

James Mark Camposeo, "The History of the Canal System between New Haven and Northampton (1822-1847)" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 6, No 1 (Fall 1977).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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The History of the Canal System Between New Haven and Northampton [1822 — 1847]

by James Mark Camposeo

In the early 1820's, enthusiasm for canal promotion and construction swept the United States like an epidemic — canal fever. As late as 1816 there were "less than one hundred miles of artificial waterways in the entire country, and the longest canal extended only 28 miles."¹ The state of New York took the lead when, in 1817, its legislature voted to begin construction of the Erie Canal. The first section of the Erie was opened "to traffic in 1820 and proved to be a great success."² The heavy volume of business seemed to indicate that canals were the wave of the future, benefiting stockholders and citizens alike.

In 1822 canal fever struck New Haven, Connecticut. Local businessmen felt that a canal to the interior of western New England would increase the commerce and the importance of New Haven, while decreasing the role of Hartford, its leading rival. Hartford depended on the Connecticut River as its economic lifeline, and transportation by boat was dangerous especially at the Hadley Falls and the Enfield Rapids.

On January 29, 1822 citizens from seventeen towns met in Farmington, Connecticut to discuss the proposal to build a canal from New Haven. A committee was appointed to raise \$1,000 for a survey that would determine whether it was possible to complete such a project. The committee hired Benjamin Wright, chief engineer of the Erie Canal, and the leading American engineer of the time. Wright conducted a preliminary survey from New Haven to Southwick.⁴ In May of 1822, he reported his findings: "The terrain is favorably formed for a great work of this kind and that a canal may be formed for considerable less average expense per mile, than the cost of canals now in the making in the state of New York."⁵

Relying largely on Wright's report, the committee decided to recommend construction of the canal. On April 22, 1822 the group from Farmington presented to the Connecticut General Assembly a petition to charter the Farmington Canal Company, which would build a canal from New Haven to the northern border of the state, at Southwick. The petition insisted that the canal was "for the good of the state," and that it would remain "a lasting monument of her wisdom and enterprise."⁶



BENJAMIN WRIGHT

All illustrations in this article are from Harte,
Some Engineering Features of the Old Northampton Canal (1933).

The Connecticut Legislature granted the charter and placed the Farmington Canal Company under the control of a commission of six members — Simeon Baldwin, George Cowles, James Mills, Roger Mills, William Mosely, and John Pettibon.⁷ These commissioners were sworn in as state officers, but were to be paid by the Farmington Canal Company. With the assistance of engineers and surveyors, they were to determine the exact route of the canal. The commissioners were also authorized to sell stock.⁸

On July 8, 1822 the Farmington Canal Commissioners met to decide on the canal's route. They decided:

The canal line is to run from the tide waters of the harbor of New Haven to Southwick, passing on its way Cheshire, Southington, Farmington, Canton and Granby. There is to be a side branch along the Farmington River to New Hartford.⁹

Before construction could start, however, the canal had to have access to the developing towns of Western Massachusetts. Otherwise the canal would not be able to compete with the Connecticut River and would have no chance of economic success. The Farmington Canal Commissioners had to convince the businessmen in those towns to complete the canal to Northampton.

Interest was aroused on August 15, 1822, when members of the commission came north to gain support for a canal to connect with the Farmington Canal. A meeting was held at Joy's Inn, Southampton.¹⁰ Representatives of Easthampton, Northampton, Southampton, South Hadley and Westfield were in attendance. The Farmington Canal Commissioners spoke in favor of extending "the canal from Southwick to the bend in the Connecticut River at Northampton."¹¹ After some discussion it was decided to determine whether it would be feasible, and if so to apply for a charter from the Massachusetts Legislature. A committee was authorized to raise funds for a survey and to evaluate the results.

Holmes Hutchinson and Henry Wright (son of Benjamin Wright), civil engineers, with experience on the Erie Canal, were commissioned to make a survey.¹² On November 6, 1822 Hutchinson and Wright reported,

No physical impracticability exists in the route to prevent the construction of the canal. The canal should be 24 feet wide at the bottom and 36 feet wide at the top, 4 feet deep, and will extend about 30 miles. The estimated cost stands at \$292,265.¹³

After reviewing the favorable report, the committee decided to petition for the incorporation of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company.¹⁴ On February 4, 1823 the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company received a charter and was "authorized to construct and operate a canal from the northern boundary line of Connecticut to the Great Bend in the Connecticut River in Northampton."¹⁵

Now that it seemed certain that a canal in Western Massachusetts would be constructed, work could begin on the Farmington Canal. The commissioners opened the subscription books for the Farmington Canal on July 15, 1823. The demand for subscriptions to the stock were so heavy that on July 31, the first stockholders meeting was held. A board of 21 was chosen and they in turn elected Joel Root of New Haven, President.¹⁶ With the future looking bright, the directors of the Farmington Canal retained Benjamin Wright to make a much more detailed survey of the route and to estimate the cost of construction.¹⁷

On August 21, the survey began on the Connecticut section of the canal line. The field work was done under the direction of Benjamin Wright's son,

No. 117 2 Assessment on one Share.
 Received, Northampton, Aug 10 1827, of Charles Smith
For Dollars, in full for the per cent
 assessment of 10 per cent. on one
 Share standing in his name on the subscription book of the
HAMPSHIRE AND HAMPDEN CANAL STOCK,
 falling due July 10 — 1827.
 Per Augustus Collins for
AUGUSTUS COLLINS, TREASURER
 of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company.

