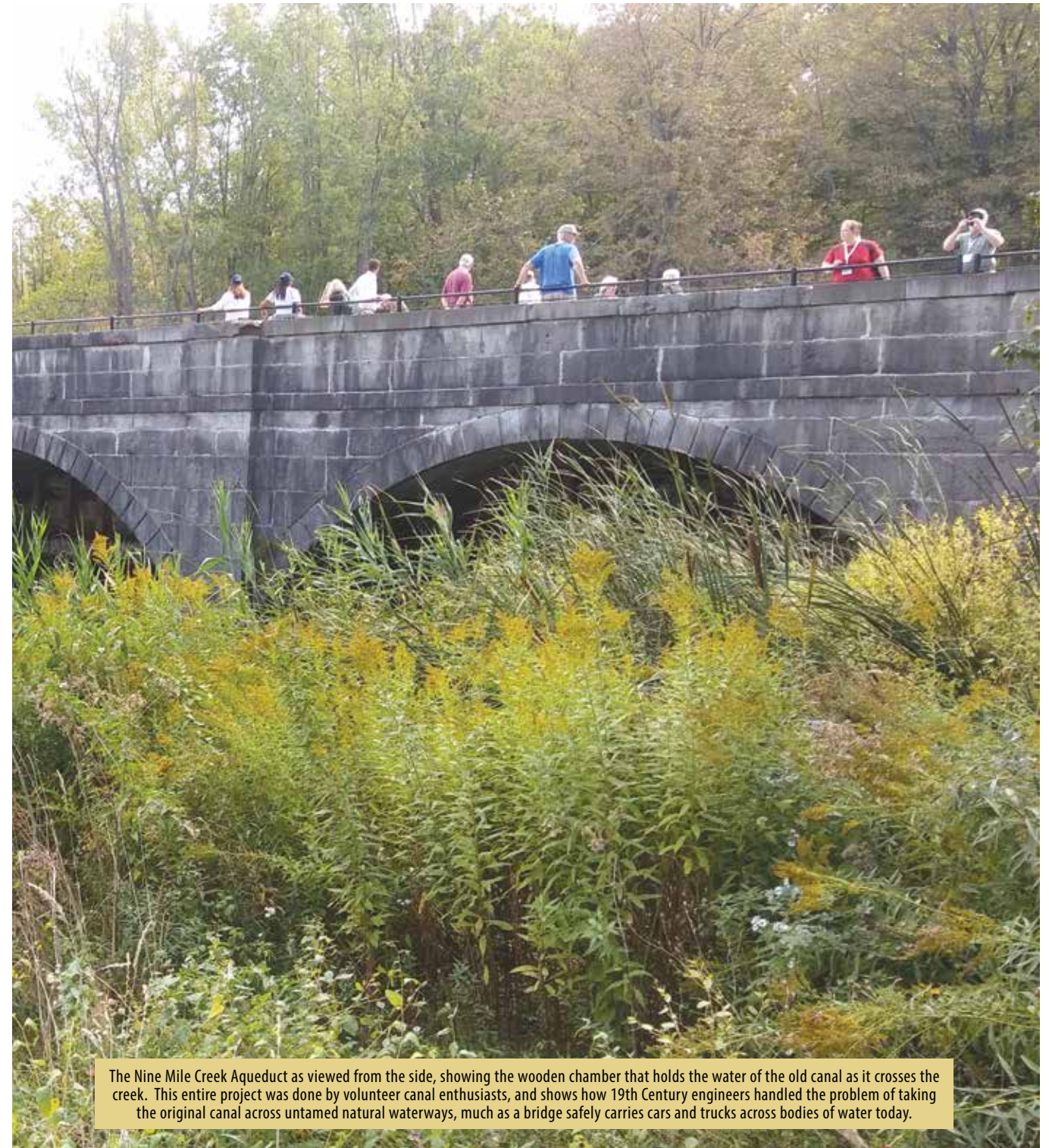


# Celebrating the Ongoing Legacy of “Clinton’s Ditch”

by **Pete Bardunias**  
President/CEO, the Chamber of  
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Imagine the foresight, planning and actual construction of a water-filled ditch from Albany to Buffalo in the years after the American Revolution, 40 feet wide, 4 foot deep, when such an idea was incomprehensible to most citizens of New York State. This is the canal, envisioned by New York Governor DeWitt Clinton, that was still under construction 200 years ago this year. The waterway was hand dug by many immigrants from foreign lands, some of whom died in construction accidents and are even buried within its banks. They worked under terrible conditions by today’s standards, yet when the Erie Canal, Champlain Canal and other man-made waterways



