

Seneca Grain Elevator

Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor

Illinois Department of Conservation
National Park Service



History of the I&M Canal

For many thousands of years, the area which is now the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor was the home of Native Americans who carried their canoes across a low divide separating Lake Michigan and the Des Plaines River. Jolliet and Marquette recognized the value of the Chicago Portage during their exploration in 1673, and noted that a canal would permit continuous water travel from Lake Michigan to the Illinois River.

Interest in a canal continued over the first several decades of the nineteenth century. A Canal Commission established in 1835 raised the money to begin construction, and a ground-breaking ceremony took place in Bridgeport on July 4, 1836. The plan called for a canal 60 feet wide at water level, 36 feet wide at the bottom, and 6 feet deep. Its route was 96 miles in length, with 5.5 miles of navigation along the Chicago River. The canal was to contain 15 locks to lift and

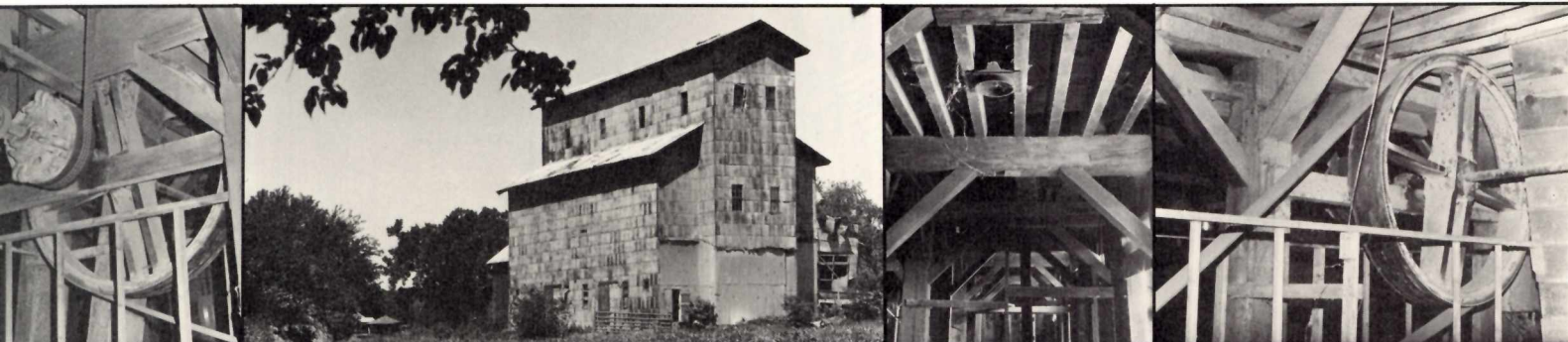
lower boats, as well as dams, aqueducts, bridges, canal basins, locktenders' houses, and towpaths.

Despite financial problems which delayed construction, the canal was finally completed and the locks opened amid great celebration in 1848. Opening of the canal created a new era of prosperity for towns and villages along the corridor. Crafts of every kind carried travelers and goods including cotton, sugar, grain, and metals. The immediate and continuous flow of products and people helped make Chicago the nation's inland port, a center for manufacturing and trade.

By 1854, railroads offered faster travel and freight transportation. The canal was further supplanted with the opening of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in 1900, and the establishment of the Illinois Waterway System in 1933. However, before it fell into

disuse the canal provided the impetus for settlement and development throughout northeastern Illinois. Cities including Chicago, Lockport, Joliet, Morris, Marseilles, Ottawa, Utica, LaSalle-Peru, and of course Seneca owed their prosperity to the I&M Canal. In 1974, the I&M Canal was transferred to the Illinois Department of Conservation to be developed as an historical and recreational area.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor was established in 1984 by an act of Congress which recognized the area's unique contribution to the development of this nation. The law specified that the Corridor's cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and economic resources will be retained, enhanced, and interpreted for the benefit and inspiration of present and future generations.



The Grain Elevator, Agriculture and the Canal

The location of the Seneca Grain Elevator on the north bank of the Illinois & Michigan Canal highlights the important role of the canal in the development of the Midwestern grain market. The canal provided a direct transportation route for grain from the county elevator to Chicago. After 1848,

warehouses and grain elevators were erected along the length of the canal.

Before the development of grain elevators and the canal, area farmers had to load and transport their own grain to market by horse and wagon. County grain elevators

such as this one provided a local market, collecting point and storage facility. The local grain was transported from county elevators, by barges along the canal to terminal elevators in Chicago. From Chicago, grain was transported by boat over the Great Lakes or by rail to eastern markets.

