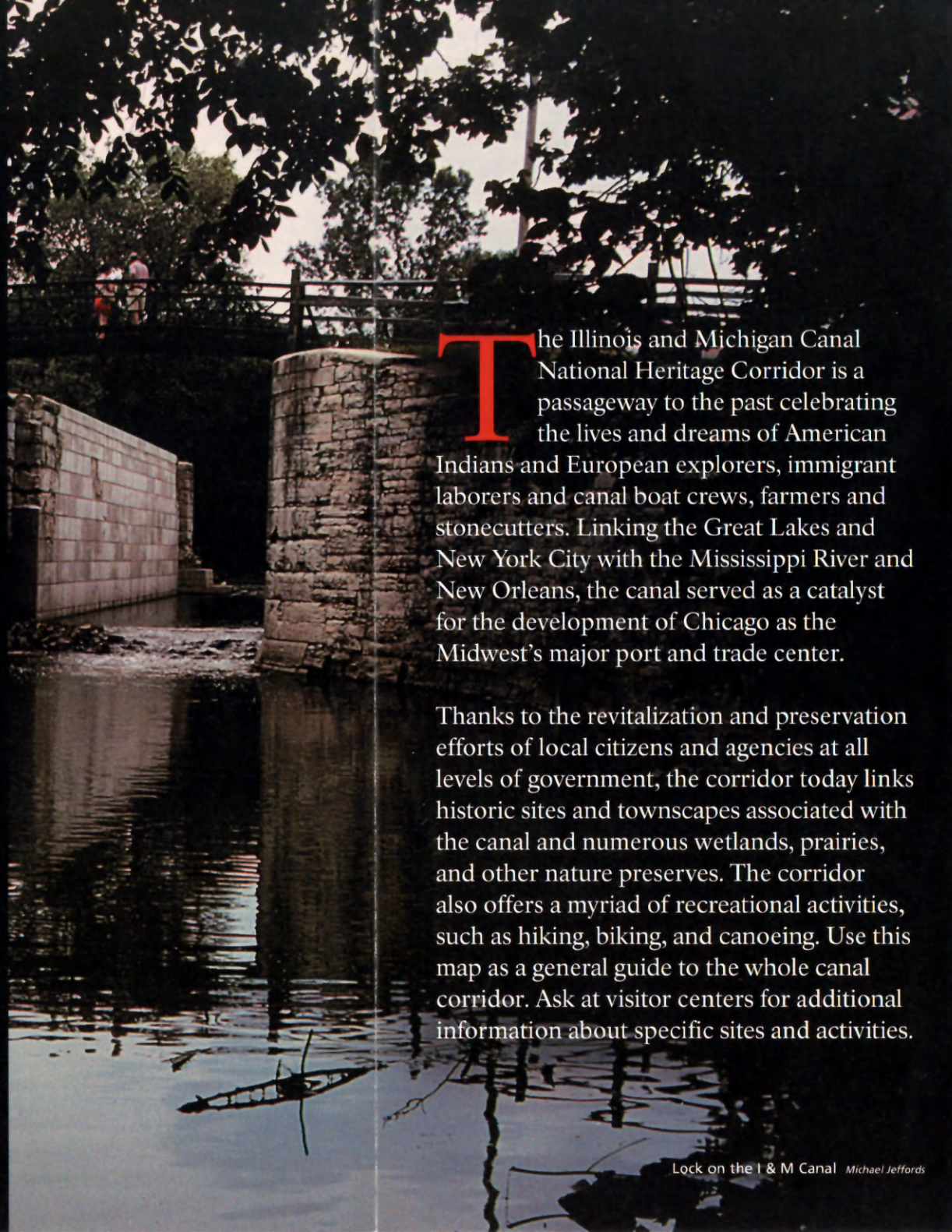
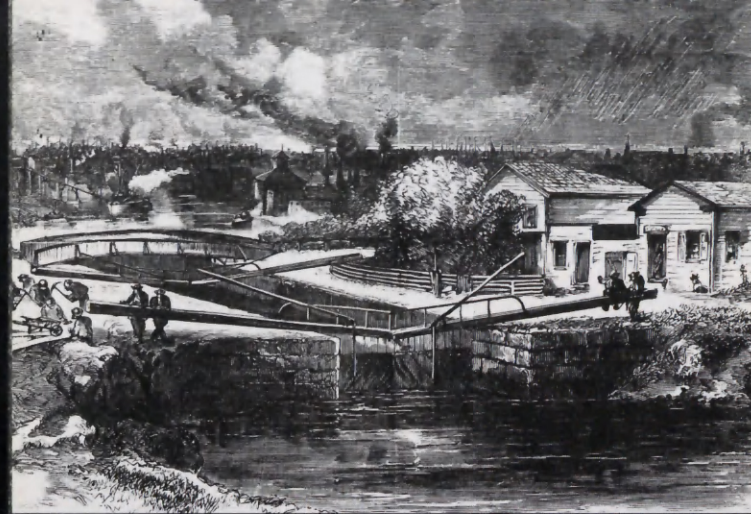




