Hometown History: Teaching with Historic Markers

Industry, Agriculture, and Transportation in Brockport, NY

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The McCormick reaper was the first mechanized farm machinery to be manufactured and sold on a national scale. A handful of companies were given license to manufacture and distribute Cyrus McCormick's invention. Among those was Seymour, Morgan & Company, located on the Erie Canal in Brockport, New York. They employed over 200 people and produced over 100 of McCormick's reapers before designing and manufacturing their own reaper, a more modern improvement over the original McCormick reaper. This company and these farm implements allowed the Village of Brockport to share in a post-Civil War economic boom that was enjoyed by many regions of the country at the time and led to a growth and prosperity in the Village of Brockport.

Essential to the distribution of these machines was the proximity of the company's manufacturing facility to the Erie Canal. When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, it instantly became the fastest and cheapest way to ship goods between the eastern seaboard and the ever expanding western territories of the United States. In fact, the inception of Brockport owes its existence to the construction of the Erie Canal. The idea of creating a village on the site of modern-day Brockport was itself an extension of the plans to build a canal. Were there no plans to build the Erie Canal, plans to develop Brockport likely would not have come to fruition.

Crucial to the success of Brockport as an emerging community was village founder Hiel Brockway. Original canal plans called for construction of the waterway as far west as Rochester, which was to be the temporary western terminus of the canal until the necessary lock system at Lockport could be completed. Brockway lobbied hard to extend the temporary terminus to Brockport, thus making Brockport itself the western terminus for a full two years from 1823 until 1825 when the canal was fully completed. For those 2 years, anyone shipping via the Erie Canal could send their goods by water only as far west as Brockport. Simultaneously, products coming *from* western New York and Pennsylvania were brought to Brockport to be loaded onto packet boats for shipment east. If not for the vision and efforts of Hiel Brockway and the construction of the Erie Canal, the land that Brockport occupies today would likely have remained divided between the neighboring towns of Clarkson and Sweden.

II. ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson is based on the format used by the National Park Service's "Teaching With Historic Places" and Dr. Mary Corey's "Hometown Heroes: Teaching With Historic Markers" online lesson and used sources related to this topic including *Early Brockport* and *Images of America: Around Brockport* by William G. Andrews, *The Story of Brockport for 100 Years* by Charlotte Elizabeth Martin, *The Village of Brockport 1829-1879* by David George Hale, and *From the American System to Mass Production* by David A. Hounshell.

III. CONNECTING TO THE NYS CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The teaching materials in this lesson are aligned with the New York State Curriculum and Learning Standards for the Social Studies and the thematic strands of the National Council for the Social Studies. The lesson can be used to teach NYS Standard One: The History of the United States and New York to enrich units on local history, Internal Expansion: new roads, canals, and railroads, The Maturing of an Industrial Society in the Second Half of the 19th Century, and Changes in the methods of production and distribution of manufactured goods.
http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/ssls.html