The Nine Mile Creek Aqueduct as viewed from the side, showing the wooden chamber that holds the water of the old canal as it crosses the creek. This entire project was done by volunteer canal enthusiasts, and shows how 19th Century engineers handled the problem of taking the original canal across untamed natural waterways, much as a bridge safely carries cars and trucks across bodies of water today.

throughout the state were complete, transportation of people, products and raw materials was far speedier and more efficient than ever before, truly making New York the Empire State for the past two centuries.

In late September 2017, the World Canals Conference came to Syracuse, NY with nearly five days of seminars, information sessions, exciting field trips and some big news regarding the future of our venerable canal system. It was a fitting location for this worldwide celebration of

inland waterway travel, coinciding with the 200th anniversary (1817-2017) of the start of construction of the original Erie Canal. Held at the historic Hotel Syracuse (now called the Marriott Syracuse Downtown), the conference organizers arranged for an ambitious tour schedule that really amounted to an in-depth mini-course on the history of the Erie Canal, its various iterations (1820s, 1840s, 1880s, and 1910s) and the many innovations utilized by 19th and early 20th Century designers to create what is still one of the world’s most marvelous waterborne inland





This historic lock in Port Byron is accessible right off the New York State Thruway, a first-of-its-kind exhibit in the state. Motorists can stop, enjoy the visitors center and canal exhibits, and then conveniently re-enter I-90, all without passing through any toll booths.

transportation systems. Hudson Valley residents and boaters are close to an amazingly complex and interesting system which is often overlooked on canal journeys – if you take the time to plan and explore it!

Central New York is home to a large section of unused, “enlarged” Erie Canal that was bypassed when the Barge Canal was built, and so there are many structures still standing that have been preserved either as artifacts or in some cases restored to demonstrate their functionality. The Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse, for example, was once located on the Canal but now is several miles south of the current waterway. A preserved drydock and other buildings in Canastota or the amazingly well-maintained (and working!!!) aqueduct in Camillus are must-sees, well worth a taxi ride from the closest Erie Canal Lock or park. Statewide, there are

preserved structures close to the New York State Thruway (such as the rest area in Montgomery County or Historic Lock 52 in Port Byron) and along the Canal (Historic Lock 19 in Vischer Ferry, Historic Locks 21/22 at the Schenectady Yacht Club, or the flights of old locks in Waterford and Lockport, the preserved factory in Seneca Falls destined to become the National Women’s Hall of Fame or aqueducts such as the

Visitors of all ages enjoy canalside festivals. Here is the view alongside the Waterford harborfront during an event.



A typical scene on the Erie Canal? Hardly, as these boats are tied up atop the only working aqueduct left in the entire canal system, part of an historical exhibit at the Nine Mile Creek Aqueduct in Camillus, NY.



The paddle wheeler “Caldwell Belle” is indicative of the type of interesting tour boats available to canal visitors. Normally based in Schuylerville near Lock C-5, the “Belle” and her companion, the “Mohawk Maiden”, will be mainstays at Waterford events in May, July and September. Visit [www.mohawkmaidencruises.com](http://www.mohawkmaidencruises.com) for more information.





Captured in this photo are many of the things you will see at the Waterford Canal Festival on May 19: canal barge replicas, mules, local information, food, kayaks, history, heritage and of course, the water. The Chamber of Southern Saratoga County will be hosting the Canal Festival in partnership with the Village of Waterford. Both Chamber and Village are proud supporters of the Town of Waterford's Steamboat Meet (July) and Tugboat Roundup (September).



Ed Riley, the developer who saved the historic Hotel Syracuse, shares his insight during a presentation at the World Canals Conference in late September. Note the ornate, beautiful decorations in the elegant ballroom, located on the 10th floor of the new Marriott Syracuse Downtown.

