

Collection #
M0988
OMB118
BV3693
FF15-O

WHITE WATER CANAL COLLECTION 1835-2000

[Collection Information](#)

[Historical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Series Contents](#)

[Cataloging Information](#)

Processed by

Lillian Green
June 11, 2010

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 document cases, 1 bound volume, 1 oversize document case, 1 flat file folder
COLLECTION DATES:	1835-2000
PROVENANCE:	Charles Apfelbaum: Rare Manuscripts and Archives, Watchung,

New Jersey, February, 2010

RESTRICTIONS: None

COPYRIGHT:

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2010.0058

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Increasing in popularity during the 1820s and 30s, the use of canals for trade and transportation spread to the recently incorporated state of Indiana, whose residents sought to cut down on travel time and shipping expenses with the use of canals. Meeting as early as 1822, residents discussed the possibility of building a canal along the Whitewater River. In 1836, Indiana's state government passed the Mammoth Internal Improvement Act, drawing plans for ten million dollars worth of state-wide infrastructure improvements, including turnpikes, railroads and canals. Of these ten million dollars, one and half million went to the construction of the White Water Canal in eastern Indiana, a project overseen by the Board of Internal Improvements.

The proposed canal would connect the economically prosperous White Water Valley in Indiana's heartland to Lawrenceburg, Indiana, a town on the Ohio River, decreasing the amount of time necessary for the transportation of goods. The first section of the canal opened in 1839 and ran from Brookville, Indiana to Lawrenceburg, running about 7 to 8 miles in Ohio, near the town of Harrison, in order to avoid the difficulty and expenses of navigating the canal through the hills of southern Indiana. However, like other initiatives of the Mammoth Internal Improvement Act, the White Water Canal ran into financial trouble after the Panic of 1837, which caused the state government to declare bankruptcy in 1839. Forced to sell off nearly all of the projects, including the White Water Canal, to private ownership, the Indiana State government passed control to the chartered the White Water Valley Canal Company in 1842, after which construction resumed.

In the new phase of construction, the White Water Canal extended northward to Laurel in 1843, Connersville in 1845 and finally to Cambridge City in 1846, running alongside the west fork of the Whitewater River. From Laurel southwards, the canal crossed to the east side of the river and continued on to the Ohio state line. The canal grew with additions constructed by other private companies in the 1840s. The chartered Hagerstown Canal Company extended the canal system northwards from Cambridge City to Hagerstown from 1846 through 1847. The Cincinnati and Whitewater Canal Company built a section from Harrison, Ohio to Cincinnati between 1839 and 1843. A section from Brookeville to Richmond was proposed in 1837, but because of financial constraints was abandoned in 1839 after the construction of 4 miles.

At the peak of its construction, the White Water Valley Canal ran 101 miles from Hagerstown, Indiana to Cincinnati, Ohio. In the 76 miles in Indiana, the canal fell 491 feet, requiring the expensive inclusion of 56 locks and 7 feeder dams to operate. The Canal measured 26 feet wide at the bottom, 46 feet wide at the top, with 10 foot wide tow path on one side and a 6 foot wide berm on the other side. The water measured 4 feet deep, with the towpath and berm

approximately 21 inches above the waterline.

In addition to the mounting expenses of construction, the canal company ran into more financial difficulties, straining the new company's budget. Firstly, claims for damages filed by those whose property suffered injury from the construction and maintenance of the canal asked for reparations ranging from several dollars to several thousand dollars. Even more detrimental to the prosperity of the canal, a series of floods in the later 1840s and in the 1850s aggravated existing design problems, destroying sections of the canal and costing thousands of dollars in repairs. The White Water Valley Canal Company was unable to keep up with the intensive maintenance and eventually, the project proved too expensive, leading to its altogether abandonment in the 1850s. Once the canal closed down, talks began between the canal company and several railroad companies to make parts of the canal tow-path usable for railways transport, keeping Indiana's heartland connected to the national market.

The transfer to railroad ownership began with agreements between the White Water Valley Canal Company and the newly chartered White Water Valley Railroad Company in the early 1860s, ending with a formal indenture in 1865, leasing land to the railroad company. After the railroad company took charge of the land, claims for damages continued and some cases went to court over their disputes. In 1890, this section of railroad became the "White Water branch" of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad (known as the "Big Four"). In the 20th century, this stretch of track along the old White Water canal encountered financial trouble when a flood in 1913 destroyed parts of the track.

The White Water branch of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad changed hands several times in the twentieth century as railroad companies bought and sold rights of way. It transferred from the ownership of the Big Four to New York Central in 1930 and Penn Central in 1968, which ceased operations in 1972. In this same year, the nonprofit organization—Whitewater Valley Railroad—formed and leased 25 miles of track from Connersville to Brookville and began operating passenger freight on the weekends in 1974. In 1983, the organization bought the stretch of track from Connersville to Metamora and still operates this line today as a functioning railroad museum, staffed primarily by volunteers.

In addition to restorative work on the tow-path railway lines, efforts to conserve and preserve the White Water Canal itself as a valuable cultural resource began in the 1940s when the Indiana Department of Conservation negotiated the transference a stretch of the canal, from Laurel to Brookville. This section of the canal includes the town of Metamora and the structurally unique Duck Creek Aqueduct, a covered bridge that brings the canal sixteen feet over Duck Creek. Built in 1843 (and rebuilt after the flood of 1847), the Duck Creek aqueduct is the oldest covered wooden aqueduct in the United States and is listed as a National Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers. Today, the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site provides visitors with the opportunity to ride on the restored canal in a horse-drawn canal boat and see an old grist mill that once utilized the water power of the White Water Canal.

