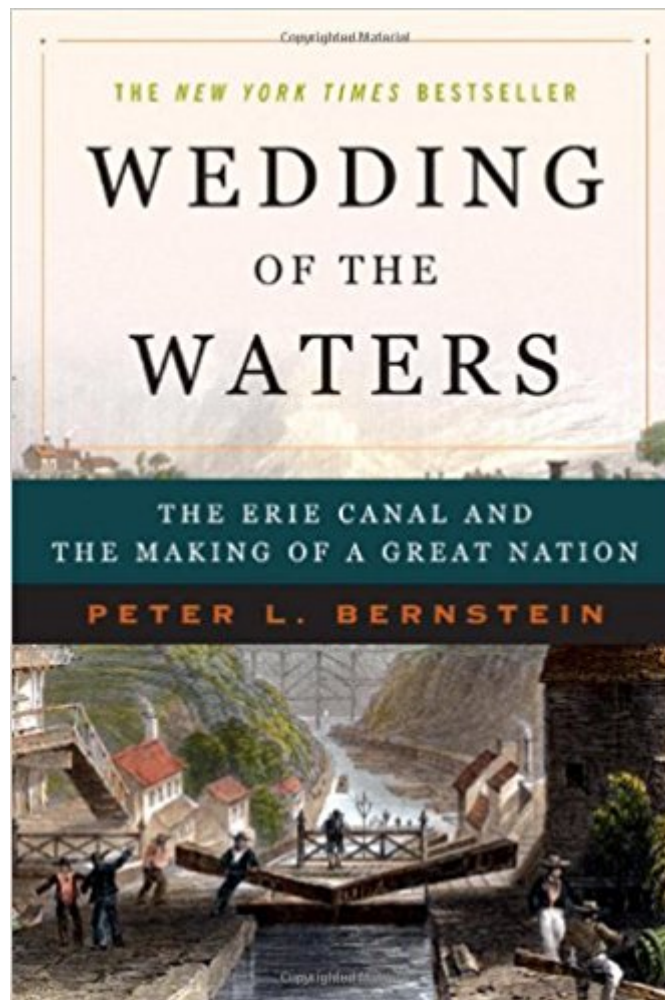




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# Wedding Of The Waters: The Erie Canal And The Making Of A Great Nation



## Synopsis

"One corner of the great American panorama enlarged to highlight starry-eyed visionaries, political machinations, indefatigable ingenuity, and cockeyed optimism." —Kirkus Reviews

The building of the Erie Canal, like the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Panama Canal, is one of the greatest and most riveting stories of American ingenuity. Best-selling author Peter Bernstein presents the story of the canal's construction against the larger tableau of America in the first quarter-century of the 1800s. Examining the social, political, and economic ramifications of this mammoth project, Bernstein demonstrates how the canal's creation helped prevent the dismemberment of the American empire and knit the sinews of the American industrial revolution. Featuring a rich cast of characters, including not only political visionaries like Washington, Jefferson, van Buren, and the architect's most powerful champion, Governor DeWitt Clinton, but also a huge platoon of Irish diggers as well as the canal's first travelers, *Wedding of the Waters* reveals that the twenty-first-century themes of urbanization, economic growth, and globalization can all be traced to the first great macroengineering venture of American history. 20 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Begun in 1817 and completed in 1825, the Erie Canal stretches 363 miles across upstate New York from Buffalo on Lake Erie to Albany on the Hudson River. A stunning achievement, the canal was hacked through a densely forested pass in the Appalachian Mountains using only axes, shovels, low-grade explosive power, beasts of burden, and some ingenious devices. The engineers and

workers created locks, bypassed rapids and waterfalls, and adjusted to countless changes in elevation. When the canal was completed it became one of the wonders of the world. But the canal was much more than a spectacular construction project; it also served to bind a young United States to itself and the rest of the world in one bold stroke. In this thoroughly absorbing book, Peter Bernstein describes in vivid detail how the Erie Canal helped to shape the United States into a great nation by connecting the eastern seaboard and western expanses of America, as well as propel the Industrial Revolution and stimulate global trade, economics, and immigration. It was so important to the development of the U.S., argues Bernstein, that without the canal the detached western territories "would in all likelihood have broken away" and created another, if not several, separate countries. Manifest Destiny would have been denied. In telling this gripping tale, the author offers a brief history of canals through the ages, explains the foresight exhibited by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson regarding the need for a waterway to the west, and outlines the political wars, financing challenges, and seemingly endless delays and false starts to the project. He also reveals much about the political landscape of early America through his profiles of the personalities and visionaries who devoted their lives to the project, along with the engineers and surveyors, most of whom had little experience designing or constructing a canal of any kind, much less such a massive undertaking. *Wedding of the Waters* succeeds brilliantly in bringing this rich story to life. --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

