

Transportation Innovation Through Extraordinary Engineering:
Barriers Broken by the Erie Canal

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PROCESS PAPER

When I first heard about the Breaking Barriers theme this year, one of the topics I immediately thought of was the Erie Canal. I did not have much previous knowledge on the subject, but I read a short passage on it in the AP U.S. textbook earlier in the year and was interested in learning more. My interest was further intensified when I got to visit the Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse, New York on a MEA break trip. I was certain I was going to do this topic after seeing all the exhibits and having a fun, informative tour. I chose to do a website because I had never done one for a project before, and I was interested in going digital. Additionally, a website allowed me to best showcase my project on the Erie Canal in the most meaningful and informative way, especially with the use of pictures. A website also allowed me to enjoy the process of creating it without it feeling like a boring task.

As stated above, I first began my research at the Erie Canal Museum. While there, I had the chance to go on a tour led by an expert and hear him elaborate on the details of the canal. Additionally, I was able to look at models of boats and locks, maps, and different exhibits throughout the museum. After my visit, I got to take home pamphlets, maps, and other hand outs on the history of the canal as well. I also utilized several internet websites which provided me with information on the intricacies of the canal and other material that fell under the website tabs I wanted to incorporate in my project. These sites also provided me with the majority of the pictures I used on my website. I used several databases and historical societies to gather primary sources such as newspapers and letters which had information on the experience of traveling on the canal and what kind of products and people were transported. To further research my topic, I also visited multiple libraries (school, city, and county) and collected books from each.

When I started to gather information for my website, I discovered that I did not know many ways to gather primary sources. Fortunately, my teacher pointed me towards databases and historical societies that had diverse selections of newspapers, letters, and other primary sources. The website builder was also decently hard to navigate and was not the most efficient. I watched multiple videos and read information on the NHD site on how to most successfully navigate the builder.

The Erie Canal revolutionized transportation in America and thereby had a lasting impact on the economy, urban growth, and Western expansion. With the support of laborers, engineers, and canal enthusiasts, the canal broke various engineering and transportation barriers.