

"The Middlesex canal, uniting the waters of [the Merrimack River] with the harbor of Boston, is however the greatest work of the kind which has been completed in the United States." *Report on Public Roads and Canals* by the US Secretary of the Treasury to Congress, April 4, 1808. Retrieved from the internet, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2046>.

The visitor center is on the bank of the canal and of the Concord River summit pond, the highest point of the canal. A mile of the walkable Thoreau Towpath begins at the visitor center. Rte. 3 already has signs directing visitors to the center, less than twenty minutes away. The new center will have signs on I-495, less than fifteen minutes away. Aside from those visiting the greatest -, approximately 10% are from out-of-state visiting the greatest, this past Covid-19 December, visitors were from San Diego and Pennsylvania --, the attraction is a riverfront park on Thoreau's Concord River with public rest rooms and dog walk. I-95 is a major north-south route with no rest areas.

In the Canal Visitor Center (4,800 sq. ft.) - open weekends, noon - 4

- Carpeted children's play area with a model canal through it

- An operable model lock with flowing water

- Scavenger hunt

- The love story of Jabez and Rebecca with Barton's two contemporaneous paintings

- History and artifacts of the canal

- Middlesex canal park, gift of land and easements

- First railroad in the United States with 2' gauge

- Billerica Mills Historic District

Brief description of canal

Incorporated in 1793 with John Hancock as the first proprietor, the canal connected the Merrimack River at Lowell with the Charles River at Boston by a ditch 3½' deep, 30' wide, 27 miles long with eight aqueducts, twenty locks, and fifty bridges. It was the greatest work of its kind in the US until the Erie Canal, and its low-cost transportation of thousands of bales of cotton along with waterpower was the basis for the cotton mills of Lowell, Nashua, and Manchester. The canal operated for 50 years, until the one horsepower canal boat quickly lost to a new competitor, the 30 horsepower steam locomotive.

Lowell National Historical Park has a committee preparing for Lowell's bicentennial celebration. The Middlesex Canal Association is a major celebrant.