The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor is a passageway to the past celebrating the lives and dreams of American Indians and European explorers, immigrant laborers and canal boat crews, farmers and stonecutters. Linking the Great Lakes and New York City with the Mississippi River and New Orleans, the canal served as a catalyst for the development of Chicago as the Midwest's major port and trade center.

Thanks to the revitalization and preservation efforts of local citizens and agencies at all levels of government, the corridor today links historic sites and townscapes associated with the canal and numerous wetlands, prairies, and other nature preserves. The corridor also offers a myriad of recreational activities, such as hiking, biking, and canoeing. Use this map as a general guide to the whole canal corridor. Ask at visitor centers for additional information about specific sites and activities.

Lock on the I & M Canal Michael Jeffords



Lock at Bridgeport

Canal Sparked Midwest's Commerce

A French explorer-mapmaker, Louis Jolliet, first proposed a canal connecting Lake Michigan with the Illinois and Mississippi rivers in 1673, but the idea was not pursued in earnest until the 1800s.

Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette, with an American Indian guide, were returning to Canada after exploring the Mississippi and determining that the river flowed south to the Gulf of Mexico. Traveling north via the Illinois and Des Plaines rivers, the explorers came across a low ridge requiring them to portage their boats to the Chicago River. The site—now called Chicago Portage—was well known to the Indians, whose ancestors had inhabited the valleys of northern Illinois for more than 10,000 years.



Waterfall Glen

In writing about his trip, Jolliet envisioned a short canal through the portage area so that boats could travel from Lake Michigan via the Chicago, Des Plaines, Illinois, and Mississippi rivers to the Gulf.

The idea lay fallow until after the American Revolution, when the U.S. Government built Fort Dearborn on lands at the mouth of the Chicago River obtained in a treaty with the Potawatomi Indians. As the fur trade burgeoned and more European settlers moved into the region, the proposal for a connecting canal reappeared periodically. Eventually a second Illinois Canal Commission raised funds from land sales, and canal construction started on July 4, 1836.



Chicago skyline Gary Moore

Immigrants from Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Poland, and other nations—some of whom had worked on New York's Erie Canal—were brought in to dig the earth and, in places, to cut into the bedrock to create the canal prism, or ditch. They built feeder canals, locks, aqueducts, dams, plus the towpath for mules and houses for locktenders.

Construction stopped for years because of a lack of funds. English and eastern investors finally came to the rescue, and the \$6.5 million canal opened for business on April 20, 1848. The 96-mile canal was six feet deep and 60 feet wide. Fifteen locks lowered and raised the canal boats a total of 141 feet, the difference in elevation between Lake Michigan and the Illinois River.



Starved Rock Willard Clay

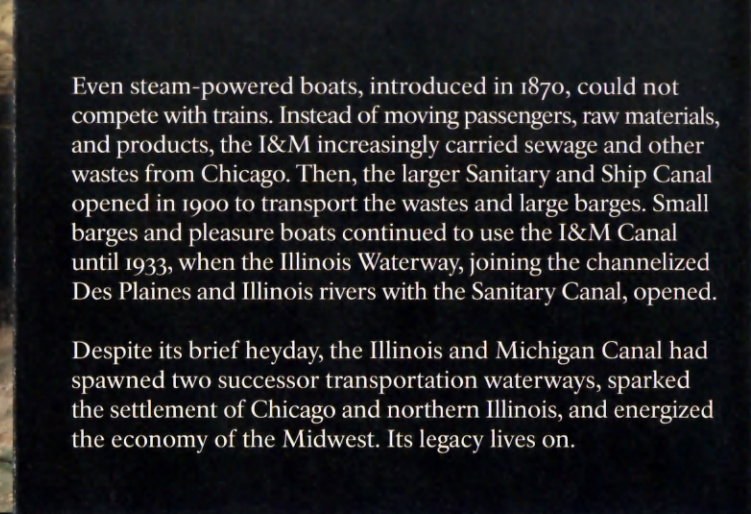
Soon 100-foot-long boats were traveling back and forth carrying grain, stone, lumber, and coal. Goods could now be transported between New York City and New Orleans via a less expensive and easier all-water route along rivers, lakes, and canals. Packet boats carried passengers in 22 hours from Chicago to LaSalle.

