

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 29 1977

DATE ENTERED AUG 26 1977

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Portage Canal

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Between Fox & Wisconsin rivers (see appended maps) NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Portage

VICINITY OF

2nd

STATE

Wisconsin

CODE

55

COUNTY

Columbia

CODE

021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

 DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

 PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

 IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

 OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

 YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO

PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER: None**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY** Note: Ownership of right-of-way in dispute and not fully determinable at time of nomination

NAME

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources & Multiple Private

STREET & NUMBER

4610 University Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Madison

VICINITY OF

STATE

Wisconsin 53705

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Columbia County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

717 East Cook Street

CITY, TOWN

Portage

STATE

Wisconsin 53901

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Wisconsin Survey of Historic Buildings and Sites

DATE

March 13, 1973

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

CITY, TOWN

Madison

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Portage Canal and its right-of-way comprise some 36.07 acres. The canal, which connects the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, is 11,200 feet long (or 2.12 miles) and its right-of-way on either side varies from 60 feet to 95 feet. The canal has both a rural and urban environment divided by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad bridge. The northeasterly section is lined with overhanging trees and takes on a pastoral setting, while the southern part runs through the heart of the city of Portage. Both sides of the canal were built with a timber and pile revetment and it was to be 75 feet wide and 7 feet deep. Presently the water level of the canal is 783 feet M.S.L.

The northern section of the canal is crossed by one highway bridge (State Highway 33) while the southern section is crossed by two city streets, Adams and Wisconsin.

Two locks were built. The Ft. Winnebago (Fox River) and the Wisconsin River lock were originally to be 160 feet long and 35 feet wide. The Ft. Winnebago Lock lies in ruins while the other one is said to be in an "excellent state of repair."¹ The current Wisconsin Lock, "a fairly modern structure" (date unknown), has a net length of 146 feet and net width of 35.2 feet.²

At present there is no current in the water. The entire length of the canal could be navigated by nothing larger than a canoe except where Adams Street crosses. At this point the canal is filled, not actually bridged, and the only opening for water is a pipe imbedded in the fill.

The Wisconsin River served as the canal's main source of water supply.

1, 2

Historic Portage: A Study of the Feasibility and Implementation of Developing the Historic and Related Resources of the Portage Area as a Part of the South Central Wisconsin Region, Frank and Stein Associates, Incorporated, Lansing, Michigan, 1968, 8, 10.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1835, 1851 & 1876 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Conro, Starke & Co., Milwaukee; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significant factor about the Portage Canal is that it was intended to be one of Wisconsin's major water routes, linking the West to the Eastern markets and population centers. Its historic importance lies in its close association with the old Portage trail, once traversed by Indians, French fur traders and British soldiers.

During Wisconsin's territorial days, influential politicians, businessmen, and land speculators like James Duane Doty, Daniel Whitney and Morgan L. Martin saw what the economic and commercial potential of a canal at Portage would mean to Wisconsin, the Portage area, and to themselves. When talk first began about building such a canal, the fur trade and the lead industry were becoming the major causes for the steady increase in Wisconsin's population.

The first attempts at building the canal came in 1835 when the newly organized Portage Canal Company financed a large work force that managed to dig a ditch deep enough to accommodate only canoes. During the next two decades, after subsequent attempts and failures by both private interests and the state government, a navigable canal was completed to the extent that, in 1856, a small steamer made the voyage from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi via the Ohio, then up the Mississippi and the Wisconsin, through the new canal, and down the Fox to Green Bay. In reality, however, the canal was never a success, and the coming of the railroad, which reached the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien by 1857, outmoded the canal as a means of transportation. In 1872 the federal government took over the canal and completed construction by June, 1876. It refused to take over water rights, however.

The federal government retained control but closed the upper reaches of the Fox River to navigation in 1951. In 1958 it turned the canal over to the Wisconsin Conservation Department (now the Department of Natural Resources). Though never a success, the Portage Canal is a visible reminder of an interesting and important chapter in Wisconsin's transportation history.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Alexander, Edward P. "Canals of Wisconsin," Wisconsin Journal of Education, 78:125-128, Milwaukee, November, 1945.

Butterfield, C.W. History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1880, 499-1095.

Kanetzke, Howard. "Wisconsin Canals, : The 30th Star, 8:14-16, Madison, September, 1962.

Nesbit, Robert C. Wisconsin: A History, Madison, 1973, 203.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 36.07

UTM REFERENCES

A	16	30	34	75	48	26	02	5	B	16	30	27	25	48	23	67	5
	ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING					ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING			
C	16	30	06	75	48	23	07	5	D								

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Bounded roughly on the north by the Fox River, on the south by the Wisconsin River, and on the east and west, respectively, by the limits of the Portage Canal right-of-way.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Allan T. Heninger, Planning Analyst, Historic Preservation Office

ORGANIZATION

DATE

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

5/1/75

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

816 State Street

608/267-2970

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Madison

Wisconsin 53706

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

SHPO Signature

Richard Henning

TITLE

Acting Director,

Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

4/25/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CULTURAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

8/26/77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8.23.77

