

Delaware and Raritan Canal Chronology (1851-1974)

- 1851 The depth of the canal was increased by dredging so that it would be 8 feet throughout.
- 1853 The locks on the main canal were lengthened from 110 feet to 220 feet and the banks were "rip-rapped" to protect them from erosion. The improvements were covered by a \$700,000 loss that was charged to capital stock. At about the same time Lock #5 probably was eliminated.
- 1854 The Central Railroad of New Jersey was opened in Phillipsburg and made connection with the Lehigh Valley Railroad thus opening for the first time an all rail route from the coal fields in Pennsylvania to tidewater at New York. A temporary decline in traffic was experienced by the Delaware and Raritan canal.
The State of New Jersey prohibited transportation of freight on Sunday, on highway, railroad or canal. This rule was in effect all the remaining years of the canal.
- 1858 The canal company began offering prizes and bonuses for greater speed of vessels through the canal.
In order to speed the flow of vessels, all bridge ways on the main canal, except two, were enlarged to a width of 48 feet so that two boats could pass at the same time.
- 1861 Early in the Civil War a flotilla of fourteen Delaware and Raritan Canal steam transports were employed to carry 3,000 New Jersey troops and equipment south to the defense of the capital at Washington, D.C.
- 1865 This was the year of peak earnings \$933,643. 2,857,233 tons were carried on the canal, eighty three percent of which was coal.
An additional outlet lock at New Brunswick measuring 24 feet by 220 feet was constructed and the canal was enlarged by dredging between New Brunswick and Kingston and at Bordentown. The original outlet lock at New Brunswick was 30 feet by 130 feet but was lengthened in 1853 to 220 feet.
- 1867 The Delaware and Raritan Canal Company, the Camden and Amboy Railroad Transportation Company, and the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company were authorized to consolidate their interests with each company retaining its separate organization..
- 1868 Ashbel Welch designed and supervised the installation of steam powered winches and steam activated valves and gates for all locks to greatly speed the passage of vessels through locks.
- 1869 The Philadelphia and Reading put their steam colliers in operation to move coal from Philadelphia to eastern ports by the outside route. There was an immediate decline in both the coal and total tonnage through the canal.
The special privileges conferred by the State on the joint companies expired. They were no longer immune from competing transportation systems.
- 1871 The properties of the United New Jersey Railroad and Canal Company, created in 1867, were leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company for a period of 999 years.
- 1873 The peak gross income for the canal was noted when the sum of \$1,519,991 was reached.
- 1877 Toll rates were considerably decreased in an effort to protect canal traffic from railroad competition.
- 1882 Tolls were increased and class for class made higher than they were in 1871. Tonnage, average length of haul, revenue, and revenue per ton began to fall..
- 1893 The Pennsylvania Railroad expanded to four tracks its main line across New Jersey. The Delaware and Raritan Canal experienced its first year of deficit operation.
- 1900 Coal traffic from Mauch Chunk, PA via the Delaware Canal, which came into the Delaware and Raritan Canal at Lambertville for New York, was discontinued.
- 1902 The Pennsylvania Railroad completed the first non-opening bridge over the canal at New Brunswick. The stone arch bridge had a fifty foot clearance.
- 1903 Navigation on the canal was closed for several weeks due to damage done to the feeder above Lambertville by the freshet in the Delaware River.
- 1913 The connection between the Delaware Division Canal at New Hope and the Delaware and Raritan Canal at Lambertville was abandoned, but some local boat traffic continued on the feeder for a few more years.
- 1917 The canal was protected by strong security measures with soldiers guarding strategic points. Torpedo boats, gunboats, and military vessels frequently traveled on the canal. The U.S. government utilized the canal for the transportation of boilers and other naval equipment from the League Island Navy Yard in Philadelphia to the Brooklyn Navy Yard.
- 1918 The United States Railroad Administration took over control of the canal and promoted use of the canal in order to reduce wartime railroad congestion. The Delaware and Raritan steam tug West Jersey and four gasoline tugs were included in the takeover. Several New York State canal boats were brought down to New Jersey to help carry the traffic.
- 1924 The deficit for this year was \$383,471, the greatest dollar loss for the canal.
- 1926 The Pennsylvania Railroad applied to the Public Utility Commission to close portions of the canal at night.
- 1929 The peak year for pleasure boaters, when 941 non-commercial vessels moved through the canal. A new concrete lock was constructed just north of Greenwood Avenue in Trenton to permit the aqueduct over the main line of the Pennsylvania railroad to be raised to provide the necessary clearance for the railroad's electric centenary. Sheet piling had to be driven to hold the new water level in the canal between the aqueduct and Lock #7 at State St.
- 1931 Freight traffic on the canal had declined to 41,801 tons.
- 1933 The canal did not open for business and was officially abandoned by the Pennsylvania Railroad.
- 1934 The property of the Delaware and Raritan Canal was taken over by the State of New Jersey. Water was sold to industrial plants along the canal.
- 1936 Most of the Trenton portion of the main canal was deeded to the city and filled in as a WPA project.
- 1944 Rehabilitation of the canal was begun in order to convert it into an efficient water supply system.
- 1973 The Delaware and Raritan canal was entered on the national Register of Historic places.
- 1974 Governor Byrne signed a bill creating the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park and establishing a commission with veto power over all proposed land use on or near the canal.