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NEWS FROM THE WABASH & ERIE CANAL • DELPHI, INDIANA

February 2024



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2024 Memberships

Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal is excited to celebrate its **50th Anniversary** in 2024, and we

50th Anniversary Recollections

Dan McCain, President Emeritus, recalls the early days of the Canal Association



In February 1971 the very first meeting of the dozen people concerned with forming a Canal history group was held. It was

want to invite you to join us as a canal supporter for the year!



Now is the perfect time to send in your financial support for the new year if you haven't already done so. We have a variety of giving levels to match your budget, and we've also got some special gifts in store! [Visit our website for ways you can contribute.](#)



HOGGEE Level (donations under \$149): You'll receive a recognition letter as a Canal supporter and a free postcard set with Wabash & Erie Canal Park photos.

STEERSMAN Level (donations \$150-\$299): You'll receive the above gifts PLUS free museum entry for 2024 for yourself and three guests. Note: these guests can be any three people you bring with you and can change from visit to visit!

LOCKMASTER Level (donations \$300-\$467): You'll receive the above gifts PLUS free Case House entry for yourself and three guests in 2024. In addition, you will receive a free T-shirt, and a free one-night stay in the

chaired by Robert Bradshaw and Dennis McCouch, and my mother and father were there as well. During this early time the local Soil and Water Conservation District helped make an estimate of what it would take to dredge the canal thus improving the water quality and looks. It turns out that it might be done then for \$25,000—this was beyond the group's budget!

In July 1971, the first officers of this new association were my mother, Roseland McCain, elected president Robert Bradshaw, Joe Peterson, and Fay Wood. In March 1972 my mother began a weekly series on Canal history published in the newspapers in Carroll County. This began a time for the public to understand the significance of the history we were involving with the Canal project.

My mother Roseland created a fictitious character called Mrs. Sarah Spoonagle, and she told the story of a new widow coming from New York City to Delphi to visit her sister on a canal boat. She related the sites and sounds and smells and dogs and busyness and so forth along the way.

Meetings were held to figure out how to restore the canal's water quality, depth, and width. In April 1973 the group considered creating a nonprofit corporation so that grants could be acquired and expensive work on the canal could be done.



Up to that point, there weren't many results to show. Fundraising in this community hadn't sprung forward due to the poor community perception of the looks, smells, green slimy surface, and millions of mosquitoes around the waterway. Locally the canal was denounced for its "rats and snakes and dirty water." Kids were forbidden by their parents to go there!

In 1974, the IRS granted 501(c)(3) nonprofit status to this young group, Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc. In November 1975 the neighboring factory, Peters Revington Furniture, donated the first piece of land and that became Wabash & Erie

Lockmaster's Airbnb cabin! The cabin stay will depend on availability, but we can arrange those details when you're ready for your rustic cabin experience.

468 MILE CLUB Level

(donations \$468+): You'll receive the above gifts PLUS a free hat, four free canal boat tickets, and a VIP tour of Canal Park with executive director Mike Tetrault with all-access to the historic buildings. This elite level of membership can also be arranged with automatic \$39 monthly giving.

Outside of Delphi there is no other site where you can experience the engineering marvel of the Wabash & Erie Canal so completely, and it is only possible because our generous community sees the value in preserving this story. Please help us continue our mission of preservation, education, and recreation as you're able. And keep your eyes open for 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2024!

VOLUNTEER
TODAY!

Basketball Is Back!

This is a story about how the best parts of Canal Park can shine in all circumstances, told through basketball.

Canal Park. Later with two more land gifts the park grew to a size of about seven acres.

The young group organized events to raise awareness of canal history. In October 1978, the Madam Carroll was rented for a boat ride to replicate what it might feel like riding on the canal. There was a skit written by Dennis McCouch and 110 passengers enjoyed music, history, and a brown bag lunch while riding the boat that day. There were questions about whether we ever have a canal boat for Canal Park and my mother's comment always was, "Yes, we will have a canal boat but we just don't know when!"



In November 1981, the Chester Kuns house was donated by the family and later moved to Canal Park. In October 1982 the Speece Picnic Shelter was built by the high school's building trades class and the Reed Case House was given by Jim and June Davis including an offer of \$12,000 to move it.

As the park grew and evolved, it became a site for public enjoyment and events. From humble beginnings and earnest efforts, Canal Park has become a treasure of Indiana history.

