

MEDINA BUGLE

A Publication of the Medina Historical Society

April 2021

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy Spring!

After navigating the numerous challenges 2020 had in store, turning the page to spring 2021 feels like a much needed breath of fresh air.

While the world is still contending with the COVID-19 pandemic, the unique challenges that have arisen from this global health crisis have pushed us to find new ways to carry out our mission and vision. In the months ahead of us, it is my sincere hope that members like you—the lifeblood of the Medina Historical Society—will continue to engage with us as we push on toward a brighter future.

It is our hope to once again to schedule programs for the fall season and have some open dates to visit the Museum. Perhaps we can even schedule our outdoor annual picnic the last Monday in June to get things kick started. Stay tuned for updates.

I would like to thank those members that renewed their membership for 2021 and also special thanks for those that added an additional donation. If you have not renewed please consider doing so and as always thank you for consideration and unwavering support.

Sincerely,

Reinhard Rogowski

President, Medina Historical Society

rrogowski@rochester.rr.com – 585-317-7457

CONTENTS.

"Life on the Erie Canal 1884-1905"
A first person account by Mrs. Ross Arnett

*"Our version of the Canal is so anesthetized.
Do you sometimes wonder about the sight and smells.
Dead mules floating in the water. Mule dung on the towpath.
Cooking smells from the canal boats: coffee, frying, baking.
Sounds of children playing, tug-boaters calling.
Laundry drying on deck.
A far cry from today's sleek boats and manicured boaters."*

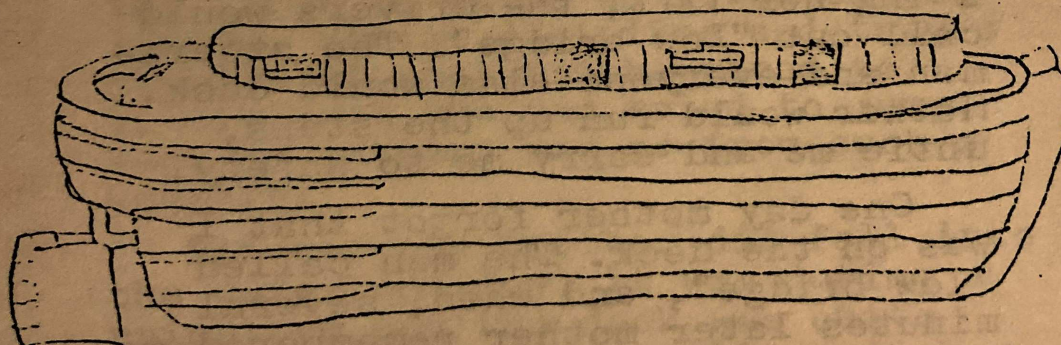
"Life on the Erie Canal 1884-1905" by Mrs. Ross Arnett

LIFE ON THE ERIE CANAL.

1884 - 1905

As Told By Mrs. Ross Arnett

Medina, N. Y.



The canal on which my father had his boats, was seventy feet wide and seven feet deep. When the canal was first built it was only forty feet wide and four feet deep. Today it is one hundred and twenty-five feet wide and twelve feet deep.

There were three kinds of boats traveling on the canal. They were known as bullheads, lakers and scows. On the bullheads and lakers the cabins were flush with the deck, but the cabins on the scows rose several feet above the deck.

On this deck there was an awning supported by poles and between two poles was swung a hammock. This was my playroom on pleasant days. My mother, ever concerned for my safety, tied me with a rope to a ring which was in the center of the deck. When we came to a bridge which was neither swing nor lift, the drivers would call out "Low bridge". The steersman and everyone else would duck. Mother would run up the steps, untie me and carry me to safety.

One day mother forgot that I was on the deck. The man called "low bridge", and when, several minutes later mother remembered me she had just time to grab a butcher knife, run up the steps, cut the rope and snatch me to safety as the scow swung under the low bridge.

Fathers pair of scows would be loaded with wheat at Buffalo and proceed down the Canal to Troy drawn by a span of Mules. In the stern of the boat there was a stable in which were kept two extra teams of mules. The boats

travelled twenty-four hours a day. Shift of teamsters and mules was made every six hours.

