

DANVILLE HISTORY

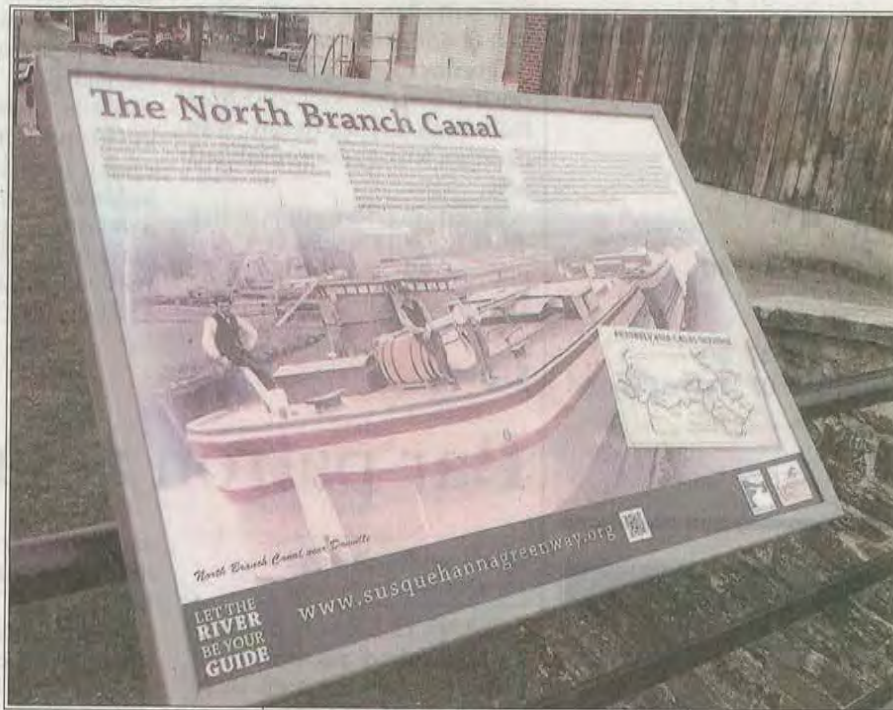


Photo by Eric Pehowic/The Danville News

This interpretive sign at Canal Park is one of three in Danville through which people can learn about the borough's rich and colorful history. Story and more signs on Page A3.

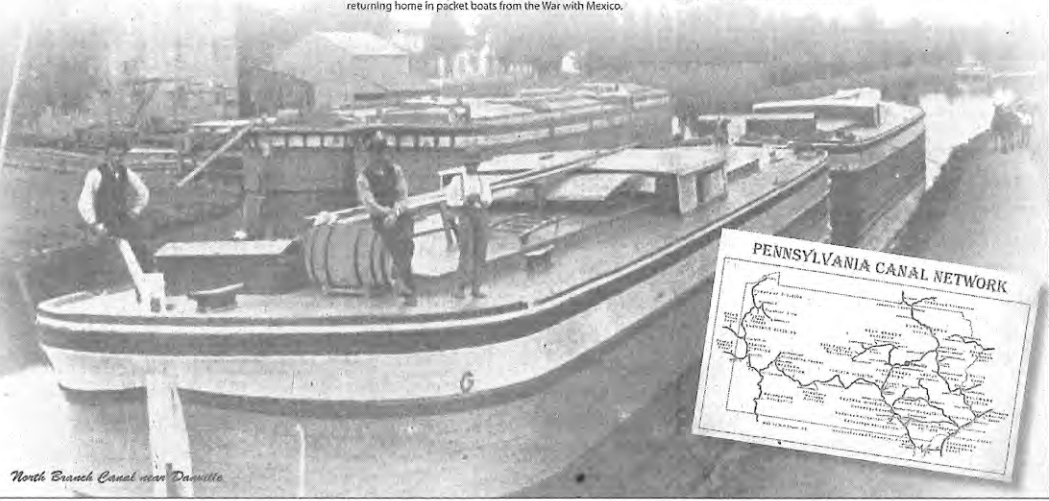
News

The North Branch Canal

In 1826 Daniel Montgomery, for whom the town of Danville was named, was elected president of the Board of Canal Commissioners. The North Branch Canal was surveyed in 1826-27, with construction of the canal between Northumberland and Nanticoke beginning in 1828. The first water was turned in during 1837 opening up a new transportation corridor.

At Danville the canal veered away from its normal place along the river to the center of town close to where the Montgomery family had mills. At one time Mill Street merchants advertised their business as north or south of the canal. Both cargo and packet boats, which had sleeping and dining accommodations, traveled the canal attracting local residents and visitors to the dock with the sounding of a conch horn announcing their arrival. In 1849 more than 5,000 people greeted the troops returning home in packet boats from the War with Mexico.

The use of anthracite coal in the iron furnaces in Montour County and the rolling of the first T Rail for building railroads at The Montour Iron Works on October 8, 1845, contributed significantly to the success of the North Branch Canal. Thousands of tons of coal were shipped from the Wyoming coalfields to produce the rails, which in turn were shipped to markets by canal boats pulled by mules traveling at 4 miles per hour. Ironically, as railroads were built, they became the preferred method of transportation, leading to the demise of the canal system.



