

SCHUYLKILL NAVIGATION 1825 • BICENTENNIAL • 2025



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

THE SCHUYLKILL NAVIGATION: CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

Bicentennial Activities are being Planned for Canal Towns Along the Schuylkill River May 17-19, 2025

This spring marks the bicentennial of the completion of the **Schuylkill Navigation** in 1825, a pioneering 108-mile Pennsylvania canal system. To commemorate this milestone and educate the public about the canal's rich history and impact on the region, a celebration is planned to include a symposium, tours, and other events throughout 2025, focusing on the canal's history and impact.

Many historical sites along the canal route will be featured through Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties, highlighting its significance as America's first and longest anthracite coal-carrying canal system and Pennsylvania's first slackwater-canal navigation. The system connected through Reading on May 20, 1825, several months before the Erie Canal opened. The celebration aims to engage history enthusiasts, residents of canal towns, and recreational users of the Schuylkill River Trail. **[Visit waterhistoryphl.org](http://waterhistoryphl.org)** for more information.

Schuylkill Navigation Bicentennial (2025)

The commemoration will involve a range of activities, highlighting various aspects of the canal's operation and its connection to local communities.

Key Themes and Ideas:

- **Historical Significance:** The Schuylkill Navigation was a groundbreaking engineering achievement. It was the first and longest anthracite-carrying canal system in America, and the first slackwater-canal navigation in Pennsylvania. This system played a crucial role in transporting anthracite coal from Schuylkill County to Philadelphia and beyond, fueling industrial growth. The Navigation canals also provided critical water power to mills.
- **Widespread Impact:** The canal's influence extended throughout the Schuylkill Valley, impacting numerous communities. Historical notes mention that “many towns had ‘Canal Streets, Lock Streets or Coal Streets’, and in some cases ‘the canal itself was the main street.’” The celebrations are intended to be a valley-wide event, connecting many towns along the navigation.
- **Relevance to Present Day:** The Navigation’s legacy is still visible today through physical remains like locks, dams and aqueducts, and the Schuylkill River Trail, which often follows the historic towpaths. The river itself had about 50 miles of towpaths, from Port Carbon to Fairmount, in addition to the towpaths of 27 canals. The Bicentennial aims to connect the past to the present by highlighting the ways the canal's history is still present. This includes beautiful watered sections like the Manayunk Canal and Oakes Canal, and many large desilting basins becoming public wetland parks, constructed for the 1940s-50s cleanup of coal waste in the river.

SCHUYLKILL NAVIGATION BICENTENNIAL 2025 EVENTS

Special event- Saturday, April 5, 2025

All-Day Canal-Rail Excursion with Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad, a fundraiser for the American Canal Society and future Friends of the Schuylkill Navigation. [CLICK HERE](#) for details and registration. (Nearly sold out!) Press note: See our big crowd on April 5: (Berks Co.) Train arrives 9:40 West Leesport near clock and old station lot, Leesport Lock House at about 10 to 10:30 a.m. (Berks-Schuylkill Co.) Train arrives 11:20, Port Clinton Borough Park at about 11:40 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

May 17-19, 2025: BICENTENNIAL WEEKEND

- **Saturday May 17: *Open houses and events*** at individual historical societies and parks along the Navigation.
- **Sunday May 18: *All-Day History and Environment Symposium***
Slide presentations by Schuylkill historians, authors, and activists, film screenings, archive

sharing, and self-guided walking tours. Events held at C. Howard Hiester Canal Center at the Berks County Heritage Center, 1102 Red Bridge Rd., Reading PA 19605.

- **Monday May 19:** *All-day caravan/walking tour* of Hamburg Canal sites in Berks County.

The following events are planned with dates TBA:

Spring 2025: Grand Reopening of the Manayunk Canal at Flat Rock, insider's tour with Philadelphia Water Department

June 2025: Schuylkill Sojourn theme is "Canals and Campfires." Along with presentations about the Navigation, paddlers may apply bumper stickers funded by the Awesome Foundation's "On the Water" program. This "Adopt a Canal Boat" effort features at least 50 real canal boat names and 250 stickers.

Canal Heritage Markers, Tours, and Open Houses

- **Lock 27** ceremony at Port Clinton, Schuylkill Gap, April 5 at noon
- **Vincent Canal**, Spring City
- **Lock 60** Schuylkill Canal Park, Mont Clare, ten new history signs
- **Catfish Dam and Locks**, SRT near Betzwood Bridge, new heritage sign by King of Prussia Historical Society
- **Walking Tours:** stone locks on private property, Hamburg Canal sections, May 17 and 19
- **Open Houses:** Open houses will be held at locations such as Leesport Lock House, Lock 60, and the Spring-Ford Area Historical Society.
- **"Adopt-a-Canal-Boat":** An "Adopt-a-Canal-Boat" program will be part of the 2025 Sojourn.

Other Activities:

Canal Art for Kids: flyers at all Berks County public libraries, art due 4/15

Canal Boat model regatta and restoration of canal skiff

Happy Hours in Reading and Port Providence

Photo: Schuylkill Navigation historian Larry Whyte at the recent Bicentennial Cleanup of Canal Lock 27 in Port Clinton, Schuylkill County PA. Image ©2025 Sandy Sorlien