First proposed in 1808 and completed 17 years later, the Erie Canal was the first great feat of macroengineering undertaken by the infant American republic. As economic consultant Bernstein (*Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk*) shows in his eloquent account, the canal—stretching 363 miles from the Hudson River to Lake Erie—reshaped not only the economic landscape of the eastern seaboard but the political and social landscape as well. Bernstein vividly relates the political battles fought over the high-priced project and the work of surveyors, engineers and laborers. The canal was in particular an economic engine for New York, bringing down the cost of shipping goods between Buffalo and Manhattan by a whopping 90%. This in turn inspired the development of farms throughout the Great Lakes area and the Upper Midwest. At the same time, prices for farm commodities in Manhattan and other eastern cities dropped steadily, facilitating the growth of industrial workforces and a dramatic shift in the urban-to-rural ratio toward the cities. Bernstein does a first-rate job of examining the social, political and economic impact of the canal both as a construction project and as a viable path linking the Atlantic seaboard with the American interior. 20 b&w illus. not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business

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Provides an engaging account of "the 19th. c. Panama Canal". The heroics of Gov. Clinton struggling with finances; political machinations arrayed against stubborn & short-sighted nay sayers; etc.; is a reminder of "plus ça change" comparing those days & times to our own. Bernstein includes morsels of Hawthorne, Twain, assorted socialites and mixes in engineering facts which make clear the extent & import of the Erie Canal in opening up the western parts of the USA as well as propelling New York City's financial energy & boom in these years.

Tedious reading though a wonderful story which kept me going. At half the length it would be a jewel. Perhaps he will do a rewrite and remove the modern political cant. The cant isn't so much right or left but soaked in modern pieties, pervasively interfering with his story and insights. His economic, demographic, and historical/political analysis of the time is stellar. In short, there is so much to like that his PC overlay interferes with his great work. In sum, a must read even with having to slug through it--which many of my friends did not accomplish because they got stuck in the swamp of length and pieties. I rated it a 4 despite those issues. A good editor might have burnished it into a 5 and the best work on the subject for the foreseeable future.

I really looked forward to reading this book. As I would drive along the New York Thruway, I always thought the Erie Canal was beautiful, and often dreamed of taking a boat trip along it. I am an engineer and a sailor, and looked forward to a detailed explanation of how the canal was built. When I got to the end of the book, I was quite disappointed. Although it is a worthwhile read, to me this book is more of a political history of New York State from 1810 to 1830 than a book on the building of the Erie Canal. I now know a lot about De Witt Clinton, Martin Van Buren, and Tammany Hall politics, but I really don't know all that much about the building of the canal itself. I also felt that the author explained the basic economic impact of the canal a few dozen too many times. By page 100, I had it memorized that cutting transportation costs by a factor of 10 would revolutionize how farm commodities and manufactured goods were bought and sold. By page 200, I had the feeling that I was reading a high school essay that was being stretched from 1 page to meet the 5 page requirement. Overall, I am still glad I bought the book and invested the time to read it. I'm just still looking for a book that explains how the canal was built.

Bernstein's *Wedding of the Waters* is a wonderful summer read. He weaves a masterful story including history, politics, geography, science and economics. Let me list a few of the themes: 1. A political history of the United States during the formative years from George Washington to Abraham Lincoln 2. The geographical limitations of settling the interior of the United States west of the coastal rivers and the Appalachian Mountains 3. A history of canal navigation from ancient China to modern times 4. A geographical voyage across upstate New York along the 363 miles from Albany to Buffalo 5. The history of the post-Revolutionary War conflict between the United States and England which led to the War of 1812 6. A description of the industrial world before the opening of the canal in 1825 and before railroads 7. The economic and political constraints of the early confederation of states 8. A political history of New York State I read the book with my tablet computer at my side frequently looking up topics, checking facts and searching for archival photos on the internet. An electronic edition might contain hyperlinks for taking the reader to the many web sites I visited. The book has several pages of illustration but the epic nature of the story demands more. This book could be the basis for a great TV special.

This book is a well written account of the first great public works project in America! The need for such a canal had been identified for decades before it ever got down to planning and then building it. It proved to be a huge winner for New York and the USA as a whole!

Fascinating, not an exaggeration when I call it a must read for anyone interested in America, history, politics, and how great things actually get done. Was the internet of its' day.

The Erie Canal was one of the most important and substantial engineering feats of the 19th Century. Bernstein provides extensive coverage of the personal and political events which lead up to the eight year dig. At page 199 he begins a well organized outline of the 300 mile excavation and the 100 plus locks required to deal with the elevation issues. The book had few maps and drawings, and the reader needs a separate atlas to grasp what is happening. Except for that lack, the work is highly recommended. If you are expecting the equivalent of McCullough's "Path Between the Seas", you will be disappointed. That book deals extensively with the physical aspects of construction on the Panama Canal. Bernstein's book is mostly about the history of the period, the people, politics, and financing of the Erie Canal. The actual dig is treated lightly. It depends on your taste: people or shovels.

Loved the blend of politics, economics, and social welfare. Amazing how quickly the Canal transformed the nation and the world.

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