

Canal Traffic.

References:- Westfield and its Historic Influences, 1669-1919 by Lockwood. Vol 2.
Westfield Public Records Dec. 2, 1822.
History of Western Mass. Vol. I
Hampden Register- 1826-27-29 etc.
"Water over the Dam"- novel by Marguerite Allyn.
Westfield Souvenir Book
Canal Trip- 1832 by Aurelia Taylor in her diary.
Data from Charles R. Harte of New Haven for the Hartford Co. Mutual Fire Insurance So.

At last in 1829, four years after the first survey was made, the Canal was opened from the Mass. Line in Southwick, connecting New Haven with Westfield. It was not until July 30, 1835 that the canal was opened to Northampton, with great acclaim. Already 16 boats were plying regularly between New Haven and Simsbury and warehouses along the route were continuously springing up, filled with cargo, waiting to be transported.

Westfield was called the Port of Westfield and the town basin, "Westfield Harbor." This basin was located on the east side of the main plant of the H. B. Smith Co., just south of the Main St., now filled by Railroad tracks.

On Oct. 1829, the new canal boat "Sachem" of Granby came up to the locks opposite Southwick Village and within 5 miles of Westfield Harbor, having on board more than 150 passengers, accompanied by a band of music. There was great enthusiasm and crowds of people travelled from surrounding points to watch and cheer. This was her first voyage to New Haven with freight and passengers. A month later, the first local boat, the General Sheldon, was launched into Westfield Basin.

The Hampden Register records the following:- "The new canal boat General Sheldon built and owned by Mr. Z. Bosworth, an enterprising citizen of this town, was launched into the Basin in this village. The boat slid into the water in fine style amidst the cheers and acclamations of a large concourse of citizens and a number of strangers which the novelty of the occasion had drawn together. The boat, with about 250 on board, was floated to the North Basin, when, after giving 3 hearty cheers to the prosperity of the canal, and the success of internal improvements, they returned."

Under the heading "First Cruise from the Port of Westfield" the following account was given Dec. 9, 1829. "Canal Excursion. The Canal boat General Sheldon, left this village on Thursday last, on her first voyage to New Haven. Owing to the danger apprehended from suddenly letting the water upon new banks, it was delayed within the limits of the town until the evening, when it again proceeded on its course and arrived at Granby at 12 o'clock that night. The crew took supper, or rather breakfast, at 1 o'clock, and after a short sleep and another breakfast, recommenced their voyage, passed Farmington at evening and arrived at Hillhouse Basin at New Haven, at half past 10 o'clock. They were received at Weabaug and at Farmington with the discharge of cannon. The boat took in her cargo

on Saturday afternoon and arrived at Westfield on her return on Monday evening. The cargo consisted of coal, salt, molasses, oranges, codfish, flour, etc."

There were two types of boats used on the canal. The word "boat" being purely a courtesy. In reality, they were huge, ponderous barges, with low superstructures. However, one type was called a "packet". On these excursions were held with honeymooners and sightseers plenty, serving excellent meals and all heightened by band music. Cargo was stored on board these boats too. The packets were usually built 70 feet to 74 feet overall and 11½ feet wide. This barely allowed passage through the many locks which were constructed exactly 14 feet wide and 80 feet long, allowing for the swing of the gate into the recesses leaving 76 feet leeway.

The boats passed into the locks from a pond basin, at which points only, could they pass each other. There was a bumping post at the entrance of each lock, While the tedious wait of raising and lowering the water in the locks was progressing, and while cargo was being shipped, taverns and inns situated closeby, did a thriving business. Almost all the packets recorded capacity from 150-250 passengers, plus the service crew.

There was a huge tiller at the rear of the boat, which the Captain manipulated and ladies and gentlemen's cabins, fore and aft respectively. On top of these was the promenade deck, provided with benches, surrounded by a rail and ascended by stairs. As there were many low bridges to pass under during a trip to New Haven, passengers were constantly moving up and down these stairs to avoid being hit.

Two horses ridden by small boys and driven tandem, were used generally on the ten foot towing path, but on special occasions or with a heavily laden barge up to 5 horses were used. At various stops along the route a change of fresh horses was made. At times the patient oxen towed. Boat horns were used to call for opening the locks and for calling the passengers from the inns etc.. Many a loud blast from the horn caused the lockkeeper to leave his fields and rush to open the gates.

The ladies cabin forward was usually painted in bright colors, made of panelling, while more somber tones were used for the men's cabin. Hulls were painted crimson etc. with a wide white band at the water line. The superstructure which consisted of the combined cabins set on the main deck was another color. The cabin was low and narrow, with its small windows brightly curtained in calico. Some of the canalboats dispensed hard liquors at a bar in the rear of the boat. Both cabins were fitted with berths which were tipped up against the walls, in daytime, out of the way of tables and chairs set for serving meals, which like sleeping accommodations would be included in the cost of the ticket. Let down at night, the berths were to be furnished with blankets and linen, and surrounded by curtains for privacy. This meant simply curtains hung up in the middle of the boat, keeping men on one side and women on the other. Washrooms, with a tiny cubicle with toilet were provided with an ample supply of water. Excellent meals were served by colored waiters, each boat Captain striving to outdo his competitors.

The fare in 1835 from New Haven to Northampton was \$3.75, berths and meals included. In 1841 it is recorded that fare from Westfield to New Haven was \$2.25 and from Northampton to New Haven \$2.50. but it does not state whether berth and meals were included. It seems probable that they were.