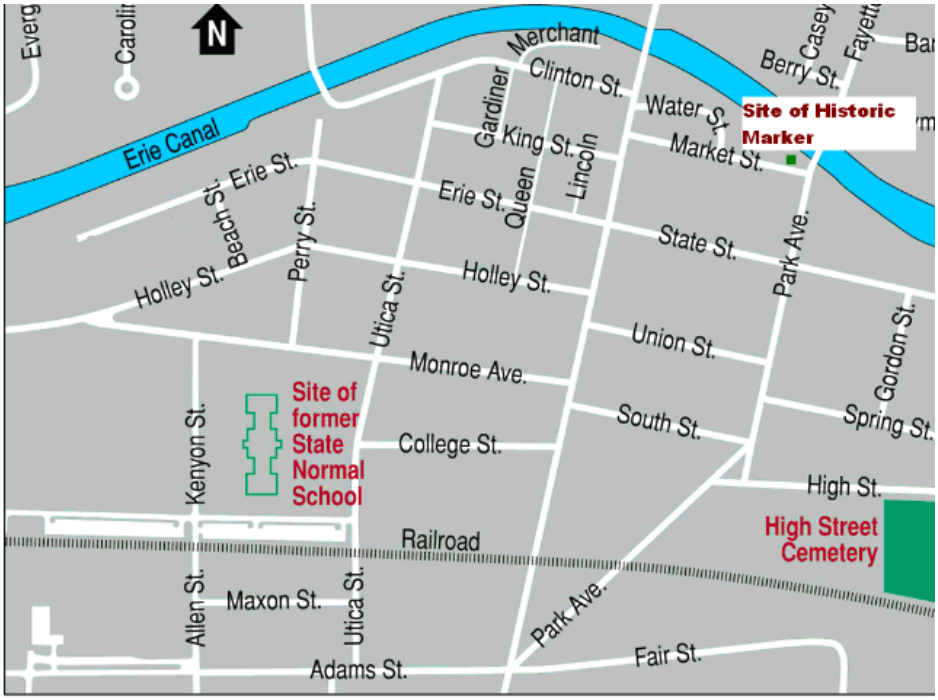
It also meets the National Council for the Social Studies Thematic Standards for Social Studies. Thematic standards include Standard 2, Time, Continuity and Change; Standard 3, People, Places and Environments and Standard 8, Science, Technology, and Society

IV. OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS (Students will be able to:)

- Describe the role that the Erie Canal played in the founding of the Village of Brockport
- Recount the history of Brockport's founders as the village was born
- Compare and contrast the economic viability of the canal in the 19th Century with that of its recreational viability today
- Explain the era of national and regional growth as related to the emergence of canals and railroads.
- Discover the role played by Brockport and Western New York in advancements in transportation, westward expansion, and industrialization.
- Evaluate the impact of the canal on Brockport and the region over time.

V. VISITING THE SITE

A marker commemorates the site where the Seymour and Morgan Company constructed McCormick reapers in 1846. It stands near the Erie Canal at the corners of Park Avenue and Market Street in the Harvester Park Brockport/Canal Front Welcome Center area.



Supplementary Readings: To learn more about Cyrus McCormick, the McCormick reaper, the Seymour and Morgan Company, and Brockport and its relationship with the Erie Canal teachers and students can refer to *The Story of Brockport for 100 Years* by Charlotte Martin, *The Village of Brockport Sesquicentennial 1829-1979* by David Hale, *Images of America: Around Brockport* and *Early Brockport* both by William G. Andrews and the Village of Brockport website.