The trip to Troy from Buffalo was about three hundred and forty miles. We covered about three miles an hour. The entire trip took from a week to ten days. Steersmen were at the wheel constantly. The wheel controlled the tiller at the back of the scow which directed its course.

The mules traveled on the north side or bank. This was known as the towpath. There was another narrower path on the opposite bank. It was called the heel path.

Father's two scows were about one third the size of a present day barge. They were fastened together, one behind the other.

It was a temptation to jump from the first on which we lived to the second. Strict discipline and tragic stories of what had happened to little ones who had tried to jump, kept my brother and me from such a venture.

However, my brother did fall into the water one day. It was during a rainstorm and the deck was quite slippery. In he went yellow slicker, boots, and all. He was followed into the water by one of father's loyal steersman who soon had him safe and mother soon had him dry again.

The bridge which led up from the in the hole to the bank was narrow, steep and often slippery. Mules were ordinarily surefooted but sometimes they didn't negotiate the trip. There was no way to save them once they were in the canal. I remember that the

sight of dead mules floating in the canal was not too rare a sight.

Of course it was inevitable that two scows going in opposite directions, would meet. In order for these scows to pass, the boat on the side farther away from the towpath would have to let down the rope or hawser slack enough for the near boat to pass over the rope. It was always a tense time for sometimes the passing boat caught the tow rope and tore it loose. This was serious and was bound to bring recriminations from the injured boatman. Without delay the rope was spliced and the boat was on its way.

You can see that knowledge of the method of splicing ropes was important. This was the reason why in the early years of our lives my brother and I learned to splice ropes. We spent many happy, busy hours at this activity.

Days passed pleasantly and without much excitement for a preschool child. One of the pleasant breaks in routine came when the scows arrived at one of the regular canal stores. Here mother would stock up on supplies that she needed to serve twelve to fourteen people three meals a day.

Meals were served at two sittings. Steersmen and drivers were the first at the table. The family was served at the second table. First table was served at six, noon, and six. Mother had quite a reputation as a cook. She enjoyed baking for the men and often served the drivers special pies. The

men loved her pies. Father would joke with them, telling them that too much pie would make them have sore feet. The drivers walked miles every day behind the mules. Their feet were always tender and sore so father's teasing didn't bother them.

When we arrived at Albany we joined other scows to continue the trip down the Hudson. Scows lined up nine boats wide and ten boats long. In this formation two side wheelers would tow the boats down the Hudson to New York City.

This part of the trip stands out as a highlight. It was breathtakingly beautiful. The lovely forest covered palisades seemed to be closing in on either side. There were joyful times when we approached villages or cities and little "bung boats" brought out to the scows, candy, icecream, bread and other staples and luxuries.

They were little boat stores and they were fascinating to little boys and girls.

On about the third morning we arrived at the harbor of the city. Tugboats joined us here and towed the scows to slips or piers where great liners waited to take our cargo of grain and reload the scows for the return trip.

