**How the Erie Canal Changed America**

The Erie Canal was completed in 1825. It stretched across New York State from the Hudson River in Albany to Lake Erie in Buffalo. Right away the canal proved to be a success. It changed the future of New York and the entire United States.

Affects on New York City ****

Mules walk down a towpath to pull a barge along the Erie Canal.

When it opened, the Erie Canal lowered the cost of transporting goods from New York to the Midwest from $100 a ton to less than $6 a ton. The canal also cut down the time it took to ship the goods by a third. This greatly increased trade for New York City businesses.

Many people used the canal to move to upstate New York and points farther west. This opened up new markets for New York City businesses. Cities along the canal route also grew. People using the canal needed food, places to stay, and other sup­plies during their trip, and new businesses sprang up to meet these needs

The canal also created easy access for European businesses wanting to reach the Midwest. Until the Erie Canal was built, New Orleans was the only port city with an all-water route to the Midwest. However, New York City, which was closer to Europe, soon became the main inter­national gateway to the Midwest. This helped it become the commercial capital of the nation.

Affects on the United States

As more people moved from the East to the West, strong ties developed between the regions. Not only did they transport goods to each other, but they could also communicate much more easily. This helped keep the growing nation strong.

The East began to rely on the West more and more for food and goods that came from farms. Merchants in the East also profited from exporting these goods to Europe. While the South focused on large-scale crops like cotton, the small farms of the Midwest became the nation’s food-growing center.

Also, before the canal was constructed, the few settlers living in the Midwest were mostly from the South. After construction, Northerners (from the East Coast states) became the Midwest’s main population. They began to affect the poli­tics and culture of this region. For example, many Northerners felt that slavery should not be brought into the Northwest Territory. When the Civil War broke out, the Midwest became a battle­ground over slavery.

Some historians have even suggested that the Civil War may have ended differently without the construction of the Erie Canal. Because of the canal, Northern states grew richer from trade than those in the South. This gave the North an advantage because it had more resources to sup­port its army and the people at home during war.

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