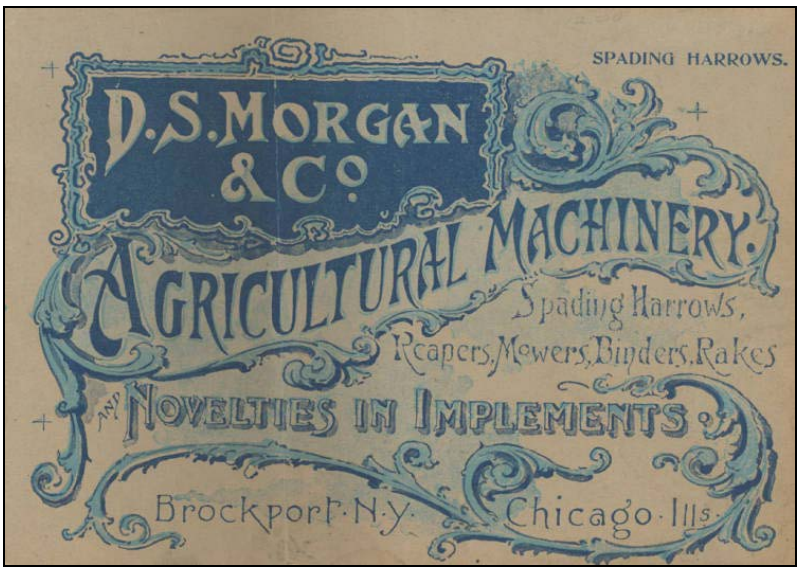
VI. SETTING THE STAGE

This lesson can be used to help students understand the relationships between modes of transportation and regional growth, agriculture and technology, and means of production and the entrepreneurial spirit. The birth and continued growth of Brockport were the direct result of the vision of Hiel Brockway and his vision of creating a community along this new, modern trade route. Cyrus McCormick's invention of his mechanical reaper vastly improved agricultural output in America. His subsequent contracting

to Brockport village's Seymour, Morgan & Company to produce these reapers locally and the company's location on the Erie Canal exemplifies the cooperation between agriculture, industry, modes of transportation, and the American entrepreneurial spirit.

The Erie Canal and Brockport, being the western terminus of the canal for a full two years, were at the heart of westward expansion to the Great Lakes region and to the incredibly fertile and productive farmland of the Midwest.

VII. FOR STUDENTS (Documents, Readings, and Activities)





Part 1. The Vision of Hiel Brockway and the Founding of Brockport

The importance that the construction of the original Erie Canal had on the development of Brockport cannot be understated. Upon learning of the canal's impending route based on the geology of the region, Hiel Brockway moved from Geneva, NY to Clarkson, NY in 1816 and in 1817 began buying up land that would later comprise much of what would become the Village of Brockport. In the spring of 1820, Brockway and business partner James Seymour successfully lobbied the canal commission to extend the temporary western terminus of the canal from its originally planned stopping point in Rochester to Brockport instead. As a result, for a full two years Brockport would serve as the dropping off point for Northeastern manufactured goods heading to markets in the Midwest and also the loading point for agricultural goods produced in western New York and Pennsylvania heading to eastern markets. Even after full completion of the Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo, Brockport's place as an important economic hub along the canal had been secured for decades to come.



Hiel Brockway

The canal reached the area in 1822 and was filled with water on October 10. Docks and toll and freight houses were built on its south side near Main Street, and Seymour, Baldwin, and Holley dug a basin for to the east where Seymour built a warehouse. The fact that for two years Brockport was the western terminus of the canal gave the new Village a tremendous boost.

Between 1823 and 1825 when the canal was finished to Buffalo, Hiel Brockway built two sections of the canal and a bridge. He established a "boat and brick yards" at the end of Utica Street and began building packet boats. He launched a fleet of them in 1828 and, in connection with his future son-in-law, Elias B. Holmes, commenced daily service to Buffalo. He established a terminal at the junction of the canal and the Niagara River. The boat-building and packet line venture proved immensely profitable, and Brockway's influence on the western reaches of the canal is said to have been substantial, setting high standards for both packet boats and service.

By common consent, for the citizen who unquestionably overshadowed all others in means, property, enterprise and public spirit, the new village was named first "Brockway," then "Brockwayport," and finally "Brockport." The Village of Brockport was incorporated April 6, 1829.

A Rochester newspaper took editorial notice on September 1 of that year:

"Considerable improvement has been made this summer in this neat and flourishing village, in the way of sidewalks, &c. The general health of the place, too, is stated, in the paper printed there, to be better, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, than ever before known…"

