

Erie Canal Village Site

This piece of land, Lot 98 of the old George Clinton tract, has seen clusters of buildings come and go as have the old waterways that criss-cross it. At the entrance to the Village is a canal road bridge. There was always a bridge here. The bed of the original lies below in the mud; the far abutment is original. The old bridge was called "Brainard's Bridge" after a farmer who lived nearby. Brainard is a name associated with the canal. Jeremiah Brainard, a Roman, invented a fine wheelbarrow for use in constructing Clinton's Ditch.

Brainard's bridge spanned the Enlarged Erie, a seventy-five foot wide ribbon of level water that ran to Albany and the Hudson River in the east, to Buffalo and Lake Erie to the west. Two miles of it have been dredged for the Canal Village. Abandoned after the larger Barge Canal took its place in 1918, much of the old bed was filled in and obliterated. Here, the bed was in good shape, but had grown to trees and brush. The waste weir, which spills excess water out of the canal, was rebuilt at its location near Fort Bull road. The canal obtains its water from Wood Creek, which is let into it from the eastern end. The Enlarged Erie, brought to this area around 1844, was dug wider and deeper than the original Erie (often referred to as Clinton's Ditch after the Governor who authorized its opening).

On this tract of land, three old waterways all run within a quarter of a mile of each other. At this point and at many others along the route of the Erie, the Enlarged Erie separates from Clinton's Ditch. The Ditch (begun in 1817) may be seen running through the middle of the Village. It must have veered around an obstacle, for it joins the Enlarged Erie route at either end of the Village.

Behind the Shull house is the earliest water route, Wood Creek.

The old bed, with some water in it still runs by the earthworks of Fort Bull. This French and Indian War fort was built in 1755 to protect the Wood Creek watercourse. Narrow and unseemly as it is, Wood Creek, before the building of Clinton's Ditch, had seen countless military and commercial vessels on its waters rubbing against its banks and shallow bottom. Bad as it was, it was often preferable to the Oswego and Mohawk roads which for a hundred and fifty years were narrow, muddy paths through hostile forests.

Fort Bull was a much used landing place for vessels proceeding east. A three mile portage by wagon brought them to the Mohawk. West bound vessels would be brought here in high water season or four miles further to Fort Rickey in dry. Some sixteen bateaux are believed sunk just beyond Fort Bull. This occurred when Frenchmen destroyed Fort Bull in 1756. Virtually all of the sixty man colonial garrison died here.

Wood Creek even had its own locks, or devices to improve navigation. One of them was near where Fort Bull Road crosses the Enlarged Erie at the Village's western end.