

## **National Canal Museum**

30 Centre Square  
Easton, PA 18042

<http://www.canals.org>

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### **Lehigh Navigation System**

The Lehigh Navigation System transported anthracite coal from what is now Carbon County, Pennsylvania to Easton. It served as a catalyst for the birth of the American Industrial Revolution. The Lehigh Navigation System's Lower Division was completed in 1829 by the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. Under the leadership of Josiah White and Erskine Hazard, the Company had developed one of America's earliest successful integrated corporations and the construction of the Lehigh Navigation system was one of its greatest achievements. From its northern terminus of Mauch Chunk (modern Jim Thorpe), the Lehigh Navigation System 'stretched' 46 miles south to Easton. It employed a total of 64 locks, and 8 dams with an elevation change of 353 feet in 46 miles.

The Lehigh Navigation system also combined slackwater pools in the river and separate canal sections. At Easton, the Lehigh Navigation system joined with the Delaware Canal and the Morris Canal. At its peak in 1855, the Lehigh Navigation System carried over a million tons of anthracite coal. Other significant cargoes included lumber, iron ore and cement. Between the years 1840 and 1875, the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company made this area the most productive ironmaking region in America. During these years there were over 14 large scale anthracite fueled iron furnace complexes located along or near the Lehigh Navigation System.

In 1862, the Lehigh Navigation System was destroyed by a flood. Its 1838 northern extension which ran from Mauch Chunk to White Haven was abandoned and only the section between Mauch Chunk and Easton was rebuilt. Competition from railroads, such as the Lehigh Valley and the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company's own Lehigh and Susquehanna (later the Central Railroad of New Jersey) decreased its traffic and revenues. However, the Lehigh Navigation System remained in operation until 1932, while mule drawn freight boats remained active on portions of it for another decade making the Lehigh Navigation System the last towpath canal to operate in America.