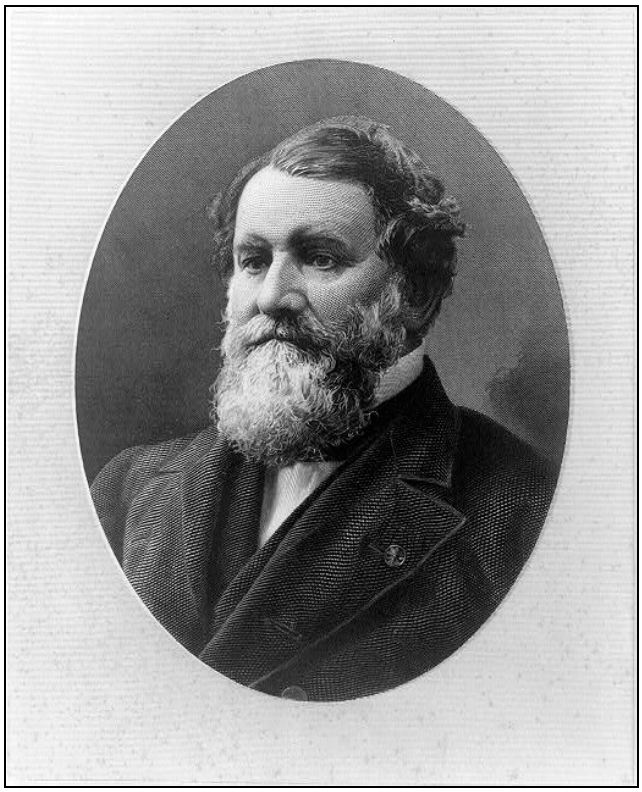
1. List specific things Brockport founder, Hiel Brockway, did to take economic advantage of the Erie Canal's location.

2. Which enterprise does the excerpt describe as being "immensely profitable" for Hiel Brockway?

3. Does the reading passage above paint a favorable or unfavorable impression of Hiel Brockway? Cite specific information to support your answer.

Part 2. Cyrus McCormick and the McCormick Mechanical Reaper

"One step at a time, the hardest one first" - Cyrus McCormick



Cyrus McCormick patented the first successful horse-drawn grain reaper. Once harvest time arrived, the mechanical reaper allowed one man to do the work of five hired hands. The reaper was packed in parts and shipped to the farmer along with a handbook of directions for assembling and operating. Combined with the newly invented steel plow, farmers could now shift from subsistence farming to growing such cash crops as wheat and corn. This also encouraged northerners and southerners to seek out farmland in the west. In 1847 McCormick began to mass produce his reaper but a mass market for it didn't fully develop until the late 1800's with the migration of farmers to the Great Plains.





1. In what way did McCormick's mechanical reaper help to create a shift in the type of farming that was performed in America?

2. Make connections: How did the McCormick reaper, combined with other advances in farming technology, contribute to the expansion of farming in the western states and territories?

View the video that can be accessed at the link or address below and use the information to answer the following questions
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-KB7TjdSqk

3. Was Cyrus McCormick satisfied after his first invention that he'd created a finished product that would need no improvements? Explain

