Canal Days In America: The History And Romance Of Old Towpaths And Waterways

Harry Sinclair Drago

Explore eight ways that the Erie Canal, which married the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes, altered the course of American history.

1. The Erie Canal opened the Midwest to settlement.

Prior to the construction of the Erie Canal, most of the United States population remained pinned between the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Appalachian Mountains to the west. As the gateway to the Midwest, New York City became America’s commercial capital and the primary port of entry for European immigrants. The city’s population quadrupled between 1820 and 1850, and the financing of the canal’s construction also allowed New York to surpass Philadelphia as the country’s preeminent banking center.