The I&M State Trail
follows the historic canal towpath, stretching 61 miles from Joliet to LaSalle. The trail features excellent hiking, bird watching and scenery. At present two sections are open for bicycling: between Channahon and Morris, and between Utica and LaSalle. Trail facilities include picnicking, snowmobile and cross-country skiing trails, fishing, and camping. 28 miles of the canal is available for canoeing. Gebhard Woods, William G. Stratton Park, and Buffalo Rock and

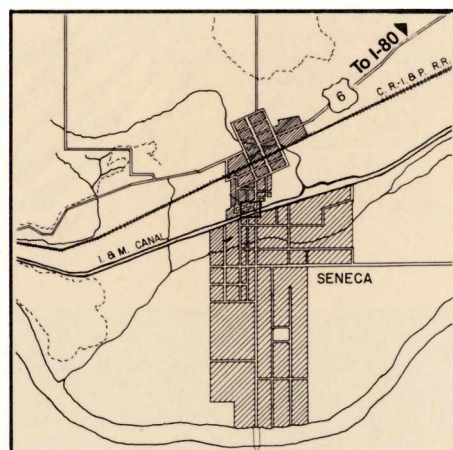
Channahon State Parks are all located along the I&M State Trail.

Safety
Make your visit a safe one. For your safety and the safety of others, please exercise caution and common sense at all times. Be careful near canal and river banks, while crossing highways and streets, and watch out for uneven walking surfaces.

Administration
The Seneca Grain Elevator is administered as part of the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail. The area superintendent has an office at Gebhard Woods Access, Post Office Box 272, Morris, Illinois 60450. Tel (815) 942-0796.

Presently used for grain storage, the elevator is leased by a local farmer. Please respect his property rights. The building and adjacent grounds are not available for public use.

Location
The Seneca Grain Elevator is located on the north bank of the I&M Canal in Seneca, Illinois. Take Route 80 to Mile Marker 105, Seneca exit. Travel south to Route 6, then west to Seneca. In downtown Seneca, look for William Street and the canal.



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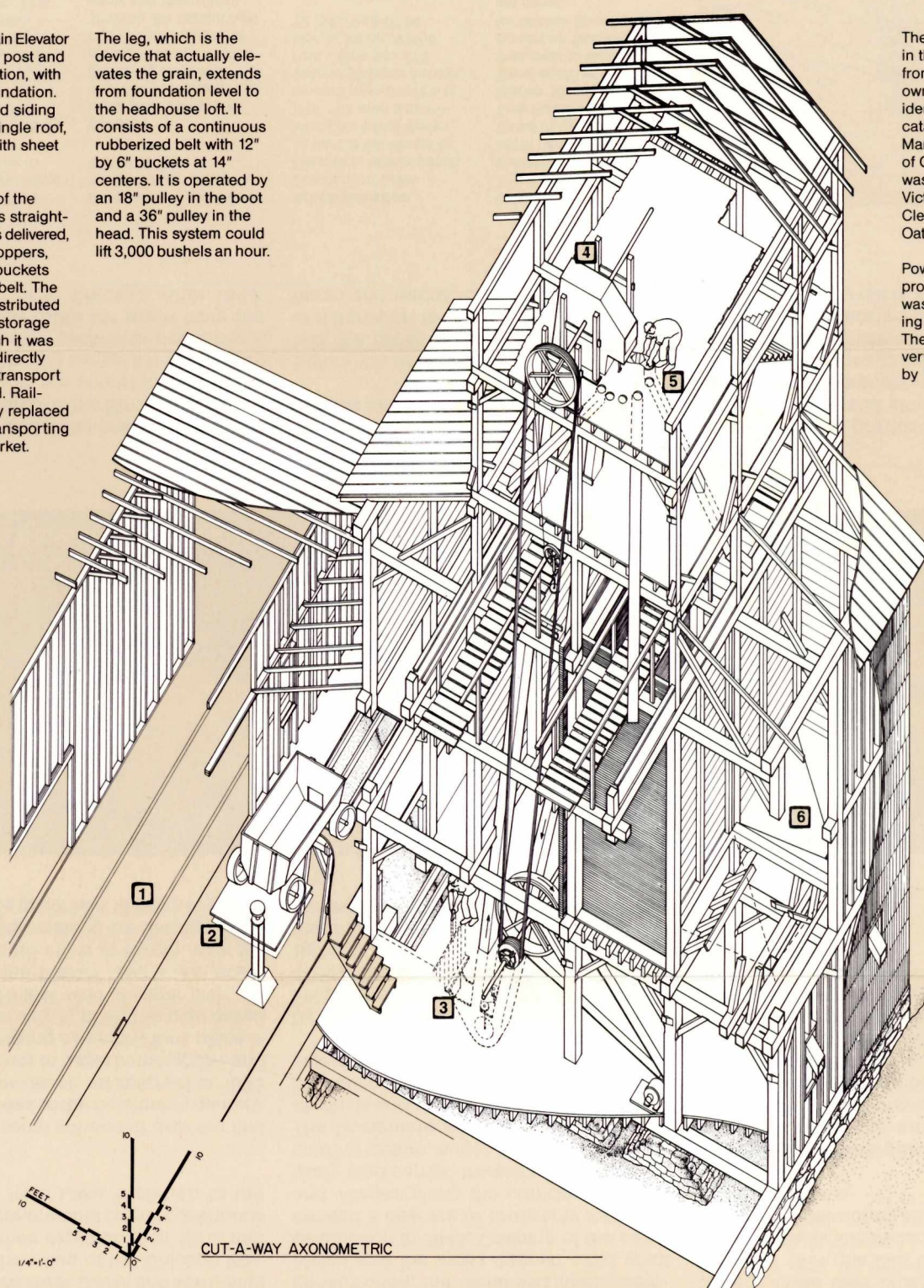
The Seneca Grain Elevator is heavy timber post and beam construction, with a limestone foundation. It had clapboard siding and a wood shingle roof, now covered with sheet metal.

