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Student Reading 13.4: There's a Better Way!

Ohio has many **natural resources** such water, fertile soil, and trees. When Ohio became a state in 1803, Ohioans did not have many ways to sell these natural resources, since the state was so far to the west of other settlements at the time. Ohioans knew that selling their resources, other than to markets in their own little towns, would improve the new state's **economy**. Ohio waterways were not exactly easy to navigate at this point in history, but they could be used to build a **canal** system that would help jumpstart Ohio's economy.

Life Before Canals

Before the Ohio canal systems were built, sending **goods** out of the state took a lot of time and was very expensive! Roads that led to different markets in the east, such as New York, were very rough or did not exist at all. Farmers would have to ride on horseback to the East to sell their goods, which was a long trip. Railroads did not exist yet either, and many Ohio waterways were impossible to navigate. Before the canals were built, Ohioans had to ship their goods downriver



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(down the Ohio River to the Mississippi River) to boomtowns like New Orleans.

From New Orleans, goods were then shipped up the east coast to states like New York. In search of an easier way to do this, Ohioans began to build canals.

Life After Canals

In 1825, the Erie Canal was opened in New York. The canal connected Lake



Erie and the Hudson River.

After the Erie Canal was completed, Ohioans could then ship their products through the Great Lakes and down the Hudson River to New York City on a boat. As a result, water traffic increased going up the canal and through the Great Lakes up to New York.

(This map shows the route of Ohio's statewide canal system from 1825 to 1913. Courtesy of Ohio Memory.)



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Before the Erie Canal was built, companies in New York bought an average of 1,000 bushels of wheat from Cleveland. After the canals were built, New York began purchasing 250,000 wheat bushels every year! Farmers were also able to sell their crops for more money because they were now in higher demand.

The Erie Canal also greatly increased the amount of products Ohioans brought into Ohio from other places. Ohioans found it easier to get products from the east, such as nails, glass, tea, and coffee. Before this, these items were very



(This photograph shows Rupp's Cana Store on the Miami and Erie Canal in Waterville, Ohio in the 1880s. Courtesy of Ohio Pix.)

rare in Ohio. Because more products were available in Ohio, more people wanted to live there. This ability to move goods easier also helped to launch Ohio's steel



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industry, which was Ohio's main moneymaker for years to come.

More Ohio Canals

Only two weeks after the opening of the Erie Canal in New York, Ohioans began to dig Ohio's canal system. The first Ohio canal was the Ohio and Erie Canal. This

canal was 308 miles

long from Lake Erie

to Portsmouth on

the Ohio River. Later,

the Miami and Erie

Canal was built. The

1,000 miles of canals

in Ohio touched

nearly all of Ohio citizens. This created jobs, increased interest in living in Ohio,

and provided Ohio with many resources that were rare in the past. These canals

also increased the ability to get to Great Lakes and allowed Ohio to become a lead



(Reproduction of a photograph depicting a view of the Ohio & Erie Canal in Chillicothe, Ohio. Courtesy of Ohio Pix.)



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player in Great Lakes shipping. Lake Erie, which was an outlet for many rivers, became the very thing that helped many Ohio cities such as Toledo and Cleveland grow. The many river outlets into the Great Lakes increased traffic in and out of the state of Ohio.

Ohio's Boom

During the 1800s, Ohio quickly became an **agricultural** and **industrial** leader within the United States because of the canal systems. **Industry** increased all



along the Ohio and Great Lakes canal system, especially at lock points (where someone has to raise and lower the water level for the boats). Because lock points were a good source of waterpower, sawmills sprang up everywhere. Lock points also caused boat traffic jams!

(This is a photograph of a lock on the Ohio-Erie Canal in Tuscarawa County, Ohio. Courtesy of Ohio Pix.)



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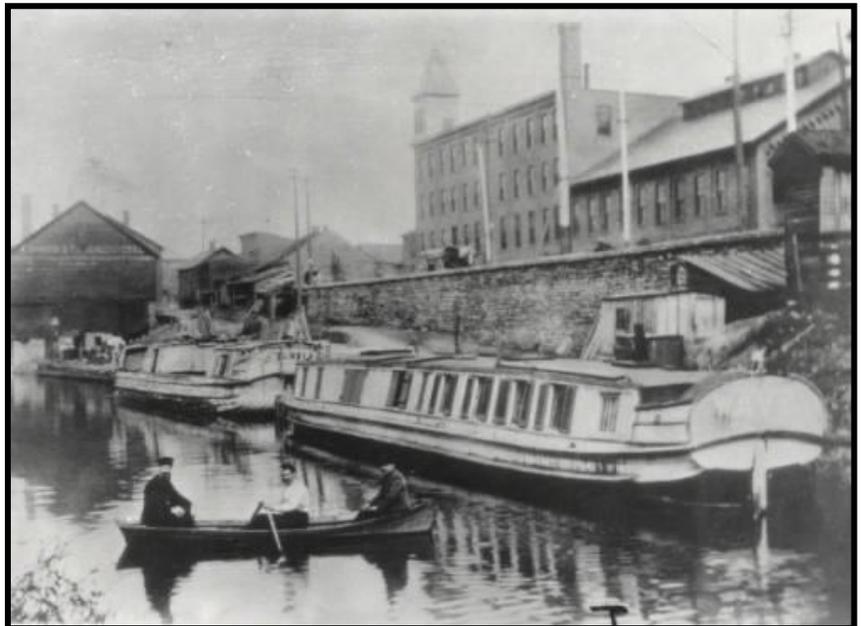
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Instead of people waiting around for boats to pass one another, they went for a stroll in town to buy things they needed or food. The building of the canals also created jobs that attracted people from other countries. Ideas that people had from other countries began to spread in Ohio.

Legacy of the Canal System

Ohio's connection to the Great Lakes was and is very important for the movement of goods. The building of the canals helped move Ohio products across the country easier. The canal system also helped Ohio bring goods from other states and countries.

Although the Erie Canal no longer operates today, other waterways, such as the St. Lawrence Seaway Canal are giving the



(Boats on the Ohio Erie Canal at Groveport, Ohio. Courtesy of Ohio Pix.)



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Great Lakes region the ability to connect to other continents! A new ship called *The Fortunagracht* is being used to increase trade between Europe and the Great Lakes region of the world. The ship is expected to do regular cargo runs between Cleveland and Europe, and will take four to five days off of shipping travel time. Even today, shipping goods on the water continues to be a good idea.



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Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What kind of natural resources are prevalent in Ohio?

2. What kind of products were Ohioans able to get from the East after the canals were built?

3. What is a lock point?
