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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A century and a quarter after abandonment, this remnant of an impressive civil engineering work is remarkably well preserved and stands as a monument to the care and construction skill of its builders. The familiar red sandstone or brownstone of central Connecticut, squared into random-sized blocks, forms the walls of the canal lock and in general remains as firmly in place as when first laid. Pockets in the side walls near each end formerly housed the lock gates when these were opened to receive or discharge a canal boat. Since the gates were of wood, all trace of them has long since disappeared, as has the iron hardware on which they were hung. Studs or bolts, however, which once held the gate hinges can be seen protruding from the capstones of the sidewalls, and it is evidence of the quality of metal used in them that the threads are still in good enough condition to accept a nut of proper size.

The lock is about twelve feet in width, the same in depth, and is of a length between gate positions to accommodate the average eighty-five feet length of the old canal boats. Natural drainage keeps some water in it at all times of the year. Except for the missing gates, a century of weathering, and overgrowth of vegetation, the installation presents much of the appearance it must have had during the twenty years of its active life. On the east side stands the former lock-keeper's house, now the private residence of the property owner. Just north of the lock an earth fill has been placed in the canal for an access road to the house, but north of this the earth-banked canal itself extends for about threetenths of a mile, containing water and showing on the west bank the old tow path, now an entrance road to the property.

Comparatively little of the masonry components of the Farmington Canal has escaped destruction by flood or by intentional demolition such as overtook the piers of the aqueduct over the Farmington River farther to the north in the town of Avon. These were demolished by the Corps of Engineers after the flood of 1955. The Cheshire lock is the best-preserved relic of the canal era in this State known at present to the Historical Commission. It is also an historical record of the principal cause of failure of the enterprize. At the south end a masonry arch spans the canal, built to accommodate a parallel railroad line. The stonework in this forms an interesting comparison and contrast to that of the canal, into which it is skillfully incorporated, and since it crosses the waterway at an angle, the skew construction of the arch proper is a notable achievement. The coming of the railroads rendered canal-building obsolete as a primary transportation method.

JAN 23

PERIOD (Check One or More as	Appropriate)		
Pre-Columbian	16th Century	18th Century	20th Century
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SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicab	le and Known)		
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Architecture	Landscape	Sculpture	
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Communications	Military	Theater	
Conservation	Music	Transportation	

Connecticut shared to some extent in the canal-building mania which swept over the country during the second quarter of the nineteenth century but, with one exception the projects were small in size, and none of them permanently benefited the cause of navigation.

Between 1822 and 1829 five canal companies were incorporated, four of which accomplished little, but the remaining one embarked upon such an extensive scheme for inland navigation that it deserves more than The Farmington Canal Company, chartered in 1822 passing attention. was authorized to accumulate capital sufficient to complete a waterway from New Haven northward to the Massachusetts line, in the town of Southwick, from which point a Massachusetts company was to extend the canal into Northampton. It was hoped that this waterway could afford cheap transportation facilities to the agricultural towns that were not within easy reach of the Connecticut River. The company was made subject to state control through a commission of six members, appointed by the legislature, with power to fix tolls and supervise the canal for the benefit of the general public. The necessary capital was raised largely by private subscription, although the assembly lent some assistance by diverting to the company's treasury several cash bonuses collected from newly incorporated banks. Farmington canal stock was also made exempt from taxation until the annual profits of the company exceeded six per cent of the outstanding capital. But tax exemption and the subsidies did not insure permanent success. Funds from the original sale of stock were exhausted in 1827, before any part of the canal was ready for operation, and to save the company from an early death, the subscribers who had not paid for their shares in full had to be forced, first by argument and then by threat of legal action, to fulfill their pledges. Finally in June, 1828, a section of the canal, extending from New Haven to Farmington, was opened to traffic. Inauguration ceremonies were held in the latter town; a freight barge was launched with appropriate speeches, while the spectators refreshed themselves with crackers and cheese, lemonade and wine.

The remaining sections of the canal were completed within a short time, and for seven or eight years the company enjoyed a fairly regular volume of business, the income from which averaged 375, 00 per annum, but expenses of maintenance were so heavy that there was no profit. The canal banks were injured by spring freshets, by heavy rains, and occasionally by the acts of malicious persons. In 1836 a financial reorganization took place, after which a new company, called the New Haven and Northampton, announced

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Mo	Morse, Jarvis Means. <u>A Neglected Period of Connecticut's History: 1818-1850</u> . Yale University Press, New Haven. 1933.									
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T	Date 18 January, 1973					Date <u>2.14.73</u>				

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

#8 Significance

the sale of additional stock to the amount of \$300,000. The new shares were offered at a par value of twenty-five dollars, so that purchases could be made by investors of moderate means, but the project was doomed from the start by the advent of railroads. Canal traffic fell off almost daily until, in 1846, the company abandoned the old enterprise altogether, and secured a new charter which authorized the construction of a railroad along the route of the former waterway.

When the canal company ceased operations it had little to show for a total expenditure of nearly two million dollars; its property was heavily mortgaged and was, physically, of small value to any creditor, since who, inquired the Courant, wanted a mile of canal in payment of his debt? Tradition related that the company had paid but one dividend, and that on an occasion when some of the directors cut grass on the towpath and divided the hay! Yet to some inland towns, such as Bristol and Avon, the canal had brought facilities for transportation that were only slightly improved by the railways of later years. Even when the clumsy barges were taken away and the water was let out of the channel, the canal conferred upon its successor, the Northampton Railroad, two distinct benefits---a complete right-of-way, and graded banks which could be used as a roadbed, thus saving about a third of ordinary construction costs.



