Canals in Pennsylvania

The principal waterway in [Lancaster County](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania) is the Susquehanna River, which forms its western border. However, its many rocks and rapids made it difficult for navigation. An attempt was made in 1820 by James Hopkins to dig a canal to bypass the Conewago Falls, already bypassed in 1797 by the [Conewago Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conewago_Canal) in York County on the opposite side of the river. However, the Hopkins Canal was poorly laid out and not useful for navigation.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-Baer-0) He was then authorized by the legislature to build a canal along the [Conestoga River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conestoga_River) to [Lancaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancaster%2C_Pennsylvania) to connect that city with the Susquehanna, but abandoned it after building one lock.

On March 3, 1825, the [Conestoga Navigation Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Conestoga_Navigation_Company&action=edit&redlink=1) was incorporated to make a second attempt at improving the Conestoga River. It was placed into operation in 1826.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-friends-1) The Conestoga Navigation was 18 miles (29 km) long, with nine locks and dams, between [Safe Harbor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safe_Harbor%2C_Pennsylvania), at the mouth of the creek, and Lancaster.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-histmarker-2)





Map of historic Pennsylvania canals and connecting railroads

Interest in improving the Susquehanna continued. Surveys were made along the east bank from Chickies Rock to the Maryland state line in 1827; the extension of the Eastern Division of the [Pennsylvania Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Line_of_Public_Works) to Columbia was authorized on March 24, 1828 and again on March 21, 1831, and was completed on December 4, 1832. Revenue service began on April 9, 1833.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-Baer-0) The construction of the [Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia_and_Columbia_Railroad) (*vide infra*) placed Columbia on the route from Philadelphia into the western parts of the state, via the canal. The [Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susquehanna_and_Tidewater_Canal) to Baltimore was ultimately opened in 1840 on the west side of the river, canal boats crossing at Columbia to reach the Pennsylvania Canal.

By this time, the Conestoga Navigation was already in financial difficulties, and was sold to the Lancaster & Susquehanna Slack-water Navigation Company. The newly-built (1838) rail line from Harrisburg to Lancaster allowed westward trade to bypass the canals, and by 1849, the Eastern Division was entirely paralleled by rail. The state sold the [Main Line of Public Works](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Line_of_Public_Works) to the [Pennsylvania Railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania_Railroad) in 1857, which kept the canals in desultory operation. The former Columbia Navigation last collected lock fees in 1872; its dams were later used for [hydropower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydropower) in the early 20th century.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-histmarker-2) The last operating segment of the Pennsylvania Canal, from Columbia northward to [Nanticoke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanticoke%2C_Pennsylvania), was abandoned on April 11, 1901.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-Baer-0)

Of the nine original Conestoga Navigation locks between Lancaster and the Susquehanna River, Lock 6 is the only survivor. Maintained by the Safe Harbor Water Power Corporation, it can be seen at Conestoga Creek Park near Safe Harbor.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Lancaster_County%2C_Pennsylvania#cite_note-3) Railroad fill and construction has essentially obliterated the Pennsylvania Canal within the county.