\$10.00

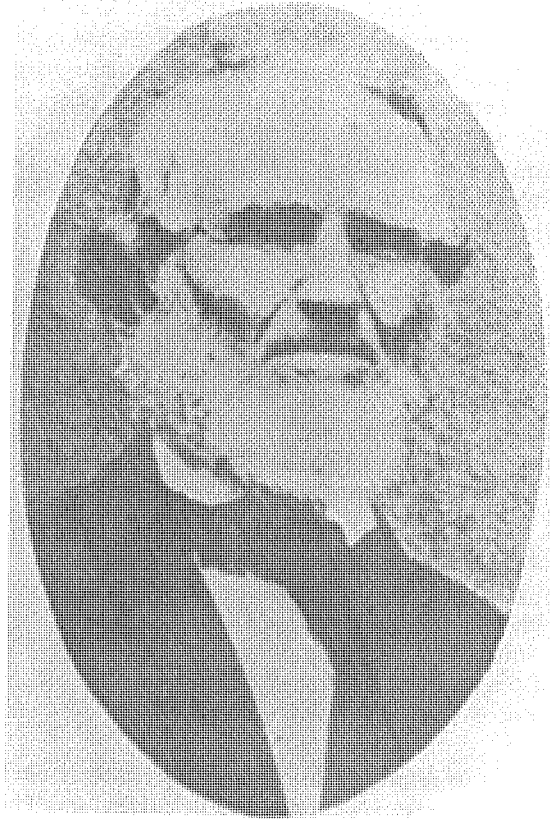
RECEIPT FOR SHARE ASSESSMENT, HAMPDEN AND HAMPSHIRE CANAL

Henry. Based on his son's report, Wright figured that the cost of construction of the 58 mile canal line from New Haven to Southwick would be \$480,698.88. The figure did not include land damages and "\$101,773.17 for the 16½ miles of the sidecut from the main line to New Hartford."¹⁸

At the stockholders meeting on January 7, 1824, Benjamin Wright pointed out that "the average cost per mile of constructing the canal is \$13,321 compared to the average cost per mile in the state of New York of \$17,368."¹⁹ After hearing the report, the directors voted to have work started on the canal as soon as possible. Davis Hurd was appointed as chief engineer and his brother, Jarvis, was his assistant. Both men had worked on the Erie Canal under Benjamin Wright.²⁰

Although the sale of stock was brisk at first, after a short period of time the demand began to decline. In fact, the lack of money forced the directors to ask for help from the Connecticut Legislature. To encourage the project, the legislature offered to make the canal stock "tax free until the Farmington Company could earn over six per cent profit."²¹ However, this did not increase the sale of stock.

The most successful methods of obtaining funds were holding a lottery or incorporating a bank.²² The directors of the Farmington Canal Company decided on the latter. In May of 1824, they applied to the Connecticut Legislature, and that same month the Farmington Canal Company secured a charter for the "Mechanics Bank, with a capital of \$500,000, of which \$100,000 to be subscribed to the stock of the Farmington Canal Company."²³ Even with



DAVIS HURD

the bank charter, funding was still inadequate. At a stockholders meeting on April 22, 1825 it was voted to start construction and the "Mechanics Bank was asked for an additional \$60,000 of subscription."²⁴

On April 27, 1825, the Farmington Canal Commissioners held a meeting in Westfield to reassure their Western Massachusetts counterparts that progress was forthcoming on the Connecticut canal. Commissioner Baldwin officially announced that stock had been subscribed for their canal and that "there is no doubt now a canal will be speedily made from New Haven to Southwick, thus insuring the completion of the line to Northampton."²⁵ The Hampshire and Hampden Canal stockholders then decided to raise funds for a final survey.

