

[date]

Dear [*contact person*] :

We are writing to the [*organization*] to invite you to participate in the **2025 Bicentennial of the Schuylkill Navigation**, a.k.a. the Schuylkill Canal.

If you are interested, please reply to this email, and/or request to join our Google Group for brainstorming (20+ members), and/or join the Schuylkill Navigation Facebook Group (1100+ members) to learn more about the history and current uses of the waterway.

Background:

This pioneering 108-mile slackwater-canal system was chartered in 1815 by the private Schuylkill Navigation Company, based in Philadelphia. The work to access the coal regions of Schuylkill County began in 1816, and the Upper and Lower sections were finally connected through Reading on **May 20, 1825**.

Plans:

We are developing a symposium and tours **May 17-20, 2025**, originating at the **Hiester Canal Center at the Berks County Heritage Center** in Reading. Also confirmed:

- Rail-Canal excursion on the Reading Blue Mountain & Northern line, Reading to Pottsville, April 5, 2025
- New history markers at canal sites in Port Clinton, Spring City, and King of Prussia.
- Walking tours of stone locks on private property
- Lock 27 cleanup
- open houses at Leesport Lock House, Lock 60, Spring-Ford Area Historical Society, etc.
- Updates on resource pages on <https://waterhistoryphl.org/> (Philadelphia Water Department Historical Collection)

Events can take place anytime throughout the year 2025, with a focus on Spring, anywhere along the Navigation. Because the system was a slackwater-canal navigation, the Schuylkill River itself is a canal site. The Schuylkill River Trail sometimes follows the historic towpaths.

You may know that the Erie Canal is also celebrating its 200th in 2025, including the World Canals Conference in Buffalo in September 2025. We can't compete with the scope of that effort, but we can at least be first – because we were first! The Erie's opening date wasn't till October.

This is our opportunity to alert history buffs, recreational trail and river users, and residents of 50 canal towns that the Schuylkill Valley was home to the first and longest anthracite-carrying canal system in America. We have many more canal and lock sites to visit than most people realize, supplementing two very popular watered sections, the Oakes Canal and the Manayunk Canal. The Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail pass

by numerous Navigation locks, dam sites, and aqueducts. At least ten Schuylkill River towns have or had Canal Streets; others have Lock Streets or Coal Streets. In many small settlements such as Frick's Locks, the canal itself was the main street.

Including yours, there are numerous historical societies, parks, trails, and canal-oriented sites up and down the Navigation, from Schuylkill County at the Head of Navigation to the Fairmount Water Works and Fairmount Dam and Canal in Philadelphia. We hope everyone wants to do something!

Activities could include:

- a Schuylkill Navigation theme at an existing annual event
- special tours at your park or history site
- an open house or exhibit at your facility with a special focus on the Navigation (Saturday May 17 will be a possible coordinated Canalers Open House Day)
- a creative, scholarly, or recreational project generated by your organization or school
- a talk presented by one of your members in your home building or at the Berks symposium
- an "archive sharing" presentation and web page listing the highlights of your collection that pertain to the Schuylkill Navigation
- other ideas welcome

We are available to coordinate all the Bicentennial events so we don't have conflicts, and to help promote your event. We'll have a logo and press release you can use.

Let us know if you'd like to be involved in some way!

Sincerely,

Sandy

Sandy Sorlien, author of *Inland*
2025 Schuylkill Navigation Bicentennial Committee
with the support of the American Canal Society and Fairmount Water Works /
Philadelphia Water Department

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