Canal Traffic #3.

Boats handsomely fitted up were advertised. At evening paper Japanese lanterns were lighted, strung along the upper deck, imparting an air of festivity.

A few of the canalboats which made many trips back and forth along the waterway were the following; The New England, Washington, De Witt Clinton Oliver Wolcott, Weatogue, American Eagle, James Hillhouse, Generak Sheldon and Sachem.

The second type of canal boat was pure barge, with old scow limes. These carried heavy freight. They were also gaudily painted.

Barges carried products of the Northern towns to New Haven, chiefly woodshingles, cider, leather and hides, potatoes, butter and cheese, pork, wool in bales, tar turpentine, wheat flour, gypsum, merchandise, charcoal, hemp, lumber and agricultural products.

In Dec. 22, 1830 the amount of goods to and from Westfield for a period of 8 weeks totaled nearly 600 tons. Coming back from New Haven, the boats cargoes were of coal, which was hitherto unobtainable above tidewater, rum, carved rosewood parlor sets upholstered in horsehair, an occasional pianoforte, salt, oranges, codfish and dried and pickled fish, molasses, flour, pine lumber.

In a single month the canal carried 375 cords of wood, 1000 bushels of grain, $\frac{1}{2}$ ton of grindstones, 500 barrels of cider, 800 pounds of salt, over a 100,000 shingles, 47 hogsheads of molasses, 300 hides, 5 tons of plaster and 5 tons of coal. Rum also was an important item of cargo, tho due to unfavorable opinion, was not published.

Cargoes also included copper, oil vitriol, lemons, glassware, paper, limes, iron pot and pearlash, beef, coffee, cotton, sugar, alum, madder whole and linseed oil, white and red lead, rottenstone, pig and sheet lead, wrought and cut nails, rice rags, saltpetre, stoves, saleratus, domestic and imported spirits and brimstone, dry and wet goods.

Trade flourished with boats carrying both cargo and passengers for a few years, despite tremendous difficulties in keeping open the canal. In summing up the business for Sept. and Oct. in 1841, reports showed that 82 boats had been in Westfield during that period, including of course, those ending their trips there and those stopping en route North and South.

The following interesting excerpts are given- "Sept 2. The New Haven Chronicle says that the elegant canal packet boat, "New England" will, for the purpose of accomodating Commencement passengers, leave Farmington the Tues, before Commencement, which takes place on Wed. the 9th Inst."

April 21; "Canal Boat Gen. Sheldon, for New Haven with merchandise & to A. Whitney & Co, Geneva, N. Y. and passengers." Same day, "Boat Warranoco" ---deeply laden with freight and passengers."

April 26; "arrived, Boat Gen Sheldon, from New Haven, with passengers, also dry goods, groceries Iron etc. to merchants in this village."

May 19; "By an advertisement in to-days paper it will be seen that the Canal boat Gen. Sheldon will in future make 2 trips a week between this place and New Haven. The boat went down and returned twice last week, taking each time but little more than 24 hrs. in passing through the whole route. This arrangement combining speed with regularity, we have no doubt will secure to the proprietor a full supply of business. The Capt. of the Boat, Mr. Barton, is an experienced and judicious manager, attentive and accomodating to his passengers, and we believe in every respect is well calculated for the business in which he is engaged."

"The two companies which had undertaken the project of constructing the canal, the Farmington in Conn. and the Hampshire and Hampden in Mass., went bankrupt and their stockholders lost all they had invested.

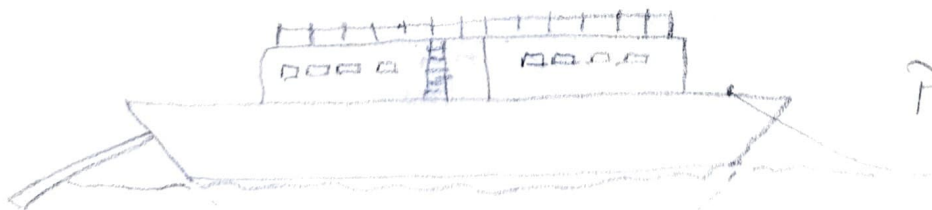
The early failure is generally remembered. What is too often forgotten is that, reorganized in 1835 as one company, the New Haven and Northampton, the canal for twelve succeeding seasons handled what for those days was a very heavy freight and passenger service; 625 trips were made in 1841 and 14,177 tons of freight were carried besides many passengers.; and its value in building up its territory, and particularly New Haven, was incalculable. Until the winter of 1847 -1848 the canal was in active operation, although extraordinary maintenance expenses ate up what otherwise would have gone into dividends." says Mr. Charles R. Harte, Conn Historian.

"In 1845, although business was excellent, the Directors realized that the railroad was the coming means of transportation, and secured an amendment to their charter, permitting construction and operation of a railroad intended to handle passenger and express business, the canal to carry the heavy freight.

The first section of the "Canal Road" was opened January 1, 1848 it was at once seen that the public wanted only railroad service and the canal was not again officially operated, although for some time, parts were used at their own risk by owners of canalboats." reports Mr. Harte. He points out the Canal had served well. An outstanding chapter in Early American transportation, it had made a great contribution to Conn.'s and Mass.' growth."

Respectively submitted,

Fraunce B. McMahon.



Packet



Barge