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NEWS FROM THE WABASH & ERIE CANAL • DELPHI, INDIANA
October 2023



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Volunteer Highlight: Becky Crabb

Each month, we want to

School Tours Continue Growth



School outreach is a huge part of our mission of preservation, education, and recreation. Each fall and spring, we host schools from all over Indiana. This year, we surpassed last year's total for school tour visitors with over 1,100 students coming to Wabash & Erie Canal Park!

highlight our volunteers in recognition of their service and to share ways that you can get involved in our mission of preservation, education, and recreation.

This month, we are hearing from Becky Crabb.

What do you do at the Canal? I do a lot of different things! The thing I like most is talking to the kids and the people that come. It's always fun because I like being able to share and to talk about people in the past. I'm the docent at the Fouts House, and I get to talk about lifestyles of the mid-1800's. I'm on the board of directors and on the Archives Committee too. I've also been helping organize the historic classes, which is another fun thing to do because people have fun doing it!



How many years have you been volunteering, and how did you get involved? I started volunteering somewhere in the 2018-2019 range. I'm involved with the Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating



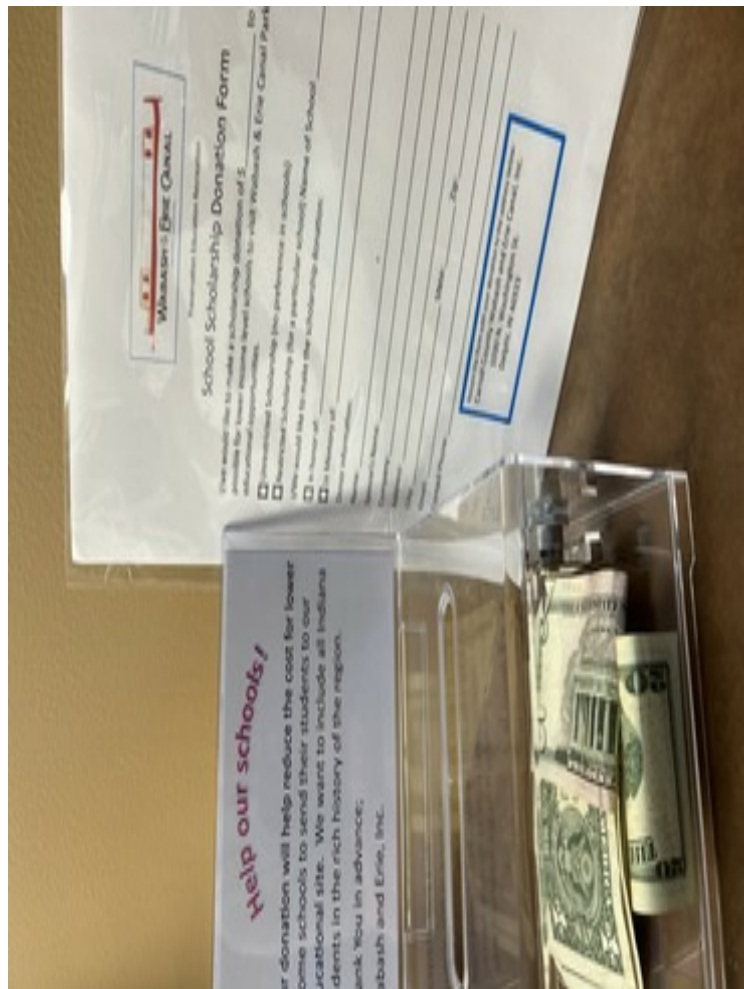
When students visit, they have the opportunity to ride the canal boat, tour the interactive canal museum, explore the Pioneer Village, and more. In each part of the visit, students experience Indiana history in an engaging and memorable way! We love hearing from educators how their students are impacted and gain new insights into the past.



Of course, such a successful year would not be possible without the dedicated team of volunteers who make the magic happen! Between museum docents, Pioneer Village artisans, the boat crew, and more, each tour can be quite a production to pull off! Your support of Canal Park is also a big driver of what we can accomplish, and we have an exciting new opportunity ahead.

Council (MOMCC), and they did a conference with the Canal at one point. I knew about the Canal, and knew it was an awesome volunteer organization. I knew that when I retired [from Buckley Homestead], I still wanted to do historic interpretation because it's a really cool thing! So I checked out the Canal and some other history organizations. The Canal was the one that got back with me and gave me a job working with the Christmas program!

I came up for Christmas at the Canal, and I had my eye on the Fouts House. Beverly Seese ran the Fouts House and the General Store, and she told me, "I can't do two places at once. Which one do you want?" And suddenly I was running a house! It's a gorgeous home; I love the fireplace, I love the cabinets, I love everything about it. After volunteering, I got 6-8 different emails from other volunteers thanking me for participating! It made me think, "This is where I'm supposed to be. This is a good organization." I didn't think hardly anyone knew I was there for the Christmas program, and all these people were thanking me! I knew it was where I belonged.