The most remarkable event of the meeting was the discussion of an ambitious plan to extend the Hampshire and Hampden Canal to Barnet, Vermont. From there it was to continue north to Lake Memphremagog, "through which a connection was to be made with the St. Lawrence

River.”²⁶ It symbolized a grand project which would connect the interior of Western New England from Long Island Sound to Canada. The Connecticut Legislature authorized the Farmington Canal Commission to meet a Federal engineer at Barnet, Vermont on May 10, 1825, and “to cooperate in a survey from Barnet to Lake Memphremagog in the interest of building a section of the canal from Northampton to Canada.”²⁷ While the Connecticut Commissioners were conducting this survey, the Massachusetts Legislature voted \$600 towards the cost of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company’s final survey.²⁸

On May 6, 1825, Chief Engineer Davis Hurd called for the payment of the first installment on the Farmington Canal stock. With the consent of the Farmington Canal Commissioners and stockholders, construction began in Southwick on July 4, 1825. A large celebration was held for the ground breaking. Captain Jonathan Rowland mounted a boat on wheels and drove it from New Haven to Southwick and on its sides were the words: “New Haven to Memphremagog, the Farmington Canal.”²⁹ The first shovel was wielded by Governor Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut, but on his first attempt to break ground the spade broke.³⁰

The second installment on the Farmington Canal stock was called for on August 22, 1825. Subscribers had little difficulty in making the first payment of \$2.00 in May, but the second installment of \$10.00 called for in less than four months was too much for many stockholders.³¹

There were to be eight installments, and the last seven were each to be \$10.00. These installments were necessary for work to be carried on. The failure to get these funds unquestionably led to skimping by the contractors. This helps to explain why the canal was always in need of repairs.

In Massachusetts, the Directors of The Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company hired Jarvis Hurd to conduct a final survey for their canal line. Hurd and the survey were paid from the \$600 appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature.³²

The businessmen of Hartford had by this time begun to worry about the building of the canal line from New Haven. To keep New Haven from gaining the upper hand in commerce, the “Riverites of Hartford,”³³ as they were called, began an attempt to improve transportation on the Connecticut River. In November of 1825, George Beach and other Riverites petitioned the Massachusetts Legislature “for an act to render improvements of navigation on the Connecticut River.”³⁴

Supporters of the canal became very disturbed over this petition, and a town meeting on the matter was held in Northampton. Those in attendance voted that “The Petition of George Beach and others is ill timed and insidious.

gotten up by enemies of the Farmington, and Hampshire and Hampden Canal. The people of this meeting find it necessary to remonstrate against it.”³⁵ Then they urged the Massachusetts Legislature to vote against Beach’s petition. On January 14, 1826 the Massachusetts House of Representatives decided to submit Beach’s petition to the committee of Roads and Canals for further study.³⁶

By the end of January of 1826, “44 miles of the 58 miles of the Farmington Canal had been contracted.”³⁷ Hoping to get construction started in Massachusetts the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company began to accept subscriptions for the canal stock on March 22, 1826. There were 2900 shares at \$100 each and in accordance with its charter one thousand shares had to be sold before construction could begin.³⁸

Due to the winter, Jarvis Hurd was not able to complete the survey, but with the arrival of spring in 1826 he resumed work. In early April, Hurd finished his survey and on April 19, he reported his findings to the Directors of the Hampshire Canal Company. He concluded that the canal from Southwick to the Great Bend of the Connecticut River at Northampton, would be 29 1/3 miles long divided into 56 sections. The cost of construction would be \$267,566.³⁹

By early September, the required one thousand shares of stock had been subscribed and on September 15, the stockholders officially organized the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company. Eight Directors were elected, who in turn picked Samuel Hinckley as President and appointed Davis Hurd as Chief Engineer.⁴⁰ On September 30 the directors awarded only two contracts for the construction of the canal, compared to the numerous small ones in Connecticut. Thomas Shepard of Northampton was contracted for the section from “the north side of Westfield River to the Great Bend at the Connecticut River in Northampton.”⁴¹ The contract called for Shepard to be paid \$51,030.48 and 269 shares of canal stock, making the entire contract worth \$77,930.48.⁴² Thomas Sheldon and Jarvis Hurd had formed a partnership for the purpose of getting the second contract, from the south side of the Westfield River to Southwick.⁴³ Sheldon and Hurd were to receive \$138,964.52 and 731 shares of canal stock or a total of \$212,064.52.⁴⁴ On November 1, 1826 work was begun by Sheldon and Hurd on their section. Then on the 27th Shepard started in Northampton.⁴⁵

With work underway on the Farmington and on the Hampshire and Hampden, interest focussed once again on the proposal to construct a canal from Northampton through Vermont to Canada. James Hillhouse and Thomas Sheldon were appointed by the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company to urge the Massachusetts Legislature to approve the project. On January 10, 1827 a meeting was held in Greenfield to consider the extension of the canal into Vermont. It was decided that the canal should be continued and to petition the Massachusetts Legislature for a charter. The meeting also resolved that

“Improving the navigation of the Connecticut River by dams and short canals is not in the best interests of the community.”⁴⁶ Jarvis Hurd was hired to survey the proposed canal route and to estimate the cost of construction. Hurd reported that the canal from the Great Bend of the Connecticut River at Northampton to Barnet, Vermont would be 48 miles long and that construction would cost \$472,041.04.⁴⁷