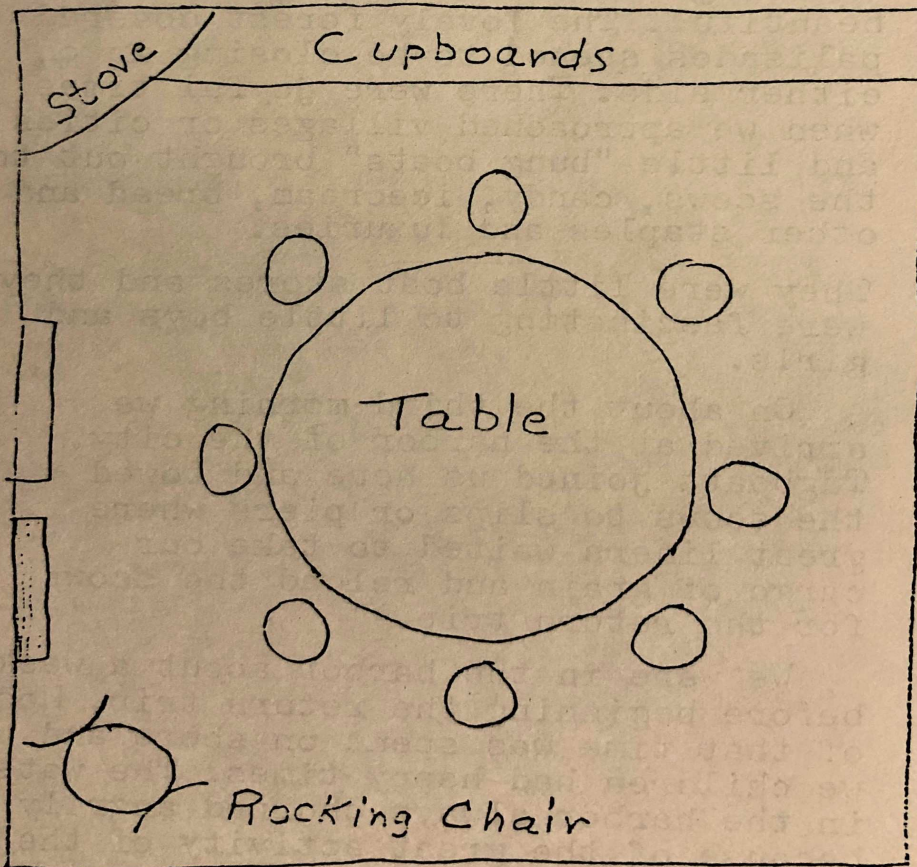
We were in the harbor about a week before beginning the return trip. Most of that time was spent on shore and we children had happy times. The water in the harbor always churned angrily because of the great activity of the

"Life on the Erie Canal 1884-1905" cont.

boats. This made mother quite seasick and she was always glad to take us ashore. We shopped, saw shows and went to Coney Island. Many pleasant hours were spent visising the parks and the great liners.

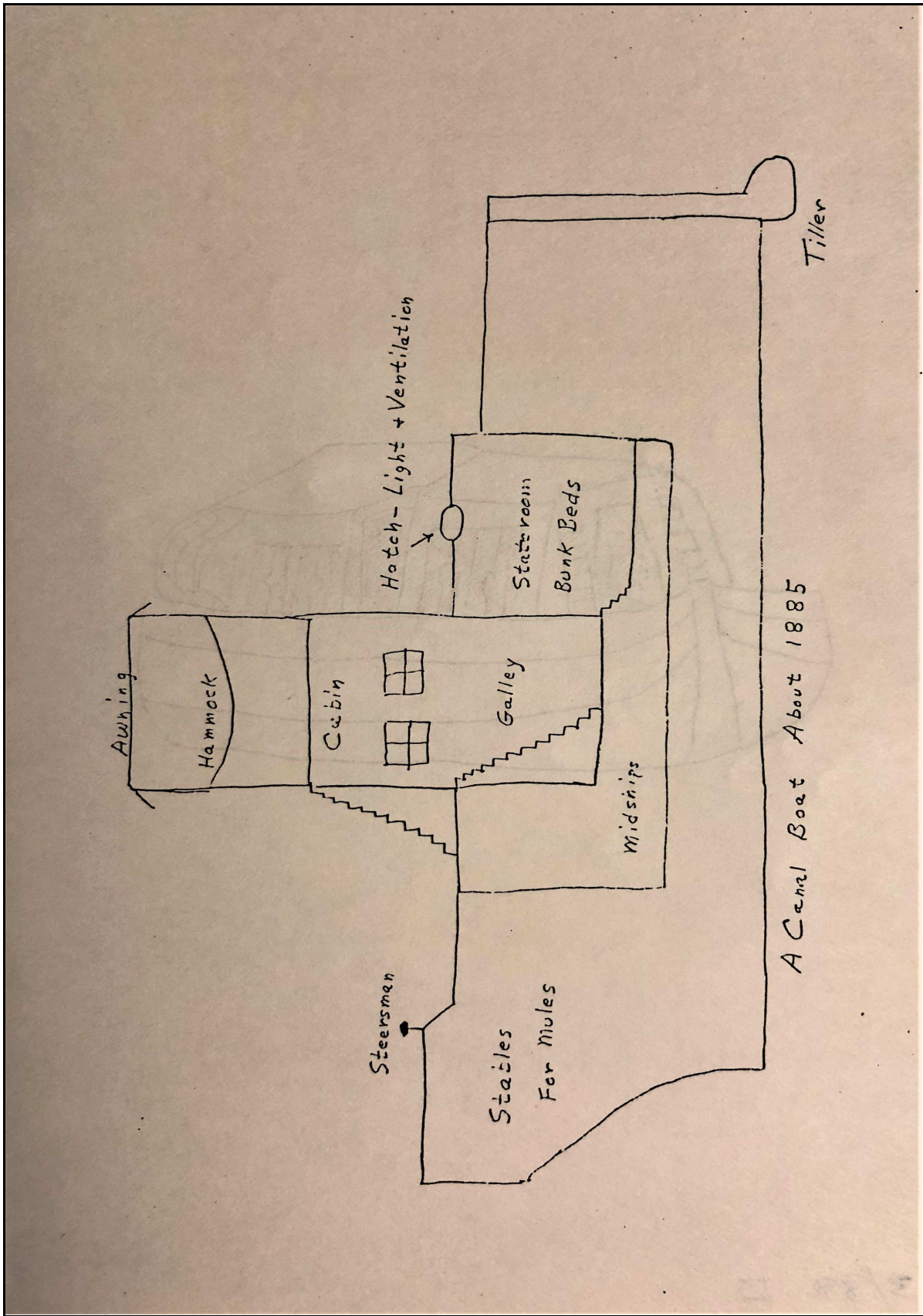
When father had finished business transactions and the scows were loaded for the return trip, we were towed back to the Hudson. There the trip began in reverse.