Rudder Fixes

One of the best parts of visiting Canal Park is enjoying a ride aboard our replica canal boat, *The Delphi*. This beautiful vessel



Some years ago, an outdoor basketball goal and some basketballs were donated by Kamron Yates, a community member who has also been involved in coaching Delphi's youth. It was placed along our parking lot, and it has been regularly used by visitors of all ages. Every so often, Kamron would check in and even replace basketballs as needed.

However, when offering a public service, you never know what may happen. Late last fall, vandals destroyed the backboard, removing this valuable asset from use. It appeared that large objects were used to shatter the plexiglass.



Looking at replacement costs, it seemed that we would simply have to remove the basketball goal, thus removing a recreational opportunity for community members on Delphi's north side. But this is where the resourceful and ingenious Monday-Wednesday-Friday Crew, led by Mac Carlisle, jumped into action.

was built by [Scarano Boat Building](#) from Albany, NY, and it has plied the waters of the Wabash & Erie Canal since 2009.



During the 2023 Canal Season, the rudder that has faithfully steered the ship for almost 15 years met its end, and it can be a challenge to find customized rudders in our area!

Thankfully, we have amazing volunteers who bring all sorts of brilliant skills to the table! Dean Smoll, a two-year veteran of the boat crew, happens to be a nautical enthusiast who also builds and restores boats for fun. He brought the rudder home, and worked his magic.



You can see Dean installing the new rudder above, and he made this stunning and functional masterpiece of white oak from a local lumber supplier. As is often the case with talented, passionate people, Dean went above and beyond to build something extra-durable that will guide *The Delphi* on its voyages for years to come.

The next time you ride the boat at Canal Park, be sure to thank Dean at each turnaround!



Mac and the team removed the broken plexiglass and measured the backboard's frame. We try to preserve whatever raw materials we can, and Mac located two old museum panels that were outdated and unused. In the cold winter weather, the crew used a heat gun to remove the panel graphics and fasten the panels to the backboard's frame, even painting a square onto the backboard for good measure!



Now the goal is back in use, and we are happy to report that kids and grownups are back to shooting hoops on warm days! This accessible option for recreation is the result of the best parts of Wabash & Erie Canal Park: community donations, volunteer ingenuity, saving useful materials rather than throwing them away, and turning negative events into something the community can celebrate.

Did you know...?

Sign Up for Spring Classes!



If you haven't check out the Spring Historic Trades Classes yet, be sure to do so today! Join us in preserving history by learning new skills and having fun at the same time.

You get to take home your creations after the class has ended, and you will be supervised by expert instructors who are passionate about their respective crafts.

All classes are one-day or two-day duration, and they are spread from late April through early June. You can browse and register for classes online at: <https://wabashanderiecanal.org/classes/>. As part of our new online platform, you can handle registration and payment all in one swoop. If you'd prefer, you can print a registration form from the website and mail it in with your payment.

There are **NINE** terrific options to choose from in this session. You can find more details on the website, but the list of classes is as follows:

- Coopering tools (April 19-20)
- Weaving (May 5)
- Coopering bucket (May 17-18)
- Broom making (May 18)
- Wool felting (May 18)
- Spinning (May 18)
- Basket making (May 23)
- Pine needle bowl (May 29)
- Hand quilting (June 1)

We'll see you in class!



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!

[Save your date today!](#)



Thanks to Our Sponsors!

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!

Festival Sponsors

- *Duke Energy*



Canal Procrastinators: Groundbreaking Anniversary

Today is February 22, and it marks the 192nd anniversary of the groundbreaking ceremony in Fort Wayne for the Wabash & Erie Canal! The unsteady start of canal construction is a fascinating account that offers a glimpse of Indiana politics in the first half of the 19th century.



But first, imagine a 4th grade student who is told by their parent, "I will buy you ice cream today as long as you promise to *start* your science fair project this semester." Our young scholar eagerly agrees, with all the usual promises and assurances. Then, on the night before the semester ends, the student jolts awake and remembers: **the project is due tomorrow!** The student grabs a marker, a poster, and scribbles his name on the back and writes "SCIENCE FAIR PROJECT" on the front. Having fulfilled his end of the bargain, the student decides to think about *finishing* the project later. This essentially summarizes how Indiana started the Wabash & Erie Canal, but with much larger stakes.