Sources:

Freeger, Luther M. *The History of Transportation in Wayne County, Indiana*. Articles reprinted from the Palladium-Item, Richmond, Indiana, 1953.

Garman, Harry Otto. *Whitewater Canal: Cambridge City to Ohio River*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana Department of Conservation, 1944.

Potterf, Rex M. *The Whitewater Canal Story*. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County, 1963.

Reifel, August J. *History of Franklin County Indiana: Her People, Industries and Institutions*. Indianapolis, Indiana: B. F. Bowen & Company, Inc, 1915.

Shaw, Ronald E. *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790-1860*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains a wide variety of materials between the years of 1835-2000. The bulk of the material concerned is of the 1835-1890s, mostly land deeds, contracts, and paperwork related to claims for damages associated with the building and maintaining the canal. Although some originals from this period remain in the collection, most of the deeds and claims for damages included in the bulk of the material are copies made by the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Company (known as the Big Four) in the 1890s.

The material chronicles the multiple transitions in ownership and land use that characterize the canal's history. From an ambitious state canal project, to an unfinished and abandoned waterway, to railroad, to restored and preserved relic of Indiana's rich heritage, the White Water Canal existed for a short amount of time in its intended function, but made a big imprint on the communities affected.

In the folder of 1920s court case information there are copies of reports made by the Board of Internal Improvements in the 1830s. In the BV containing information on the court cases of the 1870s relating to claims for damages made to the railroad companies in charge of the canal land, there are a variety of other documents laid-in unrelated to claims for damages. Additionally, folder 14 of box 1 houses the loose pages that have fallen out of this volume. The later documents housed in this collection consist of a variety of printed material chronicling the more recent history and use of sections of the remaining canal and railway, including published histories and pamphlets from Metamora, Indiana.

The items in the second manuscript box are bound volumes, all very delicate. Additionally, for those who may have allergies, the "Awards for Damages by the State of Indiana for Building of the White Water Canal" bound volume has been treated for mold damage.

Some notable pieces in the collection includes twenty two deeds from famous Indiana settlers, a proclamation for the transference of the White Water Canal to the White Water Valley Canal Company in 1842 signed by Indiana Governor Samuel E. Bigger, and an indenture between the White Water Valley Canal and the White Water Valley Railroad in 1865 signed by Henry C. Lord.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: White Water Canal under state ownership, 1820-1842

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Entries of Real Estate	Box 2, Folder 1
Title papers, 1835	Box 1, Folder 2
All are copies signed by James Herron, the custodian of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Company.	
Water power contracts, 1839	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 1
Right of way agreement, 1835	Box 1, Folder 3
Contracts and agreements, 1839	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 2
Copy book of letters related to claims for damages,	Box 2

(1837-1842)

Awards for Damages by the State of Indiana for Building of the White Water Canal (item has been treated for mold damage)	Box 2
Miscellaneous business papers (1838)	Box 1, Folder 4
Act to incorporate the White Water Valley Canal Company (July 20 th , 1842) copy	Box 1, Folder 5
Proclamation by Governor Samuel L. Bigger transferring the canal to private ownership (1842)	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 3

Series 2: White Water Canal under White Water Valley Canal Company ownership, 1842-1865

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Title papers of Indiana settlers, 1842-1845	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 4
Title papers by county: Blackford, Dearborn, Decatur, Delaware, Fayette	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 5
Title papers by county: Franklin, Fulton, Grant, Hamilton, Hancock	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 6
Title papers by county: Henry	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 7
Title papers by county: Huntington, Madison, St. Joseph, Shelby	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 8
Title papers by county: Wayne	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 9
Title papers by county: Wayne, Wells, Harrison (Ohio)	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 10
Handwritten title papers from Franklin County, 1849	Box 1, Folder 6
Water power contracts, 1845-1846	Box 1, Folder 7
Water power contracts, 1843-1865	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 11
Other contracts and agreements, 1844-1855	Box 1, Folder 8
Contracts and agreements, 1842-1844	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 12
Claims for damages by county, 1843-1850	Box 1, Folder 9
Claims for damages by county: Fayette, Franklin	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 13
Awards for damages, 1844-1849	Box 1, Folder 10

Miscellaneous business papers related to claims for damages, 1845-1848	Box 1, Folder 11
White Water Valley Canal Letter book, 1842-1846	Box 2
Copy letter book, 1846-1853	Box 2
Miscellaneous business papers, 1842-1846	Box 1, Folder 12
Expenses from December, 1854, Connersville	OMB 118 Box 1, Folder 14
Indenture between the White Water Valley Canal Company and the White Water Valley Railroad Company, 1865	Box 1, Folder 13

Series 3: White Water Valley Canal under railroad ownership, 1865-1940s

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Contracts and agreements, 1865-1890	Box 1, Folder 14
Bound collection of trial briefs and other documents related to claims for damages	BV 3693
Loose papers from BV 3698	Box 1, Folder 15
Claim for damages, 1888	Box 1, Folder 16
Court documents	Box 1, Folder 17
Correspondence, 1940s	Box 1, Folder 18

Series 4: Maps and Printed Items, 1838-2000

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Maps and drawings of the Canal	Box 1, Folder 19
Large illustrated map of the White Water Valley Canal, 1946	FF15-O
Article by E.E. Exon titled, "The History of the White Water Valley Canal"	Box 1, Folder 20
Ohio Canal Hands handbook	Box 1, Folder 21
Speech titled "Value and Necessity of State Archives"	Box 1, Folder 22

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0988).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.