Going into 2024, our **50th anniversary**, we have established a scholarship fund to allow more schools the chance to experience Indiana's Canal Era! There are already so many barriers for educators as they seek meaningful field trip opportunities, and we want to ensure that cost is not among those limitations.

Field trip costs at the Canal are modest and similar to other options in the area like Prophetstown State Park. Funds donated to the scholarship program will go to schools with financial hurdles, and we will work with those schools to find an attainable price point, supplementing the gap with your crucial donations.

If you can donate to this fund, you can either designate towards the general fund or a particular school. To make a donation, you can mail a check to Wabash & Erie Canal Park, Attn: Scholarships, 1030 N. Washington Street, Delphi IN 46923. Please write "Scholarship" on the memo line as well. You can also make a donation **right now** online at this link: <https://donorbox.org/canalparkscholarship>. Thank you for your support!

Annual Meeting 2023

On October 17, we gathered for the annual meeting of Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc. It is always a delight to gather and celebrate the past year while looking forward to the future.



Do you have a favorite fun fact about the Canal Era? I

like to tell about the difference between country and city folks because the Reed Case House and the Fouts House were built at the same time! Both houses were for the same social status, but if you were in the city you had access to milled lumber and you could build a pretty house like the Case family did. The Fouts family was wealthy too, but they didn't have access to the same products! Same time period, same economic status, but different location and different materials.

When I'm talking with kids, the most fun thing to tell about is the chamber pot. Most kids don't know what it is, and I ask them to guess. When they guess correctly, I tell them the last person awake in the morning is the one who takes it to the outhouse! It's always funny to see their reaction to that.



Linda Cooper, vice president, was the emcee and she welcomed everybody with a special raffle. Karen Bradshaw, secretary, read the 2022 meeting minutes for approval. Next, John Polles presented the nominees for this year's board of directors. The nominees were all approved: Karen Bradshaw, Gregg Bruce, Linda Cooper, and Beverly Seese.



Mike Tetrault, executive director, gave an update about the achievements and milestones of 2023 and recognized the many volunteers and donors who bring Canal Park to life. One special



Anything else you want to share about your volunteer experience? I would say that this is a good place to feel welcome.

We are always looking for new friends to join the fun at Wabash & Erie Canal Park. Click the link below for more information about volunteering with us!

VOLUNTEER **TODAY!**

Community **Steps Up**

There have been a few recent instances of the community stepping up in a big way, and we wanted to share them in a mini-anthology!



The first story involves an emergency sewer repair that popped up. It was a break at a junction on the park's main sewer line. You can never predict these things, so we

moment was awarding Rosie Wilson with the Jim French Legacy Award, which is given to a volunteer each year for exceptional service to the Canal. Rosie retired this year after volunteering for almost 20 years with the Archives Department!



The climax of the evening was hearing from Tommy Kleckner with Indiana Landmarks. As you may know, Indiana Landmarks recently completed extensive upgrades to the Monon High Bridge. The bridge's ownership has now been transferred to Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc. Mr. Kleckner shared the incredible story of how the Monon High Bridge, the 3rd highest and 2nd longest railroad trestle in the state, was saved and restored.

As with many other efforts here at the Canal, the process of preservation is not easy, but it is always worth the investment! We are grateful for all those who attended the annual meeting, and if you missed it we look forward to seeing you next time.

Mystery on the Wildcat Creek

We have written before of the unfolding mystery at Wildcat Creek and the efforts of local partners and historians to piece together exactly how the Wabash & Erie Canal traversed this historic area northeast of Lafayette.

Property owner Ed Geswein has uncovered artifacts and structures that point to a dam and a crossing bridge that helped carry mules and canal boats across the large slackwater of Wildcat Creek. What is known: the dam would have raised the water levels of the creek, creating a large basin with a very slow current. Much of the area near the intersection of I-65 and Schuyler Avenue would have been like a lake!

were in a tight spot!



To make a long (and mucky) story short, we had to empty a sewer pit a couple times while awaiting the contractor's arrival. The **City of Delphi** and **HoosierVac** (based in Camden) both provided complimentary visits with their vacuum trucks! Their generous help allowed us to continue offering full services in our park even while awaiting repairs. We want to give enormous thanks to the City and to HoosierVac for lending their equipment and assistance to keep the Canal running (and flushing).



Next, we are again so grateful for a successful Fall Cleanup Day. Volunteers from around the community showed up to get Canal Park looking its best before winter arrives. We saw representatives from the **Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts,** and **Delphi FFA,** plus the **Delphi Psi Otes** provided another amazing lunch for volunteers! Thank you to all these organizations and the people who came.

Canal Park is not funded by taxpayer dollars, and all our amenities, trails, and gardens



What isn't precisely known is where exactly all the structures were, where the towpath ran, or how the structures were built. Recently Vern Mesler, an iron and steel expert, made a trip from Michigan to investigate some objects that Mr. Geswein has found on the property. Above we see Mr. Mesler examining what is believed to be an iron brace that may have held timbers in place.