Trade soared east and west, north and south. In 10 years, Chicago's population rose 600%. With the increase in commerce, communities such as Lockport, Joliet, Seneca, Marseilles, Ottawa, and LaSalle flourished along the canal. The canal soon faced stiff competition from faster railroads.

The I&M reduced tolls, but traffic and income declined.



Canoeing the Illinois River



Even steam-powered boats, introduced in 1870, could not compete with trains. Instead of moving passengers, raw materials, and products, the I&M increasingly carried sewage and other wastes from Chicago. Then, the larger Sanitary and Ship Canal opened in 1900 to transport the wastes and large barges. Small barges and pleasure boats continued to use the I&M Canal until 1933, when the Illinois Waterway, joining the channelized Des Plaines and Illinois rivers with the Sanitary Canal, opened.

Despite its brief heyday, the Illinois and Michigan Canal had spawned two successor transportation waterways, sparked the settlement of Chicago and northern Illinois, and energized the economy of the Midwest. Its legacy lives on.



Corn with Crib along the canal

Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, established by Congress in 1984, is an affiliated area of the National Park System, but the Federal Government does not own property or manage land within its boundaries. Instead, a federal commission assisted by the National Park Service works with state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to protect the area's historical, natural, and recreational resources and to promote awareness of the canal's significance as a living, cultural landscape. The State of Illinois owns and manages the canal and towpath, now a recreational trail. For information: write to I&M Canal NHC Commission, 201 West 10th Street, 1-SE, Lockport, IL 60441; call 815-588-6040; or use this website www.nps.gov/ilmi.



Egret Michael Jeffords



Reddick Mansion, Ottawa



I&M Canal State Trail



Gaylord Building, Lockport Hedrick Blessing



Chicago Portage NHS J. M. Elliot



St. James of the Sag Susan Jackson Keig

Visiting the Canal Corridor

This map shows the communities and many of the historic sites and natural areas in the heritage corridor. Note the locations of visitor centers, where you can obtain detailed maps and guides along with information about both the watered and dry reaches of the canal. Look for access points to the 61-mile I&M Canal State Trail between LaSalle and Joliet and other trails to the east.

Wherever you go, take your time. Enjoy the scenic views, the plants, and animals. Examine landscapes and townscapes for obvious and not-so-obvious signs of the canal era. For instance, several towns laid out by the original canal commission reflect a distinctive architectural character with warehouses, stores, and homes built of dolomite, a limestone quarried along the canal route.

LaSalle County

Step back in time at restored Lock 14, the canal's terminus, and Little Vermilion River Aqueduct. Hike canyons and bluffs of Starved Rock State Park. View water transportation exhibits at Illinois Waterway Visitor Center. Visit Ottawa, site of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate and the Fox River Aqueduct.

Grundy County

Look up the 1862 M.J. Hogan Grain Elevator in Seneca, where boats were loaded with grain. Stop in Morris, Grundy County's seat and site of Stratton and Gebhard Woods state parks, I&M Trail headquarters, and grave of Potawatomi Chief Shabbona. See native tall-grasses and glacial remains at Goose Lake Prairie.

Will County

Learn about Joliet's steel and stone heritage at historical society museum and iron works site. See the Slovenian Heritage Museum and the spectacular 1920s Rialto Square Theatre. Visit arboretum and nature center at Pilcher Park. Take a self-guiding tour of Lockport, one of the best-preserved canal era towns. See reconstructed Lock 1. Visit I&M exhibit at Gaylord Building and State Museum gallery at Norton Building, both originally canal warehouses. See I&M exhibits at historical society museum.

Cook County and DuPage County

Take a living history tour of French-Indian fur trade at Isle a la Cache Museum. Visit several preserves protecting prairie grasses, woodlands, and fens. Take self-guiding walk through historic downtown Lemont, settled by immigrants who helped build the canal. Visit St. James of the Sag Church, built of dolomite in 1850s by Irish canal workers, many of whose graves are in the church's cemetery. See sculpture of French explorers Jolliet and Marquette at Chicago Portage National Historic Site in Lyons. Even though I-55 (Stevenson Expressway) was built on the canal alignment in Chicago, a few traces of I&M Canal remain in the Bridgeport area. A Canal Origins Park is being developed nearby.

