



BLACKSTONE
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BLACKSTONE CANAL CURRICULUM
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Why did the Blackstone Canal fail?

The Blackstone Canal was only in operation for twenty years. Many factors contributed to the closure of the canal at such a young age. By the time it was built, the height of the canal era in America had already passed. New modes of transportation began replacing the canals, which were unreliable and sometimes unusable. The design of the canal also contributed to its closure.

The canal was built using slack-water engineering. Instead of digging a separate trench for the entire route of the canal, the engineers used the Blackstone River for several sections of the canal. This made the building of the canal cheaper and quicker. However, it also set up disagreements between the Blackstone Canal Company and the various mill owners along the Blackstone River over water rights. They argued over how much water the canal was using. Mill owners needed the water to turn their waterwheels and run their mills; the Canal Company used the water to raise and lower boats in the canal locks. Eventually, mill owners sued the Blackstone Canal Company and won; the settlement forced the company to near bankruptcy.

Navigation of the canal was sometimes difficult, if not impossible because it did not have its own trench. In the spring, the river would nearly flood its banks with fast-flowing water, making navigation extremely dangerous. In the summer months, when there was little rain, the river would dry up from the drought so there would not be enough water to float the canal boats. In times of drought, the mill owners became even

angrier with the Canal Company and its use of the river water. Lastly, in the harsh New England winter, the canal was forced to close when it froze over.

The success of the canal made the merchants of Boston jealous of the trade that was being conducted through Worcester. They quickly began looking for a way to bring central Massachusetts' trade back to Boston. A Boston-to-Worcester canal was proposed, but it was too expensive; the answer was the railroad. The Boston & Worcester Railroad began operation on July 4, 1835 and the first run of the Providence & Worcester Railroad was on October 25, 1847. These two events soon led to the end of the canal. The last toll was collected on November 9, 1848 and the Blackstone Canal Company closed soon after. The Company sold off its property, including lock stones and the towpath to pay off its debt. The Canal itself was abandoned and in places like Worcester, it was eventually buried and became part of the city's sewer system.

Time line: 1828-1848

- 1828: Blackstone Canal opens
- 1830: Baltimore & Ohio Railroad opens, first in the U.S.
- 1830: Population of Worcester: 4,172
- 1835: Boston & Worcester Railroad opens
Population of Worcester: 6,624
- 1840: Population of Worcester: 7,497
- 1845: Population of Worcester: 11,556
- 1847: Providence & Worcester Railroad opens
- 1848: Blackstone Canal closes
Worcester incorporated as a city
Population of Worcester: 17,049



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Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

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Reading Questions

1. The Blackstone Canal was only in operation for _____ years.
2. The Canal was built using _____ ,
which made it _____ and _____ to build.
3. Who sued the Blackstone Canal Company?

4. What is one reason that made using the Blackstone River as part of the Canal
made navigation of the Canal difficult? _____

5. The first run of the _____ was on October 25, 1847.



The Blackstone Canal goes Underground
Placing the Blackstone Canal underground began in 1849 and was the longest-lasting project in Worcester history. The construction on Green Street dates from about 1900.

From the collections of Worcester Historical Museum