On February 21, 1827 Beach’s petition for improving navigation on the Connecticut River and the petition for extending the Hampshire and Hampden Canal to Vermont appeared before the Canal and River Committee of the Massachusetts Legislature. There was a great deal of debate over which project would be more beneficial. The members of the Canal and River Committee decided that the improvement of navigation on the Connecticut River was more important as “it is needless to extend the canal to Vermont, for the Hampshire and Hampden Canal enters the Connecticut River at Northampton and trading arriving there can take the Connecticut River north.”⁴⁸

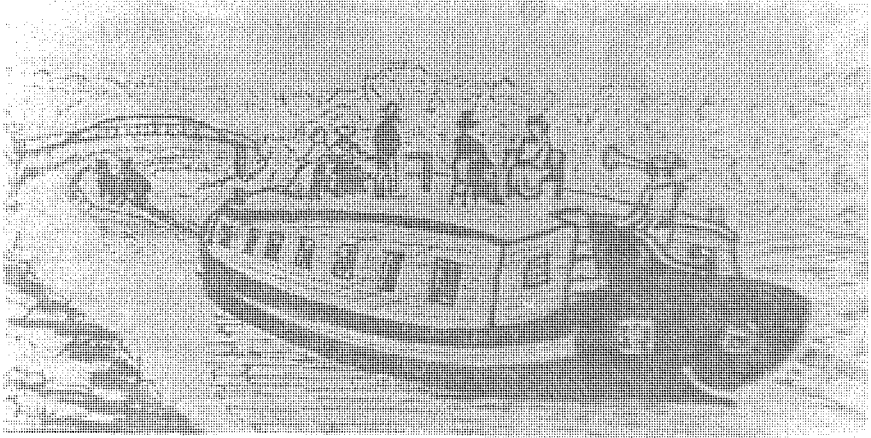
In April of 1827, Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York, who had played a major role in the promotion of the Erie Canal, visited the Farmington Canal, and the Hampshire and Hampden Canal, and the proposed extension into Vermont. After completing his tour, Clinton wrote to the Massachusetts Legislature on the extension of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal. First, he indicated that he “did not touch upon the comparative advantages of improved river or canal navigation,”⁴⁹ but confined himself to the practicability of constructing a canal from the termination of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal in Northampton to Barnet, Vermont. “The route presents no insurmountable difficulties,”⁵⁰ Clinton said. “As to the result of such a canal it may be contemplated in a double view; first as to public benefit and secondly as to profits of the proprietors.”⁵¹

On May 14, 1827, by a vote of 61 to 31, the House of Representatives decided against extending the Hampshire and Hampden Canal. This was a great blow to both canal companies; the Riverites had won the battle.⁵²

By July of 1827 the Farmington Canal had been completed from Southwick to Simsbury. After that construction began to slow down as funds were running out; the Farmington Canal Company had drawn its last \$40,000 from the Mechanics Bank and the last installments on the stock had been called. But work continued.

It had been expected that the entire Farmington Canal would be opened in July of 1828. On July 4, the section from New Haven to Southwick was officially opened.⁵³ Three canal boats starting from New Haven were expected to make their way to Southwick, but a break in the canal at Southington prevented them from reaching their destination.⁵⁴ Just as the repair work was being finished on

the Southington break, a storm caused damage all along the newly-opened line. Finally in November a successful trip of the entire canal was made by Captain James Dickinson, in charge of the canal boat "Enterprise." Dickinson left New Haven on Friday the 10th and arrived in Southwick at noon on Sunday.⁵⁵



CANAL BOAT

from the illustration collection of the Springfield City Library.

With the entire line in operation, canal transportation was becoming a reality in Western New England. But the Farmington Canal Company suffered a serious blow with the resignation of Commissioner Simeon Baldwin. Baldwin had been Chairman of the commission from its creation, and it was said that "Had he been the sole owner of the canal, he could not have served the project better."⁵⁶ Baldwin was responsible for solving many of the problems faced by the Farmington Canal Company in its early years.

Financially, both canal companies were in bad shape. Apparently, in the concern over whether there would be enough water, everyone overlooked the serious effects of the possibility of too much. The canal banks were frequently washed away in heavy rains, causing a great amount of damage. In the hope of putting the Farmington Canal on a better financial basis, on January 14, 1829, the citizens of New Haven authorized the mayor "to borrow the sum of \$100,000 on the credit of the city, to be appropriated for the putting of the Farmington Canal in perfect condition for public use."

