

Along the Outlet of Keuka Lake

by

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Index to Frances Dumas's series about mills along the Outlet

The Crooked Lake Canal

Part Two

Though the Crooked Lake Canal has been abandoned for more than a century, it's not too difficult to find its traces along the north wall of the Outlet ravine. Most of the locks can be located, and in more than one place the prism is intact. The towpath is the most obvious relic of the canal, forming as it did the grade for the Fall Brook Railroad, built on the old right of way in 1884; and for the Outlet Trail a hundred years later.

The first two locks were downstream from the Trail's Dresden access; both now lie on private property. About a quarter mile upstream from the Route 14 bridge, lock #3 lies at the head of an excellent section of remaining canal prism.

The original prism, or the ditch that actually held the water, was 42 feet wide at the water line, 26 feet wide at the bottom, and four feet deep. Where the railroad was laid on the towpath, and no roads were built on the north bank, the prism remains as it does here. It continues for some distance upstream, though shallower and without the open water. It continues for some distance upstream, though shallower and without the open water.

Lock #4 lies just west of the Hopeton access. Only a few stones remain here, as in most places. After the canal was abandoned in 1877 the beautiful stone blocks were reused; the best places to see the recycled canal stone today are in the foundation of the enormous Seneca Paper Mill and in the Main Street bridge in Penn Yan

West of Hopeton the prism can still be traced, though it is full of trees and brush and was partially obliterated by the road.

The three locks that carried boats around the falls at the Cascade were all destroyed by subsequent building. These were #s 8, 9 and 10. The Trail passes between the two railroad crossing signs along the top of the old towpath. The canal prism lay in the wetland to the north and on its north bank the driveway—once a road linking the Cascade Mill property with May's Mill—was built on the so-called "heel path," the embankment opposite the towpath, hence the pun.

West of May's Mill the Outlet Road filled in the prism to a large extent, leaving only a narrow ditch.

Four locks were needed to carry boats over the escarpment that formed the high falls at Seneca Millsite. One of these, #17, served as the foundation for the old road that crossed the Outlet above the dam and so is the only remaining lock with actual stonework in place. The overpass lies across what was the lock's downstream gateway. Still visible is

the groove in the stone that held the pivot for one of the lock's big wooden doors. The lock stretched upstream 90 feet, and here and there a few finished stones and stone rubble remain. The rest went into the huge paper mill and its dam, built at the falls in 1884.

Passing through the lock and for a quarter-mile or so westward, the Trail is no longer on the towpath, but lies along the floor of the prism. The towpath rises parallel to the Trail and south of it; on its far side was the four-acre pond backed up by the Seneca Mill dam.

As excellent continuous section of the prism begins where the Trail again rises to the towpath. Three locks—#s 18, 19 and 20—are quite easy to locate where the prism deepens and narrows between sections of open wetland.

Another good section of the prism remains west of Milo Millsite, full of cattails, wetland grasses and sedges. Two locks lay very close together at Shutts's Millsite, but no trace remains of either one. A few stones from #25 can be seen in the shallow ditch between the Trail and the Outlet Road just east of the Fox's Mill road crossing.

Lock #27 was opposite St. John's Mill's long headrace, just downstream from Armstrong's and Franklin's Mills. In 1919 a reminiscence appeared in the local paper: "The lock just below the street running down from the Five Points was the favorite swimming hole. It was more accessible than the lake, the water was some warmer, and there were other desirable features. The fenders were two large beams let into the stone walls of the lock, one on each side to guide boats on entering. These were just above the surface of the water and made famous places for swimmers.

"Charles Stark, Al Tuell, Polk Morgan and others made us who could not swim interested spectators of their diving, sometimes from the top of the lock, a distance of 10 or 12 feet to the water... The baby hole was a short distance below the fenders and where the water was not over our heads. After learning to swim there, we graduated to the fenders where the water was about eight feet deep."

Just above what is now Cherry St. bridge was a section of the canal called the Wide Waters, which the same correspondent noted as a favorite place for the local youngsters to skate; a club was organized to keep it partly filled in the winter, and the ice cleared of snow.

The guardlock, which served along with a dam across the outlet to control the level of both the lake and the canal waterway, lay where the Chronical Building is today. Boats coming up from Dresden either unloaded in the basin behind the Main Street stores; or others passed through the guardlock and were towed behind steamboats like barges to Hammondsport and other Keuka Lake ports. Going the other way, they were laden with fresh fruit and other local produce destined for larger markets

This list shows the order of locks along the Crooked Lake Canal relative to the mills along the Outlet. The canal was constructed to avoid damaging the waterpower facilities on the stream, and to use water taken only from above the guardlock. The two waterways were separate and distinct.

Keuka Lake
Liberty Street Bridge
Guard Lock
Main Street Bridge
Armstrong's Mill
Lock 27
St. John's Mill
Lock 26
Fox's Mill
Lock 25
Lock 24
Sheppard's Mill
Shutt's Mill
Lock 23
Lock 22
Milo Mill
Lock 21
Lock 20
Lock 19
Lock 18
Lock 17
Seneca Mill
Lock 16
Lock 15
Lock 14
Lock 13
Lock 12
May's Mill
Lock 11
Lock 10
Lock 9
Cascade Mill
Lock 8
Lock 7
Lock 6
Lock 5
Hopeton Mill
Lock 4
Lock 3
Milo Street Bridge
Lock 2
Lock 1
Seneca Lake

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<http://keukaoutlettrail.org/>

Or you can also contact us at: Friends of the Outlet, Inc., PO Box 65, Dresden, NY 14441. Please support the Trail and give generously to maintain and develop this beautiful historic and recreational Trail!