

Replica canal boat proves seaworthy at launch in Lockport

By Thomas J. Prohaska

The Erie Traveler, a replica Erie Canal boat [built over the past seven months by volunteers](#), was hoisted into the locks of Lockport Thursday.

"We discovered the bilges are dusty. That means it's not leaking a drop," said Roger Allen, retired executive director of the Buffalo Maritime Center, where the boat was built.

He clambered aboard and opened the hatch after a crane placed the boat into the water.

The Maritime Center had hoped to test the boat's seaworthiness in Buffalo Harbor before trucking it to Lockport, but the boat wasn't completed until Tuesday, so that couldn't be arranged.

Roger Allen talks about the Erie Traveler, a replica of a 19th century Erie Canal cargo boat a Durham Boat that was put in historic locks
[pic.twitter.com/xt0Wcko00P](https://twitter.com/xt0Wcko00P)

— John Hickey (@jhickeyBN) [May 11, 2017](#)

The boat is meant to serve as part of the City of Lockport's continuing effort to turn its 19th century canal locks into a tourist attraction.

"It's just a beautiful boat. I think it's amazing that we have a replica of what was in the canal 150 years ago," Lockport Mayor Anne E. McCaffrey said.

After the boat was placed in Lock 69, 18 of the roughly 40 volunteers who

built it climbed aboard for photos.

"It's kind of a bittersweet ending," said Marc Frys of North Tonawanda, one of the boat builders. "I met a lot of great people."

"That's the big part, the friendships you made," said Phil Cummings of Lockport. "Now it's over, and what do you do next?"

A crew from Hohl Industrial Services of Tonawanda trucked the boat to Lockport and used a crane to move the 9,200-pound craft from the flatbed trailer to the water.

The Erie Traveler, a replica of 19th century Erie Canal cargo boat, hoisted into the original canal locks by a crane moving it from truck
pic.twitter.com/LU98mqw2FZ

— John Hickey (@jhickeyBN) [May 11, 2017](#)

That was the weight measured on the crane. The 51.5-foot-long boat had been estimated to weigh eight tons.

"We figure (the lumber) dried out a lot," Allen said.

The boat, which is seven feet wide, was made of pressure-treated yellow pine. It is expected to absorb water and seal the spaces between the planks even tighter. The waterproofing spread on the exterior eventually will turn black, Allen said.

Moving the boat was a tricky project, as the staging area was beneath the Pine Street bridge. The boat was backed away from the bridge, but the crane crew had to avoid a power line to the Canal Museum and rotate the boat 180 degrees so it would face west, the historically accurate direction for the site.

"I know there's so much blood, sweat and tears that went into the boat, we wanted to make sure it got in there safe and sound," said Waylon Edmister, the project manager for Hohl.

The boat was placed in the Flight of Five, as the original 19th century canal locks are called. On Saturday mornings during the summer, it will be used to demonstrate how the locks worked nearly two centuries ago. Volunteers open the lock gates to let water in and out, and will move the boat up and down from one lock to another, as their predecessors did for nearly a century after the canal opened in 1825.

Two of the five stairstep locks have been restored to working condition in the past four years, and money is on hand to restore a third later this year, said David R. Kinyon, president of the Lockport Locks District Heritage Corp. He hopes to restore all five eventually.

The vessel is called a Durham boat and depicts the type of cargo boat used on the canal in the early 19th century.

"It's as accurate as we can possibly get from the documentation," Allen said.

About 40 volunteers worked on the project, which was funded by a \$30,000 grant from Yahoo.

The boat will be dedicated at a ceremony at the locks at 5 p.m. Saturday, Kinyon said.

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