In 1829 both Hurds took leave of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal project. On April 3, the firm of Sheldon and Hurd petitioned the Directors of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company "to permit Jarvis Hurd to withdraw and for Sheldon to assume the entire contract."⁵⁸ The request was granted, and on November 19th Davis Hurd resigned as Chief Engineer and William Butler was appointed to replace him.⁵⁹

The summer of 1829 was unusually dry, forcing the directors to close the Farmington Canal "when the depth of the water is less than two feet."⁶⁰ By August 18, conditions were so bad that the limit was reduced to 18 inches. On the 29th conditions had improved enough to restore the two foot limit. There was more trouble during the summer. At the Congamond Ponds a floating bridge 700 feet long was the tow path for the Farmington Canal. The bridge came adrift, causing a great deal of trouble.⁶¹ In spite of these misfortunes, 1829 was a fairly good year, for the canal did not freeze until mid-December, "largely offsetting the losses of the dry summer."⁶²

By 1830 the Farmington had become an essential factor in the business activities of the region. Businesses were advertising that they had canal navigation, or how near they were to it. In 1830 the Farmington Canal handled freight "which if carried by a railroad, would have yielded an average revenue of at least \$75,000."⁶³

Construction costs on the Hampshire and Hampden Canal were near the estimate, "but \$130,000 still had to be raised for completion."⁶⁴ The Farmington Canal costs had run much higher than expected. The original estimate was \$420,698.88, but "more than \$770,000 was spent on the line, much of the money was used for repair costs."⁶⁵ In an effort to get \$25,000 for the Farmington and the \$130,000 needed to finish the Hampshire and Hampden, James Hillhouse appealed to the Federal Government for a grant of \$155,000. Hillhouse had been successful in securing such legislative action in the past, but now, for the first time, his plans were blocked. A bill to finance "the completion of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal failed to pass."⁶⁶ Failure to secure money from the Federal Government brought work almost to a stand-still on the Hampshire and Hampden Canal. Most of the Company's funds were exhausted.

In spite of the heavy expenditure on the Farmington Canal, the Directors were optimistic about the future. Subscription books for the stock of the New Haven side branch was opened January 23, 1831. However, by July funds were getting scarce again and a committee was formed to give further consideration to whether or not to proceed with the New Hartford side branch. After having studied the situation, the committee recommended that the side branch should be constructed, "An extension of time for the completion of the New Hartford branch was granted, to May of 1842."⁶⁷

In Northampton, a canal meeting was held on September 7, 1831 to find ways of financing the completion of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal. The financial problem was solved when a bank in New Haven pledged to furnish \$100,000 for the completion of the canal, with the remaining \$30,000 to be contributed by surrounding towns.⁶⁸ Having funds necessary to complete the project, the Massachusetts Legislature voted to allow "An extension of time for which to complete the Hampshire and Hampden Canal."⁶⁹ This original limit, February 4, 1833 was extended to January 1, 1835.⁷⁰

Thomas Shepard, who had been unable to receive money from Hampshire and Hampden Counties, carried on the work on his section with his personal funds. It was reported that "Shepard lost his entire fortune of \$75,000 on the canal contract."⁷¹ In May of 1832 the Hampshire and Hampden Canal directors authorized Isaac Palmer and Cephas Cobb to finish Shepard's section of the line. The section of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal from Southwick to Westfield was opened in November of 1833.

The two canals were to be supplied with water from the Congamond Ponds for the section at the Connecticut - Massachusetts boundary. The other section of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal was to get its water from the Westfield and Connecticut rivers while the Farmington Canal was to get its water from the Farmington River.⁷²

August 30, 1834 was a very important date for the two canal companies; on that date, it was reported that "the canal was completed from New Haven to Northampton, a distance of eighty-five miles."⁷³ In September water from the Westfield River feeder was let into the Canal, filling it from Westfield to the Connecticut River.⁷⁴ Though the entire line was ready for travel in September of 1834, the first canal boat did not arrive in Southampton until the last week of June in 1835. The citizens of Northampton extended an invitation to "the friends of the canal in New Haven and else where, to unite with us in Northampton, to celebrate the opening of the entire Canal line."⁷⁵

July 29, 1835 was the date of the official opening of the entire canal. "The first boat with its deck covered with passengers, drawn by five horses, reached Northampton at 10 o'clock a.m."⁷⁶ The boat was greeted with great excitement — bands played, large crowds cheered, and cannons were fired. Speeches were made by members of both Canal Companies. When the festivities were over, the Canal boat passed through the locks into the Connecticut River. "The union between the New Haven Harbor and the Connecticut River was declared to be perpetual."⁷⁷

Although the canal was completed and there was a steady growth of business on the line, financial difficulties remained a problem. Delays and accidents soon exhausted the funds of both companies.

