

American Canal Society Canals' Index

<p>CANAL: <b>THE UNION CANAL</b></p> <p>STATE/PROVINCE: <b>Pennsylvania</b></p> <p>COUNTIES: <b>Dauphin, Lebanon and Berks</b></p> <p>LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): <b>Reading to Middletown, Connecting the Schuylkill Nav. with Pa. Main Line</b></p> <p>TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS:</p>	<p>STATUS: <b>Abandoned, except for short restoration near Reading</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="width: 10%; vertical-align: middle;">ENLARGEMENTS</td> <td style="width: 15%;">DATES IN USE</td> <td style="width: 55%;">LENGTH</td> <td style="width: 20%;">LIFT LOCKS</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>CANAL SLACKWATER TOTAL</td> <td>No./ SIZE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>1828-1885</td> <td>81</td> <td>93</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>8-1/2x75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>ACS HAER</p>	ENLARGEMENTS	DATES IN USE	LENGTH	LIFT LOCKS		CANAL SLACKWATER TOTAL	No./ SIZE	1	1828-1885	81	93	2			8-1/2x75	3				4			
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<p>HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:</p> <p style="text-align: right;">the Union Canal, which ultimately connected the Schuylkill River at Reading with the Susquehanna River at Middletown, had the distinction of being the first canal route ever to be surveyed in America. The approximate route for the Union Canal was first conceived by William Penn. Having laid out Philadelphia in 1682, which became the country's first great seaport, Penn issued proposals for another city in the province of Pennsylvania in 1690 as follows:</p> <p style="text-align: right;">"It is now my purpose to make another settlement upon the river Susquehanna . . . and the most convenient place for communications with former plantations in the east . . . which will not be hard to do by water by benefit of the river Schuylkill, for a branch of that river (Tulpehocken Creek) lies near a branch that runs in the Susquehanna River (Swatara Creek) and is the common course of the Indians with their skins and furs into our parts . . . from the west and northwest parts of the continent."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">This canal connection was discussed for many years, and in 1762 David Rittenhouse, the astronomer, and Dr. William Smith, provost of the University of Pennsylvania, made surveys over Penn's route from Reading to Middletown, the route later traversed by the Union Canal.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">The Revolutionary War intervened before anything further was done. In 1792 two companies were chartered by the State of Pennsylvania to build a navigable waterway between the Schuylkill and Susquehanna, improve the Schuylkill from Norristown to Reading, and build a canal from the Delaware River to Norristown. By 1794, the companies had completed 15 miles of work, including several locks, and had spent \$440,000, which exhausted their funds, and the work ground to a stop—for the next twenty-seven years. The legislature granted the companies the right to raise another \$400,000 by means of lotteries, but by 1811 the two companies, united under the name "Union Canal Company," had managed to raise only \$60,000.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">In 1815 by act of the Pennsylvania legislature a new enterprise, the "Schuylkill Navigation Company," was chartered to complete the work on the Schuylkill River.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">In the meantime the Union Canal Company, whose responsibility had now been narrowed to the water route between Reading and Middletown, was offered financial aid by the state of Pennsylvania due to the impending threat to Pennsylvania's commerce of New York State's partially completed Erie Canal. With this additional impetus the Union Canal was pushed through to completion between 1821 and 1828, to make a water link between Philadelphia and the Susquehanna.</p>																								
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<p>BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>"The Amazing Pa. Canals"</b> by W. H. Shank, 1977</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Also many records, articles and maps in the archives of the <b>Lebanon County Historical Society</b></p> <p>UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAER, HABS)</p>																								
<p>EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Continued on the reverse side)</p>																								
<p>REPORTER'S NAME &amp; ADDRESS: <b>William H. Shank, 809 Rathton Rd., York, Pa. 17403</b> DATE:</p>																								
<p>RETURN TO: CANAL INDEX COMMITTEE, c/o P.H. STOTT, HAINES ROAD, MOUNT KISCO, NY 10549</p>																								