North Branch Canal near Danville

Photos provided

New signs, above and below, that depict various historic stories and landmarks can be seen at three different locations throughout the Danville area.

Bridging the River at Danville

Until 1829 when a covered toll bridge was built across the river between Danville and Riverside (South Danville), travelers relied mainly upon ferry boats to reach the opposite shore. Unfortunately, floods and ice jams have taken their toll on Danville's bridges over the years.

That first wooden bridge was destroyed in a flood in 1846. A second bridge was erected the following year and was lost to a flood in 1875. Below is a photo of the remains of the third bridge that was destroyed in the spring of 1904.

The large background photo shown here is of the fourth bridge made of iron and steel. Located just east of the park where you are currently standing was the landing for the fourth bridge, which was a local landmark and gathering place. It was a source of community pride and withstood many floods for nearly a century, finally being replaced in 2000 by the concrete bridge just one block down river from this location.

The historic lampposts you see here in the park today were manufactured at Danville Foundry and Machine Company and originally placed in Memorial Park on Bloom Street in 1909. They were rescued by Paul "Cal" McVey, a local merchant, when removed from that park in the 1950s. They were donated in 2007 to the development of the new Riverfront Park by his daughter and son-in-law JoAnn and Bill O'Brien. Metsa Minerals, a descendent of Danville Foundry and Machine Company, financed the re-furbishing of the lampposts.



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The Hard Coal Navy

The process of dredging coal on the Susquehanna between Danville and Sunbury started as early as the 1890s and continued to the 1950s.

A fleet of battered steamboats and barges known as the Hard Coal Navy worked the waters of the North Branch. These boats and their industrious captains dredged up coal from the river bottom, waste that had washed down from the anthracite coal fields of the Wyoming Valley.

This was a seasonal industry, and at the height of the season there would be as many as 200 barges dredging the river from Nanticoke to Harrisburg. The coal was sold to utilities, industries and schools.



In 1919 and 1920 over 2,000,000 tons of river coal was harvested each year.

Captain Bill Prentiss

Barges, residents, & coal dredgers on the Susquehanna

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HISTORY

Signs help tell Danville's tale

By Karen Blackledge
The Danville News

DANVILLE — Newcomers and long-time residents alike can learn about Danville's rich and colorful history from three new interpretive signs throughout the borough.

The signs show Danville's relationship to the Susquehanna River. They have been erected at Canal Park, Montgomery Park and Riverfront Park. They depict the canal, coal dredging and the history of the Danville-Riverside Bridge.

"I wanted to start a project of interpretive signs around Danville," Danville historian Sis Hause said Tuesday. "How many people pass Canal Park every single day and don't realize it's a major part of Pennsylvania history."

Hause and representatives from SEDA-COG met on several occasions to discuss the signs, financed by a grant from the Montour County Commissioners Tourism Fund and administered by the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau.

The signs are aimed at promoting heritage and tourism, said Trish Carothers, program director of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

"We tried to place them in real visible areas and hopefully some day there will be other signs in historical areas in not quite as visible areas," Hause said.

Hause provided the photos and information for the signs.

"We produced these signs to tell just a few of the stories of how Danville has prospered by the Susquehanna and how the river and borough have influenced each other," Carothers said.

Planning for the project began several months ago. The signs were installed recently.

NORTH BRANCH CANAL

At Canal Park on Mill Street, the sign features the North Branch Canal.

In Danville, the canal veered away from its usual place along the river to the center of town close to where the Montgomery family had mills, according to the sign. At one time, Mill Street merchants advertised their business as

"We produced these signs to tell just a few of the stories of how Danville has prospered by the Susquehanna and how the river and borough have influenced each other."

— Sis Hause,
Danville historian

north or south of the canal. Both cargo and packet boats, which had sleeping and dining accommodations, traveled the canal attracting people and visitors to the dock through the sounding of a conch horn announcing the boat's arrival. More than 5,000 people greeted troops returning home in packet boats from the war with Mexico in 1849.

HARD COAL NAVY

At Montgomery Park, what was known as the Hard Coal Navy is depicted. The navy dredged coal on the river between Danville and Sunbury with operations beginning in the 1890s and continuing until the 1950s. Battered steamboats and barges dredged coal, washed from the anthracite coal fields of the Wyoming Valley, from the river bottom. At the height of the seasonal industry, as many as 200 barges dredged the river from Nanticoke to Harrisburg. The coal was sold to schools, industries and utilities, according to the sign.

RIVER BRIDGE

The Riverfront Park sign depicts the span linking Danville and Riverside. A toll bridge was built in 1829. Before that, ferry boats were used. The first wooden bridge was destroyed in a flood in 1846. A second bridge was built the following year and was destroyed by flooding in 1875. A third bridge was destroyed in 1904.

A fourth bridge, of iron and steel, stood nearly 100 years and is pictured on the sign. It was replaced by the current concrete bridge that opened in 2000.

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