



Announcing the publication of

Voices of the Hennepin Canal

Promoters, Politicians, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

A new book by Donald W. Griffin

The canal

The Hennepin Canal (whose official name was the Illinois and Mississippi Canal) was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as the western link in a water route from the Upper Mississippi River to the Atlantic seaboard. The canal connected the Illinois River upstream from the village of Hennepin with the Mississippi River west of Milan, a distance of 75 miles. A feeder (an auxiliary canal) from the Rock River at Rock Falls supplied water to operate the canal's main line.

Construction of the federal waterway was authorized in the River and Harbor Act of 1890; work began in 1892 under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District. The Corps' Rock Island District operated the canal from the spring of 1908 to July 1, 1951, when it was closed to commercial traffic. In 1970, the canal property was transferred to the state of Illinois; today, the waterway is known as the Hennepin Canal Parkway State Park.

About the author

Donald W. "Bill" Griffin holds BS and MS degrees from Illinois State University and a doctoral degree from Clark University. He is an emeritus professor in Geography at Western Illinois University where he has served as a member of the Board of Trustees since 2006.

The book

Voices is a 428-page historical account that begins in the 1830s with the start of surveys of canal-river routes to Lake Michigan and the East, the post war period of railroad expansion into the Midwest, the rise of farmer organizations, and the prolonged partisan debates in Congress on building the canal. Subsequently, the geographic focus is on surveys to determine the best route for the canal's main line and feeder, and the 18-year period of construction. Finally, an in-depth look at canal operations, including annual routine maintenance, repairs of the locks and dams, and the constant patrolling of the canal and feeder to look for potential breaks in the prism banks, is provided. The text is complemented by ten maps, thirty-nine period photographs, and three appendixes.