Above we see Mr. Mesler operating a drone to get a closer view of some remnants that remain in the middle of Wildcat Creek. Since our initial explorations of the site, the water level of the creek has subsided significantly. This has revealed new structures that were not visible before!

exist because volunteers generously serve their community!



Lastly, we wish to extend a big thank you to **Kirby Risk** in Lafayette. As you may know, our replica canal boat, *The Delphi*, runs on a pair of electric motors (plus we keep a spare motor handy!). This year, one of the motors failed, and Kirby Risk was so kind to take a look at it for us! Their electric motor expertise quickly found the problem, allowing us to pursue a fix for it. Best of all, the fine folks at Kirby Risk donated their time to diagnose the problem. We are endlessly thankful for community partners like Kirby Risk who are invested in helping neighbors thrive!

Upcoming Events

Here are some ways you can experience the Canal for yourself in the coming weeks!



Drone Photo: Vern Mesler, 2023

Above is one of the drone photos that Mr. Mesler took. Visible are some iron remnants that were presumably part of the crossing bridge's structure. While we generally know the route of the Wabash & Erie Canal thanks to historic maps, it's incredible to consider how much is still not exactly known! It is entirely possible that more remnants are buried underneath the creek bed.

We don't know what future studies of the area may yield, but we are grateful to Ed Geswein for his hospitality and passion for history, along with the help of all our canal friends like Vern Mesler along the way!

Rebuilding the Wabash & Erie

by Mike Tetrault

Since we host visitors from all over the country (and even from around the world) we get all sorts of unique questions at Wabash & Erie Canal Park. A visitor recently asked a question that has had me pondering for the past couple weeks: "How much do you think it would cost to rebuild the Wabash & Erie Canal today?" The proposition offers an intriguing thought experiment!

November 4: Hike the Trails Day, dawn to dusk. Get out there and enjoy a walk! At **1:30PM**, meet at the Canal Center for a guided nature walk with host David McCain! David will lead a group up to Founders Point and back (about one mile round-trip), exploring the natural and historical treasures of the area.

December 2: Christmas at the Canal, 10AM-4PM. Join us for the merriest event of the year! Indoor Christmas Bazaar, Pioneer Village demonstrations, visits with Santa, music, food, and more!

Did you know...?



You can hold your wedding, corporate meeting, or birthday celebration at the Canal Center?



We offer a variety of options for each different type of event. We offer free wifi and can accommodate up to 300 guests!

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In some ways, it would be much easier to build the canal today. Modern bulldozers and heavy equipment could dig a canal and its feeder network much faster and more efficiently than shovels or mules pulling slip scoops. I think it would take far less than 21 years to build today!

According to *Canals for a Nation* by Ronald Shaw, the cost of the Wabash & Erie Canal was about \$8.3 million, which would be about \$300 million today adjusted for inflation.

So, what might it cost to rebuild the full canal today? This is where your imagination and your analytic side can run wild! Here are a few thoughts I had:

- Land in Indiana is at a much higher premium than during the canal surveys. During original surveys, land was comparatively inexpensive, and speculation from the canal drove prices up. Assuming all modern owners were willing to sell the needed land at market rate, the price of 468 miles' worth of canal land would be astronomical.
- Digging the canal was "easy" in that there was nothing underground to worry about damaging! Today, dealing with



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We are fortunate to have many generous businesses in the community who place great value on preservation, education, and recreation.

If you have need of any services offered by the businesses below, we strongly recommend you reach out to them! They are all wonderful organizations who care about the community they serve!

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utilities would pose a total nightmare scenario.

- Another modern addition to infrastructure pricing is environmental impact studies and any ensuing litigation. The sheer scope of the project would involve a vast environmental study. Legal fees have a way of stacking up *fast*, so that would make things expensive.
- Most original canal structures were made of wood, since it was available and easy to find across the state. Unfortunately, wood was prone to decay. Modern materials would last longer, but they would also be expensive because things like alloys and plastics don't grow on trees.
- With the advent of labor laws and worker protections, I imagine the labor costs would also be much higher than during the Canal Era. Plus, I doubt workers would be content to live in makeshift log shanties!
- Perhaps some corners could be cut if remnants of the canal channel are still dormant in certain stretches. I know that the Delphi section would be easy to complete because it's still in great working order!

I am not a project manager or an infrastructure spending expert, so I can't even take a wild guess at the cost of rebuilding the Wabash & Erie Canal today. But I am confident the cost would be well over the inflation-adjusted \$300 million! In retrospect perhaps the original cost was a bargain for Indiana!

If you have any other thoughts on this question, feel free to send them along via email: director@canalcenter.org. It might not be a realistic project, but it's a fun mental and historical exercise!

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