The operation of the grain elevator is straightforward: grain is delivered, dumped into hoppers, and raised by buckets on a conveyor belt. The grain is then distributed by chutes into storage bins, from which it was once emptied directly onto boats for transport along the canal. Railroads gradually replaced the canal for transporting the grain to market.

The leg, which is the device that actually elevates the grain, extends from foundation level to the headhouse loft. It consists of a continuous rubberized belt with 12" by 6" buckets at 14" centers. It is operated by an 18" pulley in the boot and a 36" pulley in the head. This system could lift 3,000 bushels an hour.

The remaining machinery in the elevator dates from M. J. Hogan's ownership, and can be identified in an 1896 catalog of the Weller Manufacturing Company of Chicago. This elevator was equipped with a Victor Corn Sheller and Cleaner, and an Excelsior Oat Clipper and Separator.

Power was originally provided by steam which was generated by burning coal and corn cobs. The elevator was converted to electricity by 1924.



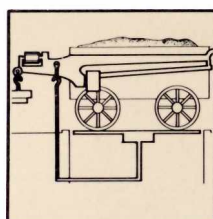
History of the Grain Elevator

In 1860, John Armour purchased the site of the Seneca Grain Elevator from Jeremiah Crotty, a founder of Seneca who had come to the area to work on construction of the I&M Canal. Armour erected the 65-foot tall, 70,000-bushel capacity elevator in 1861-1862. The elevator was built adjacent to the canal, and was fitted with spouts through which grain could be loaded directly onto boats. Railroad service was later provided by a spur line of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad.

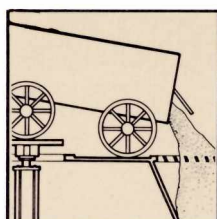
The first owners of the grain elevator were prominent local businessmen. John Armour was a founding director of the Seneca Bridge Company, and owned a half-interest in a canal boat. His brother George was a member of the Chicago Board of Trade, and owned an 850,000 bushel capacity elevator in Chicago. Armour and his family operated or leased the elevator until 1873. Later owners included Guy C. Griswold, whose warehouse reportedly shipped 900,000 bushels of grain in 1876.

In 1890, Martin J. Hogan and Howard Neilson of Marseilles purchased the elevator. Hogan had been a boatman on the canal and president of Seneca. During his ownership, as many as 400 wagons patronized the elevator in a day. The M. J. Hogan Grain Company owned the elevator until 1949. In 1975, the property was acquired by the Illinois Department of Conservation which leases the elevator for grain storage. Today, it is the earliest remaining grain elevator along the canal.

How did the elevator operate?



1. Scale. Grain arrived at the elevator in wagons from local farms. The wagons were weighed on a scale and then pulled up a ramp to the dump shed.



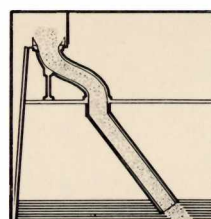
2. Dump. A hydraulic lift under the floor raised one end of the wagon, dumping the grain through a grate into the funnel-shaped hopper.



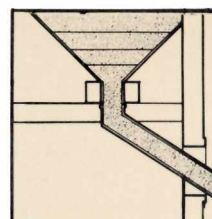
3. Boot. A boot gate controlled the flow of grain from the dump hopper into the boot at the base of the leg.



4. Head. The grain was carried to the head by the leg, a conveyor belt with rope drives. At the loft, grain was emptied into the turn head.



5. Turn Head. At the turn head, a movable cast iron spout directed the grain into chutes leading to the bins.



6. Bin. The grain was stored in the bins. From here, it was fed through chutes directly onto the canal boats, or elevated to a chute leading to the railroad siding.