The only solution appeared to be some form of reorganization. Dr. Nathan Smith, a prominent medical educator living in New Haven, suggested that one canal company "be formed from the existing two."⁷⁸ Smith's plan was adopted by both companies. As the Hampshire and Hampden Company and the Farmington Company sought a charter for a single company, repairs on the Canal had been stopped. "Progress in the repair of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal has been delayed in consequence of an apprehension, that a charter can not be obtained for the new company."⁷⁹

A new corporation, The New Haven and Northampton Canal Company,⁸⁰ was chartered on April 9, 1836 by the Massachusetts Legislature and on June 2nd of the same year by its Connecticut counterpart. The new company was to have "capital stock in an amount not to exceed \$300,000, divided into \$25 shares."⁸¹ Fifty-four hundred shares, worth \$135,000, had to be subscribed before the reorganization would be official. The New Haven and Northampton Canal Company was empowered to hold and exercise all rights and privileges of the two original companies. There are not many financial benefits, however, as both companies had gone bankrupt, and there had been a total loss of \$1,039,041.61.⁸²

During this period, public opinion had turned against the project. Citizens complained that the canal "was an intolerable unsanitary nuisance. There is just enough water in it to generate the atmosphere with seeds of disease. A number of cases of Billius Fever have been traced to this most foul and filthy mud-hole by physicians."⁸³

In the spring of 1837 it was necessary to rebuild the Westfield River feeder. By this time the work had been completed; it was impossible to fill the section of canal from Westfield to Southampton. It was reported that "the banks are as porous as a sieve."⁸⁴ With most of the major repairs completed, the Canal closed for the 1837 season on December 9th with high hopes for the following year. The *Hampshire Gazette* reported: "Very few repairs are now necessary and if unforeseen accidents should not occur, the canal may be opened early next spring under the most favorable aspects."⁸⁵

The Canal opened in April of 1838 with a new firm, The New Haven Packet Boat Company, on the line.⁸⁶ Advertisements for this new service appeared in the *Hampshire Gazette*: "Packet Boats will leave daily from Northampton and New Haven at 6:30 a.m. and 3 p.m., traveling the length of the line in only 26 hours. Fare including meals is \$3.75."⁸⁷ Unfortunately the Packet Boats did a poor business. Before the end of the 1839 season "the Packet Boat Company of New Haven" had "suspended the operation of their boats."⁸⁸

In its first three years, 1836 to 1839, The New Haven and Northampton Canal Company was forced to expend \$181,367.67, while its total revenue during the same period was only \$39,199.32.⁸⁹ With the Canal Company running in the red, an application for a loan of \$100,00 was made to the City of New Haven. The application was originally rejected in March of 1839, but when the company reapplied in May the loan was approved.⁹⁰ The Connecticut Legislature confirmed the loan on August 6 and five bonds of \$20,000 were issued to the Canal Company.⁹¹

In April of 1840, the citizens of New Haven decided to grant no further aid to the New Haven and Northampton Canal Company. Being unable to secure any more financial aid the company had no choice but to close the line. After an expenditure "of almost two million dollars the Canal was to be abandoned."⁹²

It looked as if the end had finally come for the line, but this was not to be the case. On June 8, 1840, the citizens of New Haven reconsidered aiding the Canal and decided that "it is important that the canal be sustained." They agreed to pay "\$3,000 per year for 30 years for the use of the water from the canal to extinguish fires in New Haven."⁹³ Although this might seem to be of little assistance it was sufficient to put the canal back into operation.

Though the line was reopened, the stockholders of the Canal Company had become disappointed with the project. They began thinking about converting the canal route to a railroad line. In July of 1840, E. P. Holcomb, a Civil Engineer from the George Central Railroad, addressed the stockholders of the New Haven and Northampton Canal Company. "If the water was drained from the canal," he said, "it would be possible to lay a railroad line on its bottom. The average cost of the conversion being only \$6,308 per mile."⁹⁴ There was interest in the project, but the funds could not be found.

Joseph Sheffield of New Haven, "whose business ability enabled him to retire with a considerable fortune as a young man," was persuaded in 1840 to invest in the Canal. Afraid that unless changes were made in the canal, he would lose his investment, Sheffield purchased enough stock to gain control of the Company. In the spring of 1841, Sheffield succeeded Steven Staples as president and worked to put the line into excellent condition. To pay for needed repairs, Sheffield, with the approval of the Stockholders, "assessed the Canal stock up one dollar per share."⁹⁶ With the Canal in perfect condition, it did a great deal of business in 1841. The *Hampshire Gazette* reported that "The Canal had been opened the entire season of navigation, drawing business away from the Connecticut River," something that "had not been done in any previous season."⁹⁷

The canal had another fine year in 1842. Believing that the series of misfortunes had finally ended, the company applied to the Connecticut Legislature "for an extension of ten years in which to build the New Hartford side-branch."⁹⁸

Sheffield was re-elected President in 1843. The Canal was having a successful season until November second of that year, when there was a terrible storm. "In two days, 30 different breaks occurred in the Canal line."⁹⁹ At this point, believing that the Canal line was beyond repair, most of the stockholders refused to advance any money for repairs. Sheffield was convinced, however, that the Canal would eventually succeed and he hired five hundred men to repair the breaks, personally guaranteeing "that they would be paid."¹⁰⁰ Within a week the repairs had been made and on November 9th, the Canal reopened, "remaining in service for 20 days before closing due to winter weather."¹⁰¹

Largely through the efforts of Sheffield, 1844 was the most successful season for the Canal. "Without the loss of a single day of navigation, more than