We were on the scows from April first to December first. During the winter the boats were tied in dry dock. Father's boats were named the Jesse Odeker and Joseph Brant.

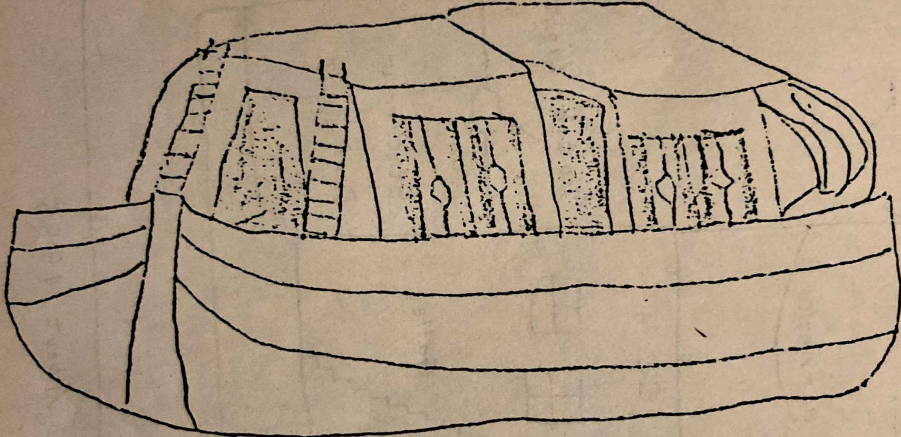


Cabin Floor Plan

"Life on the Erie Canal 1884-1905" cont.



"Life on the Erie Canal 1884-1905" cont.



3/88 B

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

FAMILY (\$20.00/YR)
INDIVIDUAL (\$15.00/YR)

MEMBERSHIP DUES: _____

ADDITIONAL DONATION: _____

TOTAL AMOUNT: _____

MAKE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO: MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SEND COMPLETED APPLICATION AND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ATTN: MEMBERSHIP CHAIR
406 WEST AVENUE
MEDINA, NY 14103



MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Officers 2021

President: Reinhard Rogowski
Vice President/Treasurer: Craig Lacy
Secretary: Shane Sia
Membership: Gail Miller
Newsletter: Georgia Thomas

Other Board Members

Catherine Cooper
Barb Filipiak
Cindy Robinson
Kay VanNostrand

UPCOMING EVENTS

**No in-person events scheduled due to
COVID-19**

**The Board is considering options like
outdoor meetings when the weather
warms up, video lectures, etc.**

Thanks to Craig Lacy
for providing the article in this issue!

Historical Society website
www.HistoricMedina.org