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ones in western NY or at Rexford near Lock 7).

The Canal changed a lot over the years, being widened in the 1840s, having locks enlarged in the 1880s, and finally being completely replaced by the "modern" Barge Canal (now the New York State Canal System) in 1918. Scheduled in 2018 are commemorative events, ceremonies and initiatives which will provide educational, historical and fun experiences for boaters and landlubbers alike. These activities will feature tourism, industry and other pursuits (see the Corning Glass Barge story in this issue for example) by utilizing chambers of commerce, state, regional and county tourism agencies as well as local groups to promote the Canal System locally, nationally and even to international visitors.



This empty lot in Syracuse's inner harbor exemplifies the results of lost industry in upstate New York. Onondaga Lake once was home to massive industrial complexes which are now gone. Once extremely polluted, the Lake has been restored ecologically and the adjacent land is now available for imaginative new projects

There are so many attractions – bike paths, museums, restaurants, even hotels, and of course the Locks themselves, a marvel of engineering even today. And there are lots of ways, even landlocked ones, to enjoy the journey. A good example of this is the "Cycle the Erie Canal Bike Tour", ([www.ptny.org/cycle-the-erie-canal](http://www.ptny.org/cycle-the-erie-canal)). In 2017 more than 650



# The Great Upstate Boat Show March 2-4, 2018

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cyclists began the 400 mile journey on July 9 to pedal along the historic Erie Canalway Trail to Albany for the 19th annual event. The trail will be 100 percent complete in 2020.

### Some other examples of canal events in 2018:

**Waterford Canal Festival, at the Waterford Harbor Visitors Center, May 19**, celebrating the opening of the canal season and the 100th year of the modern Barge Canal in style, with waterfront exhibits, great food, entertainment, a kids' fishing contest, working canal and tugboats, marine recreational activities, and more! For more information visit [www.southernsarotoga.org](http://www.southernsarotoga.org).

**Fairport Canal Days ([www.fairportcanaldays.com](http://www.fairportcanaldays.com)) is celebrating 42 years as one of the premier juried art festivals in the Northeast, June 1-3.** With artisans, food, canalside attractions and more in the heart of one of the most beautiful waterfront communities on the canal.

Waterford Steamboat Meet ([www.town.waterford.ny.us](http://www.town.waterford.ny.us)) brings wood fired boilers and a fleet of steam powered vessels to the Waterford Harbor Visitors Center. Typically the first weekend in July.

**Seneca Falls Canal Fest July 7-9**, ([www.senecafalls.com](http://www.senecafalls.com)), featuring fireworks, rides, an aquacade, duck race, music, and more, this is a great community event held in the spot where the womens' rights movement was born and led to social reform in America, right alongside the water's edge!


**Waterford Tugboat Roundup ([www.tugboatroundup.com](http://www.tugboatroundup.com)), at the Waterford Harbor Visitors Center, September 7-9**, brings the largest collection of working commercial vessels to the canalside terminal near Lock 2, along with one of the best canalside festivals and an awesome display of fireworks known regionally as one of the best north of New York City.

Our canal system suffers from a perceived lack of relevance in today's world. It's easy to overlook the fact that not only are hundreds of millions of dollars in economic benefit generated annually from tourism along the canals, but when the non-tourism activities (commercial transportation, irrigation, water management, electric power generation, and even the commerce generated in former canal towns now served by the NY State Thruway) are considered the number rises into the billions.

Use the off season to your advantage and plan your next canal voyage! For more information please visit [www.nycanals.com](http://www.nycanals.com), [www.southernsarotoga.org](http://www.southernsarotoga.org) or stop by the Southern Sarotoga Information Center on the I-87 Northway between Exits 9 and 10 in Clifton Park.



Ohio Erie Canal in Independence, OH (Circa 1902)

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The old and the new – a Canadian pleasure boat begins its voyage through the Canal System above Lock E-2, passing the NYS Canal Corporation tug "Governor Cleveland". Originally a steam-powered ice-breaking tug, the "Cleveland" with her diesel engine is a mainstay among the working fleet used to maintain our inland waterway.