4. Explain the transition that McCormick made from inventor to businessman

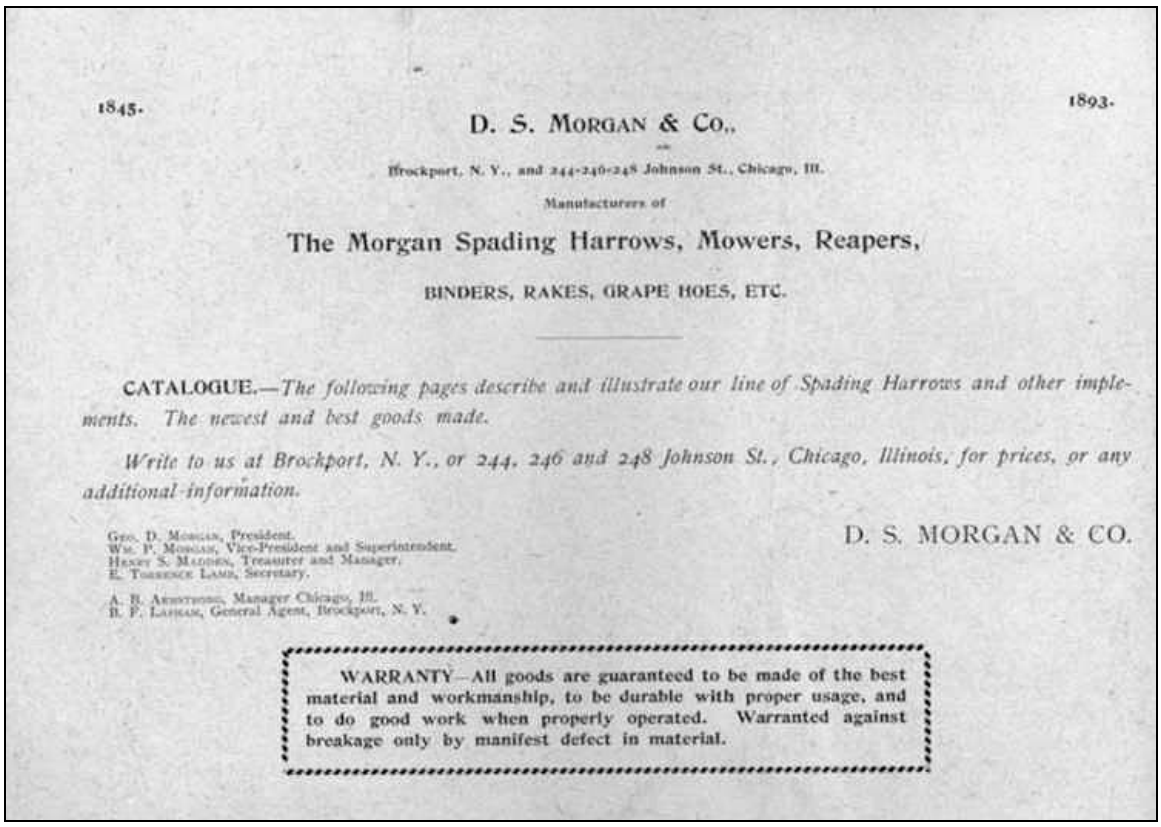
5. In what ways did McCormick's business savvy help him to sell more reapers?

Part 3. Seymour, Morgan & Company and its Place in History

The Seymour, Morgan & Company began as a foundry for the manufacture of stoves and other castings in 1843. It must certainly have been unknown to business partners William Seymour, Dayton Morgan, and Thomas Roby that their company would evolve to play a part on the national stage and one that that would have international implications. Shortly after the foundry began, Seymour set his sights on the possibility of manufacturing mechanical reapers. As fate would have it, the son-in-law of Hiel Brockway, Congressman Elias B. Holmes, invited Cyrus McCormick to Brockport in 1845. McCormick had produced and sold but a small number of his newly patented mechanical reapers and was looking for a company to manufacture his invention on a larger scale. He was informed that the Backus, Fitch & Company of Brockport might be a likely candidate to meet this need. McCormick visited Brockport and brought his reaper with him. However, the partnership between Mr. Backus and Mr. McCormick was short lived as Backus, Fitch & Company were only able to produce a few of McCormick's reapers.

McCormick had to look no further than across the village to the Seymour, Morgan & Company to find a company that was able to meet his needs and a deal was struck for the company to produce 100 mechanical reapers in time for the harvest season of 1846. The following year, 200 machines were made but the business marriage between the Seymour, Morgan & Company and the McCormick mechanical reaper would prove to be brief. Differing business interests and disagreements caused the two entities to part ways but not before planting a seed that would make local history. McCormick would go on to move production operations to Chicago but history ought not forget that it was the Seymour, Morgan & Company and the little Village of Brockport, NY that served as McCormick's launch pad for the large scale manufacture

of his invention, an invention that would propel him to international fame and fortune. Simultaneously, Seymour, Morgan, & Company would go on to design their own mechanical reaper, the "New Yorker", and in the process of manufacturing 500 reapers of their own design, the company became the first regular manufacturer of reapers in the country while placing its stamp of historical notability on the Village of Brockport.



