



09.1966.1 Wabash & Erie Canal  
Cass County  
Marker Text Review Report  
12/27/07

### Marker Text

Trade and emigration route from Lake Erie to Evansville. Completed through Logansport 1840. Followed Erie Avenue and 5th Street, crossing Eel River by wooden aqueduct. Abandoned about 1876.

### Report

The Wabash and Erie Canal was a trade route that linked Lake Erie to Evansville. However, the statement that the canal was an emigration route implies that people were leaving the state. On the contrary, the canal contributed to *immigration* as county populations bordering the canal grew from 12,000 before the canal in 1835, to 60,000 in 1845, to 150,000 in 1855.<sup>1</sup>

The marker's second sentence, that the canal was completed through Logansport in 1840, is wrong. A search of Logansport newspapers revealed that the canal was opened to that city's traffic in 1839.<sup>2</sup>

*The Combination Atlas Map of Cass County* published in 1878 was consulted to verify the location of the canal in Logansport. Curiously, the atlas did not contain a map of Logansport proper. However, *History of Cass County* (1913) described the canal as "coming in on . . . Erie avenue, to Fifth street, running north on Fifth to Eel river, crossing that river on an aqueduct."<sup>3</sup> According to one primary source, there was a wooden aqueduct.<sup>4</sup>

A final concern with this marker's text is the statement that it was abandoned about 1876. Several county histories as well as the 1878 *Combination Atlas Map of Cass County* disagree, and give 1875 as the abandonment date.<sup>5</sup> Newspaper accounts reveal that in 1873 the Cass County Commissioners, under public pressure, appropriated \$5,000 to provide for repair of the canal.<sup>6</sup> It is evident from these articles that the canal was in poor shape. In May, 1875, the *Logansport Weekly Journal* reported that "The 'Iceberg' . . . arrived last Monday, being the first canal boat of the season."<sup>7</sup> In the *Weekly Journal's* year-end recap of local happenings for 1875 it noted, "May 3. The canal boat Iceberg . . . was the first and last arrival of the season."<sup>8</sup> There was no recollection whatsoever of canal activity in the *Weekly Journal's* year-end review for 1876.<sup>9</sup> While the marker text may be technically correct since 1875 is *around* 1876, research suggests that 1875 should be the date listed.



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<sup>1</sup> Ralph D. Gray, "The Canal Era in Indiana," in *Transportation and the Early Nation* (Indianapolis, 1982), 128-129.

<sup>2</sup> An exact date for the canal's completion through Logansport could not be located in the city's newspapers because the 1839 issues for April and most of May were not on the ISL microfilms for the *Logansport Herald* or the *Logansport Telegraph*. However, the *Telegraph* of March 23, 1839 reported, "The Wabash and Erie Canal will be opened for navigation between Logansport and Fort Wayne, about the first of April." Then on May 28, 1839, the *Herald* reported, "The Canal. - Boats are arriving almost daily. Business is becoming better every day. In a few days the water will, we understand, be let in to Gorgetown [sic] six or eight miles below." There were also advertisements running for two canal cargo companies (the Wabash and Erie Packet Boat Company and Spencer, Rice, & Hopkins Storage, Forwarding, and Commission) in the 1839 *Herald* and *Telegraph*

<sup>3</sup> Jehu Z. Powell, ed., *History of Cass County Indiana* (Chicago, 1913), 197.

<sup>4</sup> "Canal Meeting," *Logansport Weekly Journal*, May 3, 1873.

<sup>5</sup> *Combination Atlas Map of Cass County Indiana* (Chicago, 1878), 11; Thomas B. Helm, *History of Cass County Indiana* (Chicago, 1886), 287; Powell, ed., *History of Cass County Indiana*, 197; Graham Taber, *History of Logansport and Cass County* (Logansport, 1947), 29.

<sup>6</sup> "Canal Meeting"; "Canal Appropriation," *Logansport Weekly Journal*, May 10, 1873.

<sup>7</sup> *Logansport Weekly Journal*, May 8, 1875.

<sup>8</sup> "1875," *Logansport Weekly Journal*, January 1, 1876.

<sup>9</sup> "1876," *Logansport Weekly Journal*, January 6, 1875.