In the 1820's, it was quite apparent that Indiana needed better options for travel and shipping. The state had a wealth of natural resources and potential for growth, but there was no large-scale means to tap into that wealth. Even a trip from Lafayette to Indianapolis would be a

- *Duro Energy*
- *Mustangs To Fear*

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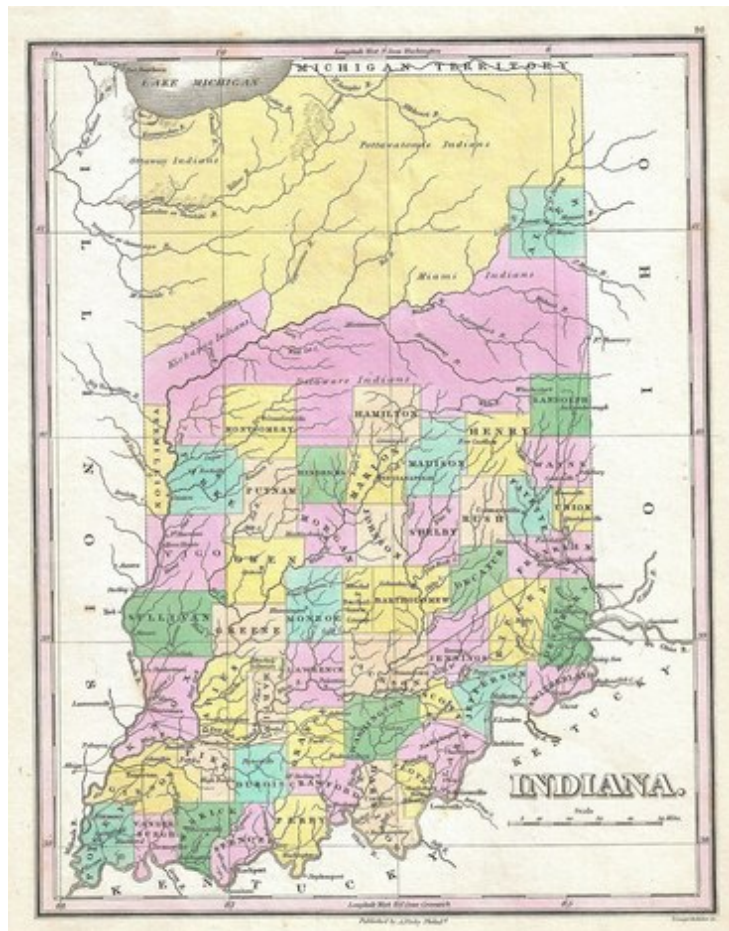
director@canalcenter.org and check out the [Sponsorships Brochure on our website.](#)



For a complete list of activities please visit us at www.wabashanderiecanal.org

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hazardous journey to undertake!



You can see from the above map that the state looked much different in 1827 when the US government offered Indiana a deal that was too good to refuse. The deal went something like this: the federal government would grant a vast strip of land to Indiana along the Wabash River corridor, and Indiana could then sell that land for its own profit. In that same year, Indiana raked in a measly \$33,000 in tax revenue, so the state saw this as an opportunity to bring in a windfall of "easy" revenue to fund improvement projects.

But here's the catch: in order for Indiana to obtain this land (which had been previously hustled away from Native Americans), the state would have to commit to building a canal along the proposed route to connect the Wabash River to the Maumee River via Fort Wayne.

There was a five year deadline for this bargain. Therefore, Indiana had to *start* canal construction by early **March 1832**. Indiana accepted the terms of the deal, and this is where things went off the rails...or towpath.

In a predictable series of events, Indiana's politicians proceeded to spend most of the next five years arguing and fighting about how to proceed. In the 1830-1831 session of the Indiana legislature, there was a motion to adjust the terms of the original deal, which would have permitted the state to build a canal **or** railroad. But this motion didn't survive and never made it to Washington. Indiana was bound to build a canal or forfeit its deal.

This brings us to the anniversary we commemorate. The legislature finally committed to its canal plans in January 1832, and the clock was ticking! Even though July 4th was the traditional date to start new public works, Indiana had to compromise and complete their groundbreaking on February 22 in honor of George Washington's birthday, who had always dreamed of westward canal connections. But it would also conveniently fall before the dreaded deadline.



Dignitaries gathered at Fort Wayne on February 22, 1832 at Fort Wayne, with the ground frozen and covered in a foot of snow. Without having a full survey of the project, nor any detailed cost estimates, nor signed contracts, nor plans drawn, nor loans secured, canal commissioner Jordan Vigus and others stabbed the earth with their shovels and achieved the deadline for Indiana to keep its land grant. The work had indeed been *technically* started.

So, like a procrastinating student, Indiana's leaders inaugurated one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in US history. The canal helped transform Indiana, even if the political circus created a lot of drama along the way.

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