1845. 1893.

D. S. MORGAN & Co.,

Brockport, N. Y., and 244-246-248 Johnson St., Chicago, Ill.

Manufacturers of

The Morgan Spading Harrows, Mowers, Reapers,

BINDERS, RAKES, GRAPE HOES, ETC.

CATALOGUE.—*The following pages describe and illustrate our line of Spading Harrows and other implements. The newest and best goods made.*

Write to us at Brockport, N. Y., or 244, 246 and 248 Johnson St., Chicago, Illinois, for prices, or any additional information.

Geo. D. Morgan, President.
Wm. P. Morgan, Vice-President and Superintendent.
Henry S. Maddox, Treasurer and Manager.
E. Torrence Lamb, Secretary.

A. B. Armstrong, Manager Chicago, Ill.
B. F. Latham, General Agent, Brockport, N. Y.

D. S. MORGAN & CO.

WARRANTY—All goods are guaranteed to be made of the best material and workmanship, to be durable with proper usage, and to do good work when properly operated. Warranted against breakage only by manifest defect in material.

1. At the time that this catalog for D.S. Morgan & Co. farm implements was produced, for how many years had this company been in business?

2. In what location, outside of Brockport, did D.S. Morgan and Co. also have facilities?

3. What evidence from the document illustrates that D.S. Morgan and Co. engaged in good business practices?

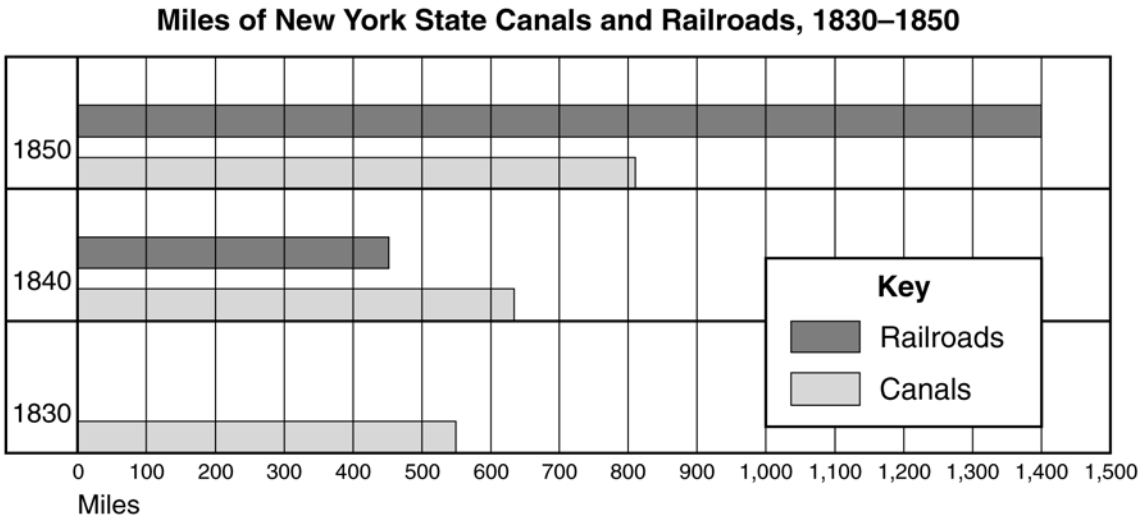
4. Why might it have made sense for McCormick to move his manufacturing to the specific location of Chicago?



Part 4. The Canal Gives Way to the Railroads

At the turn of the 19th century, there was still no cheaper or more efficient way of transporting goods or people than by water. The original New York State Erie Canal, completed in 1825 and spanning 363 miles, created a water route between New York City and Buffalo allowing farm products from the Great Lakes region to flow east, and people and manufactured goods from the East to flow west. The canal was the single largest factor in allowing for: a) New York City to become the nation's largest city, b) the rapid opening of the Great Lakes region for settlement and farming, and c) the birth and growth of the Village of Brockport itself. However, the invention of the steam locomotive in 1803, the birth of the railroad industry, and rapid improvements within that industry would lead to a decline in the construction and economic viability of canals including the New York State Erie Canal.

