

**SCHUYLKILL NAVIGATION**  
1825 • BICENTENNIAL • 2025



108 MILES • 5 COUNTIES • 32 DAMS • 27 CANALS • 71 LOCKS

**Dear Friends of the Schuylkill River, Organizations, Teams, and Schools:**

You're invited to participate in the **2025 Bicentennial of the Schuylkill Navigation**, a.k.a. the Schuylkill Canal.

**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, Mont Clare, 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.
- Tour of New Canal Flow Facility at Flat Rock
- Adopt-a-Canal-Boat on the 2025 Sojourn
- Bicentennial resource blog on <https://waterhistoryphl.org/2024/06/schuylkill-navigation-bicentennial/> (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.

By the way, New York's 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, students, and residents of 50 canal towns to these facts: the Schuylkill Valley was home to the first and longest anthracite-carrying canal system in America, and the first slackwater-canal navigation in Pennsylvania. **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.

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 creative, scholarly, or recreational project generated by your organization or school
- 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 can be a loosely coordinated Canalers Open House Day)
- 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
- team cycling, boating, or fishing events, games, contests
- **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.

If you are interested, please write to [sandysorlien@gmail.com](mailto:sandysorlien@gmail.com), 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.

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

Sincerely,

Sandy

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

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