24 thousand tons of goods had passed on the line, 20 per cent greater than the previous year.”¹⁰²The New Haven and Northampton Canal had finally achieved the success its stockholders had hoped for. In January of 1845, Sheffield decided to resign as president. Henry Farnum succeeded Sheffield as president.¹⁰³



HENRY FARNUM

The Canal opened for business in 1845, on April 28th. With continued success the directors of the Canal Company began to reconsider building a railroad. But this time the railroad was proposed to be built on the Canal's tow-path, allowing the Canal to remain in operation. "Due to the present high cost of iron," however, it was decided that "such a project is not feasible at the present time."¹⁰⁴

In 1845 a drought prevented navigation from the middle of July to the end of September.¹⁰⁵ Hardly had navigation been resumed when there was a break in the Canal in Milldale, "resulting in \$7,000 worth of damage."¹⁰⁶ Farnum, the

new president, knew that the stockholders would be unwilling to pay for repairs so he employed Professor Alexander Twining to make a report on the practicability of constructing a railroad on the Canal route.¹⁰⁷

On November 17, 1845, Professor Twining reported to Farnum that it was economically feasible to use the tow-path as the railroad, and he spoke in favor of operating both the railroad and the New Haven and Northampton Canal. Twining insisted that the train would not interfere with the "towing path used by the canal boats" and he declared that the interruption will be but momentary and without danger to the boat men.¹⁰⁸

With the favorable report, and with profits being made in railroading, Sheffield repurchased control of the Company. On March 14, 1846, "Sheffield was elected president, and Farnum was appointed superintendent."¹⁰⁹ On March 31, the Canal Company petitioned the Connecticut Legislature "for an alteration in the Company's Charter to allow for the construction of a railroad from New Haven to Collinsville, on the tow-path of the New Haven and Northampton Canal."¹¹⁰ The Legislature agreed to the alteration but required that before work could be started on the railroad, "stock subscription of the New Haven and Northampton Company must be increased by \$200,000."¹¹¹ Business on the Canal was carried on through the entire navigational season of 1846.

Work was begun on the New Haven and Collinsville Railroad in January of 1847, and it was "steadily prosecuted."¹¹² The canal continued to be operated in 1847, while the railroad was under construction. With the approach of winter in late November the line ceased operation. Canal transportation between New Haven and Northampton had come to an end. The official closing of the canal came on January 18, 1848, "with the opening of the New Haven and Collinsville Railroad in Plainsville."¹¹³

In Massachusetts there was concern over what to do with the abandoned canal. While a railroad had been constructed on the canal route in Connecticut, nothing had been done with the section in Massachusetts. Citizens began to complain during the summer of 1848; "If the New Haven and Northampton Company propose to construct a railroad along the canal line in Massachusetts we wish them God's speed and will do what we can to aid them. But if they make no public use of the ditch, proper means should be taken to fill it up."¹¹⁴ Though this complaint was made in 1848, it was not until January of 1889 when action was finally taken to fill in the abandoned canal. The *Hampshire Gazette* declared: "The citizens of Northampton will part with the old canal without regret. With this menace filled up, the sanitary condition of the town will be improved."¹¹⁵

The success of the Canal between New Haven and Northampton had been prevented by the failure of three companies to secure adequate capital. High

construction and repair costs had led to financial disaster. The lack of funds and the unfavorable climate had crippled the line at times, but it was the railroad that forced the final closing of the New Haven and Northampton Canal. The inability of canals to compete with railroads was explained by Sheffield in his final account of canal transportation: "Canals were never able to control the lines of travel, or to carry passengers to any great extent; this deprived them of great sources of revenue possessed by the railroad."¹¹⁶ As railroads had replaced canals towards the middle of the 19th century in man's never ending quest for improved transportation, so would it be that railroads would eventually fall victim to the same fate.