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1. Based on the graph and the reading passage above it, approximately how many miles of canals in New York State were NOT a part of the Erie Canal in 1830?

2. Based on the answer to number 1, what ***percent*** of miles of canal in New York were a part of the Erie Canal?

3. If the trend that can be seen in the growth of railroads in the graph above were to continue for another decade, what would the total number of miles of railroads in New York State be in the year 1860?

Critical Thinking: In terms of construction and operation, what advantages might railroads have over canals?

Part 5: The Canal Today: A Transformation

Beginning around 1980, the amount of cargo being transported on the canal dipped down below 1 million tons and by 1994 had dipped down to below 100,000 tons. Today, the amount of cargo being shipped via the Erie Canal system is "negligible". However, the Erie Canal continues to be a unique fixture in most all of the communities it passes through. It has undergone a transformation from an economic waterway to a recreational waterway. Its resurgence can be seen in cities, towns, and villages along the canal from Albany to Buffalo and few examples can be found that highlight the contemporary use of the canal as well as the Village of Brockport. The

village's charm is centered on the canal and its old style lift bridges and lift master at the helm, ready to raise the bridge for passing boats.

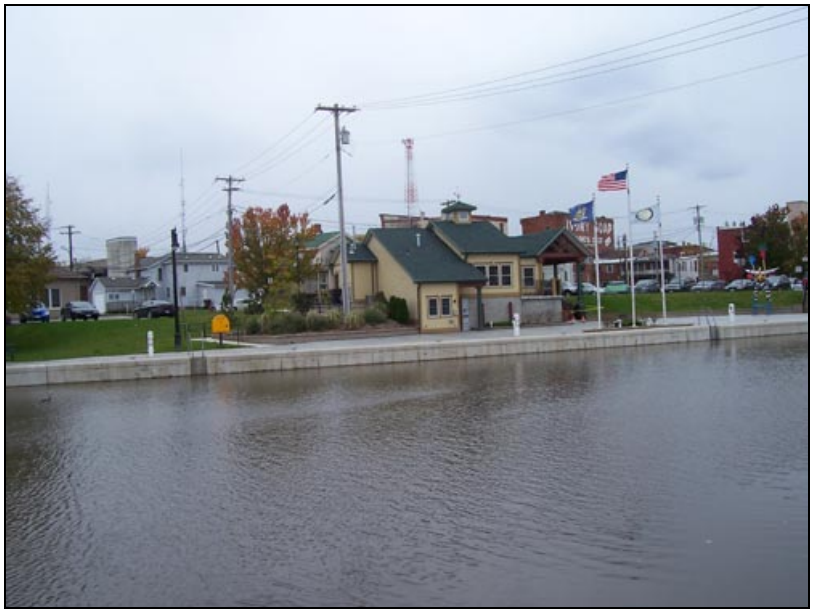


In fact, many communities like Brockport have made the canal a central feature of tourism and recreation. Boating of all varieties, fishing, biking, and hiking make up some of the activities enjoyed in the waters and on the banks of the canal. Harvester Park, once the site of the Seymour, Morgan & Company foundry, is today home to a welcome center for traveling boaters. On any given summer day, a line of visiting boaters can be seen tied to the moorings and enjoying the many free amenities offered by the Welcome Center at the park as seen in the photo below.



Part 6: Parting Thought

The vision of a village founder, a marriage of industry and ingenuity, and the trials and tribulations of an ever expanding and changing nation bring us to this very moment in time. The past explains our present and these are but a few brief chapters in the storied history of this beautiful and beloved western New York village. What is your vision for Brockport's future?



Harvester Park Welcome Center with downtown Brockport in background