

APPENDIX L

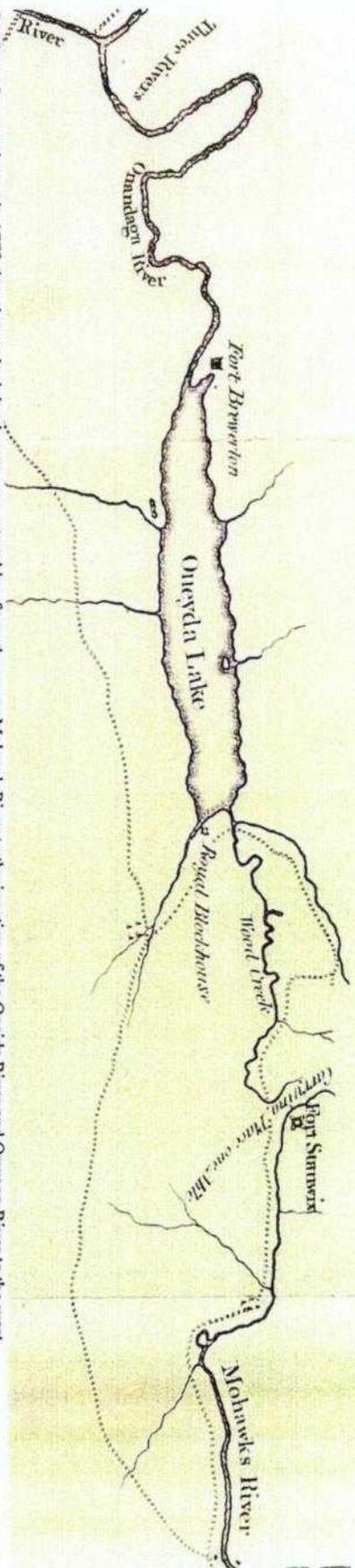
**WOOD CREEK CANAL
INFORMATION**

New York State Museum

The Durham Project: Fact Sheet for NYSM/DEC Field Trip – September 29, 1998

Historic Wood Creek: Canal Cut #1 – 1793

Wood Creek was the lynch-pin of an international navigation corridor that connected the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes via a series of inland waterways from prehistoric times until the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.



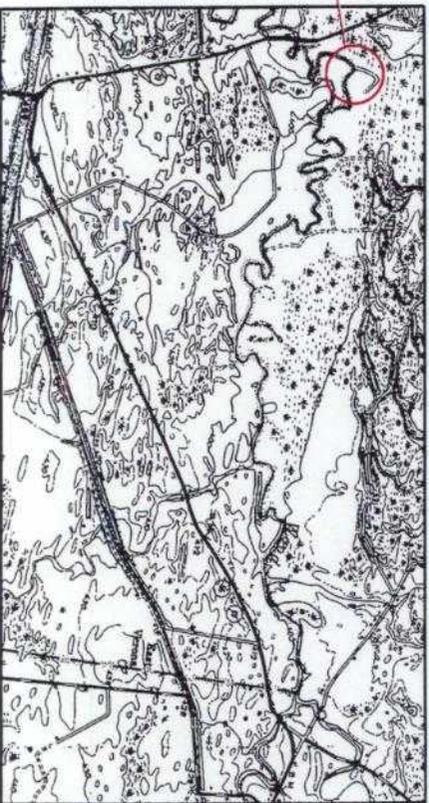
Section of a map drawn in 1772 that shows the inland waterways stretching from the upper Mohawk River to the junction of the Oneida River and Oswego River to the west.

In 1792 a private canal company – *The Western Inland Lock Navigation Company* – was formed in New York State to improve this inland navigation system, and in the summer of 1793 this company began cutting thirteen short “canals” across the necks of the worst of dozens of sharp meanders in Wood Creek – thus shortening the distance between Rome and Oneida Lake by 6 miles!

Archeological remains of the first of these historic mini-canals – some of the oldest artificial waterways in North America – can be still seen along the east side of Route 49 west of Rome.

This site is one of nine out the original 13 that survived the construction of the Barge Canal in the early 20th century.

Due to the state of preservation at the site, this location is one of the most historic places along the old inland transportation route.



These mini-canals were created in an age when engineering like this was almost unheard of, and in a wilderness where no roads, trails, or settlements existed. The technique consisted of five stages, the descriptions of which were discovered in eyewitness accounts recorded during the summer of 1793 by travelers passing down Wood Creek in boats:



First the meander to be cut was selected. Then the trees along the line of the cut were cleared and the stumps dug up. The logs were stockpiled for later use. Next a narrow ditch about 10 feet deep was dug across the neck and the saved logs were used to dam up the old channel. While the little "canal" could be used for boats at this time, it was shallow and the banks were in danger of slumping. However, the next heavy rain or spring freshet, forced to run through this ditch by the log dams, would erode the ditch to the normal size of the natural Wood Creek channel. Thus the new "canal" would be finished by nature.

This historic "canal" on Wood Creek was recorded on a map of the Wood Creek Reservation done in 1832 (left). It is shown as a cut off loop of the stream and is identified in the map legend as land that was once on the south side of the creek.

An old aerial photograph from the 1930s (right) clearly shows the relationship of this cut to the modern channel of Wood Creek. Another cut to the southwest appears to be of a similar nature, but it was the result of a natural chute cut-off in prehistoric times. (Compare the channel alignment in each view.)

The old channel of Wood Creek in 1793, measured in the abandoned channel, is only a couple feet deep, while the modern channel has eroded to many feet deep due to run-off promoted by deforestation in the nineteenth century.

