water testing is being offered by the Network, thanks to assistance and funding from the Tompkins County Health Department. The sessions will feature information on well construction and maintenance, a review of water quality and health concerns, and an opportunity for Tompkins County residents to have their well water tested for bacteria and nitrate at a 75% discount rate. Must attend one of the educational sessions in order to qualify for the discount.

Volunteers Sought to Monitor Streams

Citizens can play an important role documenting the quality of our streams. A group is forming to monitor Six Mile Creek. Monitoring may also begin on Cascadilla Creek, the Cayuga Inlet Valley and Salmon Creek. Volunteers will receive training in chemical and biological monitoring techniques and work in partnership with water quality professionals and a certified testing lab to produce high quality data that can help inform local decision-making around watershed management. Interested? Contact Tania Schusler at Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County, 607-272-2292. 🐾

Small But Mighty Willows

Shrub willows only reach 12 feet in height, but their roots work wonders, holding soil in place against the force of fast moving creeks. Would your property benefit from planting 18-inch willow whips that would hold soil in place rather than letting it wash downstream?

Each year the Network obtains 1500 shrub willows for planting along streams that have public fishing access. Less erosion means clearer water for fish plus as the shrubs reach their full height they provide shade that keeps the water cool. We are looking for people interested in planting willow whips on their property or public lands that need a little help fighting erosion. If you are interested in learning more about our willow planting program, contact the Network office 607-532-4104 or steward@cayuga-lake.org. The willows are supplied by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. 🐦



Youth from the Community Fly Fisher brave cold, rainy weather to plant willows that help fight erosion.

Seneca Falls: Waterlink to the World continued from page 8

lumber, window frames, cloth, cotton, paper, clocks and carriages. By the late 1830's the first wave of the industrial revolution, which was based on waterpower, was coming to an end. The role that water would play in industrialization would increasingly be in the form of steam, and later hydroelectricity. The village population had grown from only 265 in 1827 to 3,000 by 1840, and Seneca Falls emerged as bustling, vibrant, optimistic community.

Thanks to the economical transportation of coal and iron, heavy manufacturing thrived in Seneca Falls beginning with the manufacture of plows and threshing machines. However, it was the introduction of the pump industry in 1838 that would have international repercussions. The pump was a major innovation for the developing region and had a profound affect on the way people lived and worked. Before the availability of the pump, homeowners and farmers had to draw water from wells using buckets, and their water supply was limited by the depth of their wells. With pumps, farmers could easily move pond water to barns where it was needed by livestock. In homes, water pumped to the attic fed indoor plumbing systems including flush toilets. In industry, water could now be supplied to factories and steam engines. In transportation, pumps fed water to steam locomotives and removed water from ships. Mounting pumps on wagons created the first fire engines. This innovation was so successful that at one time Seneca Falls was known as the Fire Engine

Capital of the World.

The demand for pumps was insatiable, and thanks to the efficient system of canals, highways and railroads that intersected in Seneca Falls, it was possible to distribute them far and wide. There were at least four different pump companies in Seneca Falls and the competition for innovation was fierce. During the second half of the 19th century, Seneca Falls became the capital of pump manufacturing in North America.

Today in Seneca Falls, Goulds Pumps remains as one of the leading manufacturers of pumps in the world, and the Cayuga-Seneca Canal remains a treasured recreational attraction. The Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry invites the public to visit the Museum to look out over the canal and learn how this now peaceful stretch of water gave rise to the village and ultimately helped to change the world. 🐦

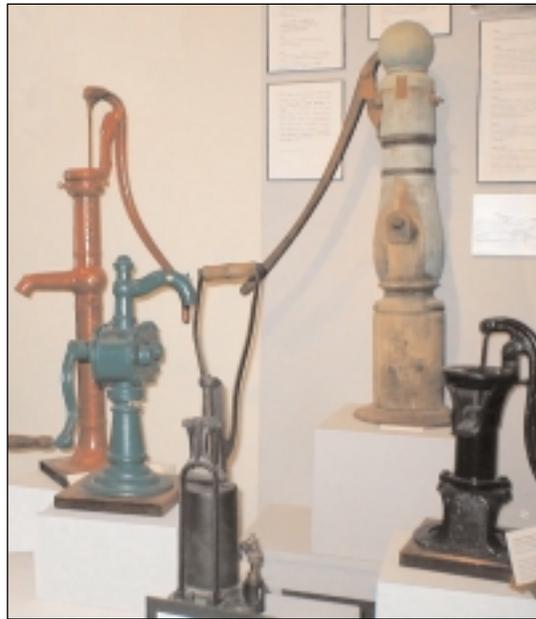
The Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry examines the rich heritage of Seneca County and, in particular, how the Seneca River powered the growth of industry in Seneca Falls. The Museum is located at 89 Fall Street, Seneca Falls, and is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Tours and educational programs can be arranged by contacting the Museum at (315) 568-1510. Admission is free. www.senecamuseum.com.

Seneca Falls: Waterlink to the World

By Connie Kindig, Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry

The Cayuga-Seneca Canal runs through the heart of Seneca Falls, both geographically and historically. In the 19th century, Seneca Falls developed from a small frontier village to a booming, flourishing, and competitive center of industry, commerce and transportation. The rich history of this beautiful village is entwined with the story of the Erie Canal and the industrial revolution.

A 42-foot drop in elevation between Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake created a series of rapids through the village that was difficult to negotiate and kept shipping costs high. In the 1790's, Job Smith's private portage business evolved into the Seneca Lock Navigation Company. The village of "Mynderse Mills" began in 1795 when Wilhelmus Mynderse built two dams to power his sawmills. The "falls" of Seneca Falls were in fact man-made dams constructed for the purpose of harnessing waterpower that was easily transformed into mechanical power. In 1818, one year after work had begun on the Erie Canal, the Seneca Lock Navigation Company complet-



Pumps were a major innovation that had a profound affect on the way people lived and worked

ed building a small canal with stone locks along the south side of the river. New York state acquired the assets of the Seneca Lock Navigation Company in 1825, and the upgraded and renamed "Cayuga and Seneca Canal" was opened for Erie Canal traffic in 1828.

This access to waterpower before the days of electricity, and the proximity of the Seneca River to the future Erie Canal, was a double blessing for Seneca Falls. When completed in 1825, the 363-mile Erie Canal linked the Hudson River to Lake Erie cutting from 3 weeks to 8 days the time required to ship goods from New York City to Buffalo.

Upstate New York flourished along with cities from Manhattan to the Great Lakes due to fast and inexpensive transportation for natural resources and finished products. With the great dual advantage of waterpower and a connection to inexpensive shipping, diverse and competitive industries flourished in Seneca Falls, producing flour, liquor,

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The Mission... The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network seeks to protect and improve the ecological health, economic vitality and overall beauty of the watershed through education, communication and leadership.



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- Education
- Communication
- Leadership