NOTES

1. Nohle Whitford, *History of the Canal System of New York* (Albany, 1906), p.39.
2. Whitford, p.81.
3. Charles Harte, *Connecticut Canals* (Printed by the Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers, 1939), p.3.
4. *Ibid*, p.8.
5. *Ibid*, p.14.
6. *Ibid*, p.14.
7. *Ibid*, p.17.
8. *Ibid*, p.18.
9. Francis Atwater, *History of Southington Connecticut* (New Haven, 1924), p.183.
10. *Hampshire Gazette*, August 21, 1822, p.4, col.2.
11. *Ibid*, p.4, col.2.
12. *Ibid*, October 16, 1822, p.4, col.2.
13. *Ibid*, November 13, 1822, p.4, col.2.
14. *Ibid*, p.4, col.2.
15. *Ibid*, March 5, 1823, p.3, col.1.
16. Harte, p.21.
17. *Idem*, p.21.
18. *Ibid*, p.22.
19. *Ibid*, pp.25-26.
20. *Ibid*, p.26.
21. *Ibid*, p.29.
22. *Ibid*, p.33.
23. *Ibid*, p.33.
24. *Ibid*, p.33.
25. *Hampshire Gazette*, April 30, 1825, p.4, col.4.
26. *Ibid*, p.4, col.4.
27. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.36.
28. *Springfield Weekly Republican*, June 19, 1825, p.3, col.2.
29. Nelson Stevens, *Scrap Book*, 1825, (Forbes Library, Northampton).
30. *Ibid*
31. Hart, p.37.
32. *Ibid*, p.40.
33. William Jacobus, *The Connecticut Steamboat Story* (Hartford, 1956) p.241.
34. George Beach, *Northampton Town Meeting* (Forbes Library, 1826), p.18.
35. *Ibid*, p.22.
36. *Hampshire Gazette*, January 17, 1826, p.3, col.3.
37. *Springfield Weekly Republican*, January 25, 1826, p.2, col.3.
38. *Hampshire Gazette*, March 24, 1826, p.4, col.1.
39. Jarvis Hurd, *Civil Engineer Report for the Committee of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company*. (Northampton, 1826), p.11.
40. *Hampshire Gazette*, October 4, 1826, p.3, col.4.
41. Charles Harte, *Feature of the Old Northampton Canal*, (Printed by Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers, 1933), p.16.
42. *Ibid*, p.16.
43. *Ibid*, p.16.
44. *Ibid*, p.17.
45. *Hampshire Gazette*, November 29, 1826, p.4, col.2.
46. *Springfield Weekly Republican*, February 17, 1827, p.2, col.3.
47. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.39.

48. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. February 28, 1827, p.4, col.1.
49. Governor Clinton, *Letters for the Extension of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal* (Boston, 1828), p.12.
50. *Ibid*
51. *Ibid*
52. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. May 19, 1827, p.7, col.5.
53. *Hampshire Gazette*. July 7, 1823, p.3, col.2.
54. *Ibid*.
55. *Ibid*, November 15, 1828, p.4, col.3.
56. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.42.
57. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. January 21, 1829, p.3, col.3.
58. Harte, *Feature of the Old Northampton Canal*. p.27.
59. *Ibid*, p.32.
60. *Hampshire Gazette*. August 9, 1824, p.4, col.3.
61. *Ibid*, September 16, 1824, p.4, col.3.
62. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.48.
63. *Ibid*, p.49.
64. Harte, *Features of Old Northampton Canals*, p.30.
65. *Ibid*, p.30.
66. *Ibid*, p.30.
67. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. August 31, 1831, p.3, col.5.
68. *Hampshire Gazette*, Sept. 14, 1831, p.2, col.1.
69. *Ibid*, June 2 1832, p.2, col.5.
70. *Ibid*.
71. William Donovan, *New Haven and Northampton Canal*. (Northampton, 1954), p.67.
72. *Ibid*, p.39.
73. *Hampshire Gazette*. Sept. 3, 1834, p.4, col.3.
74. *Ibid*. Sept. 10, 1834, p.4, col.4.
75. *Ibid*, July, 1835, p.2, col.4.
76. *Ibid*, August, 1835, p.2, col.1.
77. *Ibid*, August, 1835, p.2, col.3.
78. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.51.
79. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. March 16, 1836, p.2, col.6.
80. *Hampshire Gazette*, June 8, 1836, p.2, col.1.
81. Harte, *Connecticut Canals*, p.57.
82. *Ibid*, p.61.
83. *Ibid*, p.66.
84. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. Aug., 1837, p.3, col.4.
85. *Hampshire Gazette*. Dec., 1837, p.2, col.1.
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87. *Ibid*.
88. *Ibid*, October 23, 1839, p.4, col.3.
89. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.49.
90. *Hampshire Gazette*, May, 1839, p.3, col.4.
91. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.79.
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93. *Ibid*, June 10, 1840, p.3, col.3.
94. *Ibid*, July 22, 1840, p.3, col.2.
95. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.81.
96. *Ibid*, p.84.
97. *Hampshire Gazette*. November 30, 1841, p.4, col.5.
98. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. Aug., 1842, p.3, col.2.
99. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.105.
100. *Ibid*, p.105.
101. *Ibid*, p.106.
102. *Ibid*, p.124.
103. *Ibid*, p.132.
104. *Hampshire Gazette*, June 24, 1845, p.2, col.4.
105. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.144.
106. *Ibid*, p.144.
107. *Ibid*, p.151.
108. *Ibid*, p.155.
109. *Ibid*, p.184.
110. *Hampshire Gazette*, April 7, 1846, p.2, col.5.
111. *Springfield Weekly Republican*. June 20, 1846, p.2, col.3.
112. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p. 198.
113. *Ibid*, p.20.
114. *Hampshire Gazette*. June 6, 1848, p.3, col.1.
115. *Ibid*, January 22, 1889, p.4, col.4.
116. Harte, *Features of the Old Northampton Canal*, p.205.