



The Farmington Canal Heritage Trail

Celebrating
200 Years of
Transportation
1823–2023

By Atelier Cho Thompson

Introduction

Atelier Cho Thompson was approached by the City of New Haven to design a series of interpretive panels for the soon-to-be-completed New Haven leg of the Farmington Canal Trail. The trail is one of the largest recreational paths in Connecticut and is over 80 miles long, stretching from New Haven to Northampton, Massachusetts. The design system began as a means of organizing information on the display panels and the designers soon realized the system had the potential to become a visual language for the New Haven section of the trail.

Goals

Comprehension & clarity
Visual accessibility & appeal
Celebration & commemoration



The designers discussed the purpose and history of the trail. The idea of a linear route, that can be represented in different ways for each of its three main uses (see next page) formed the basis for the identity.

What is the FCHT?

1823

1848

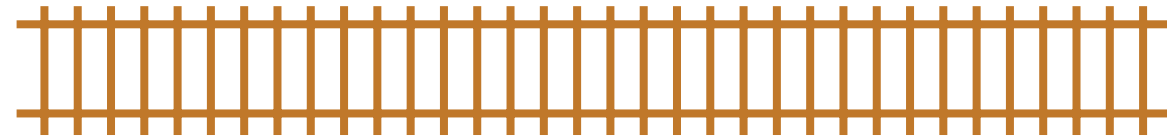
1988

2023

Canal

Railroad

Trail

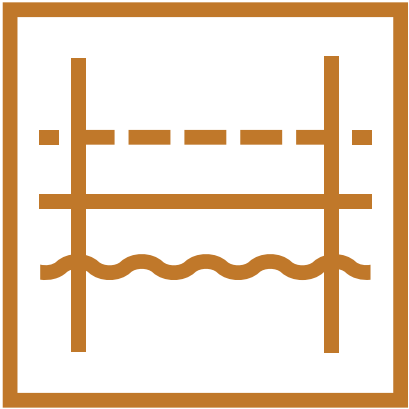


New Haven

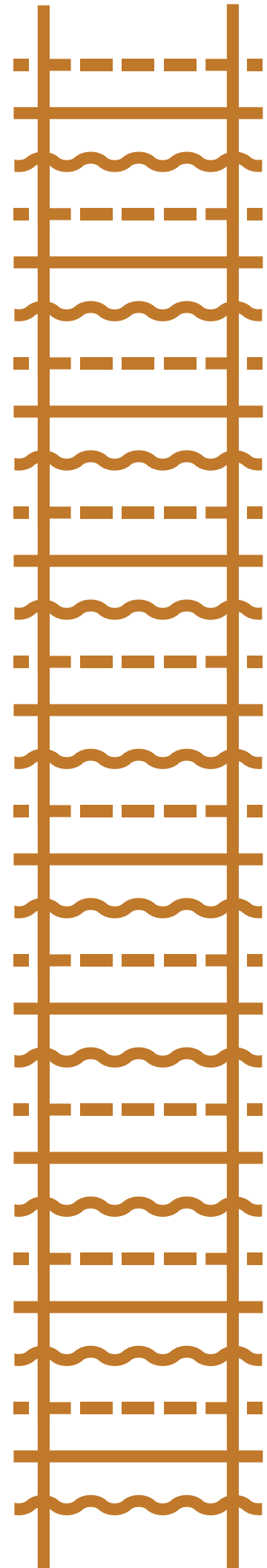
Northampton

Mark

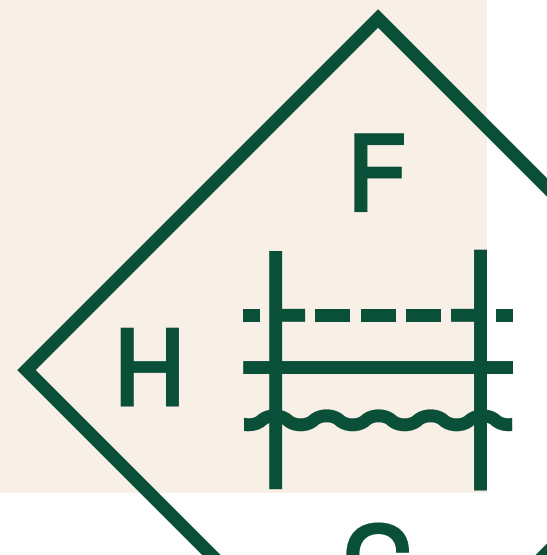
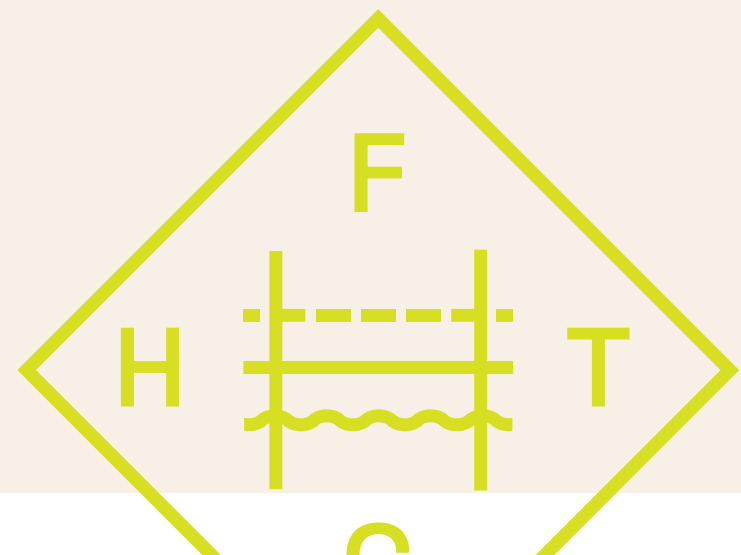
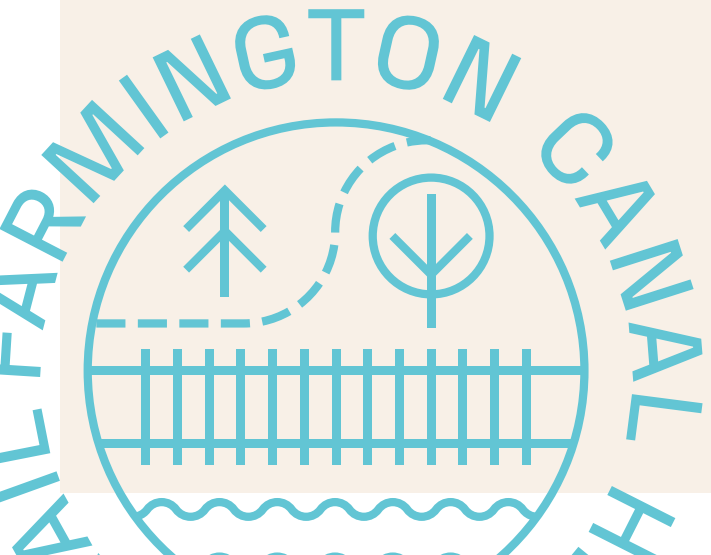
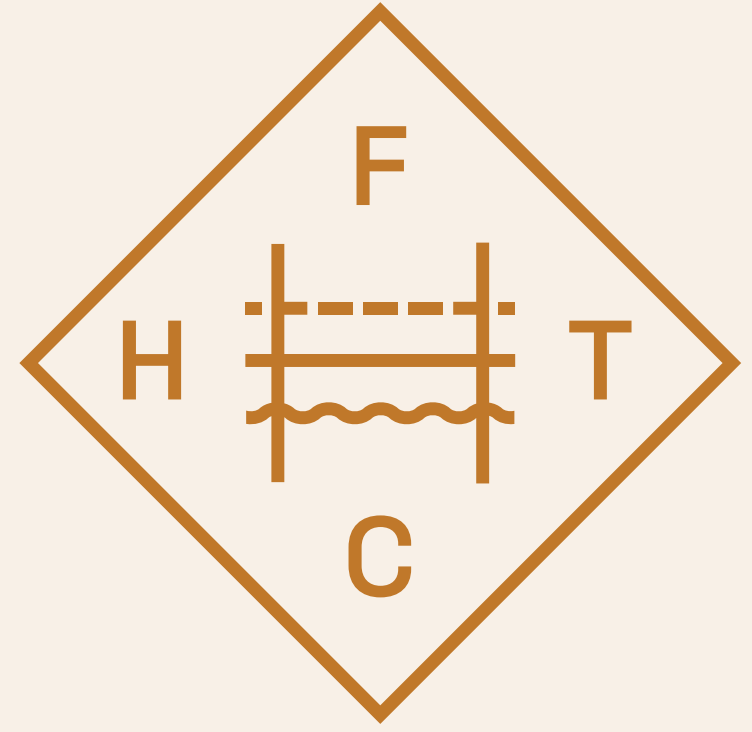
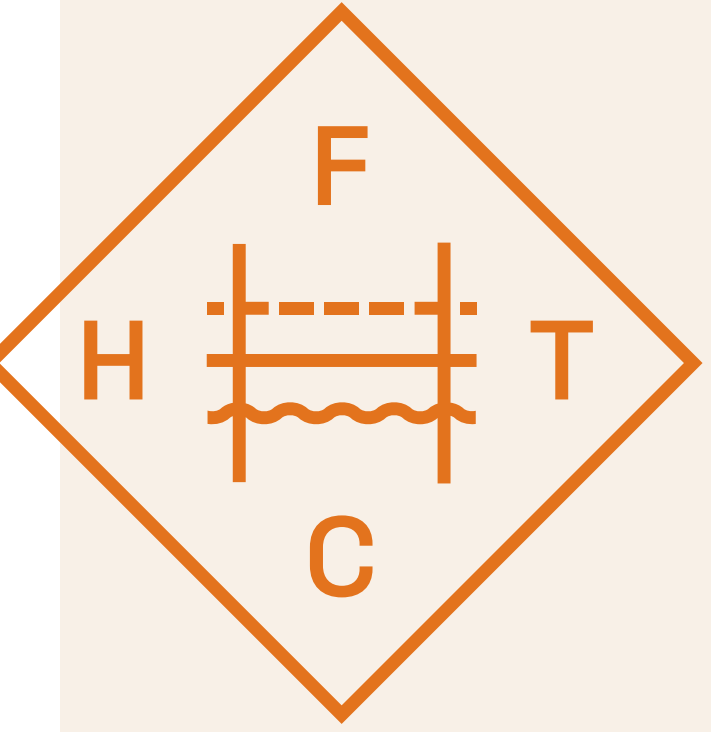
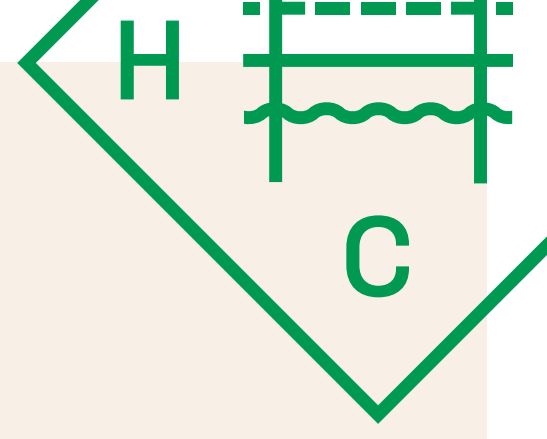
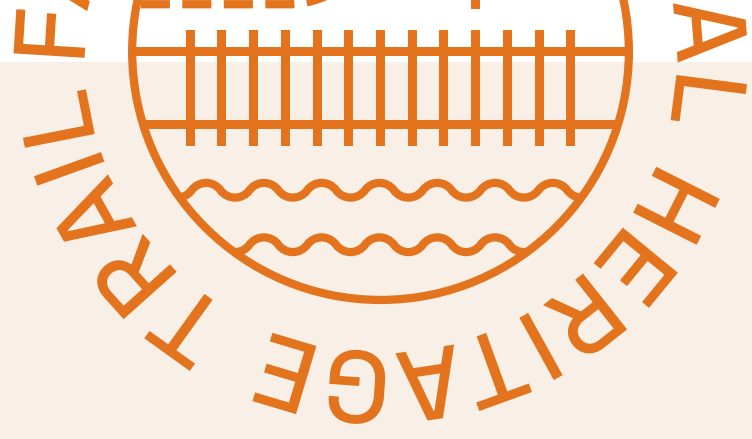
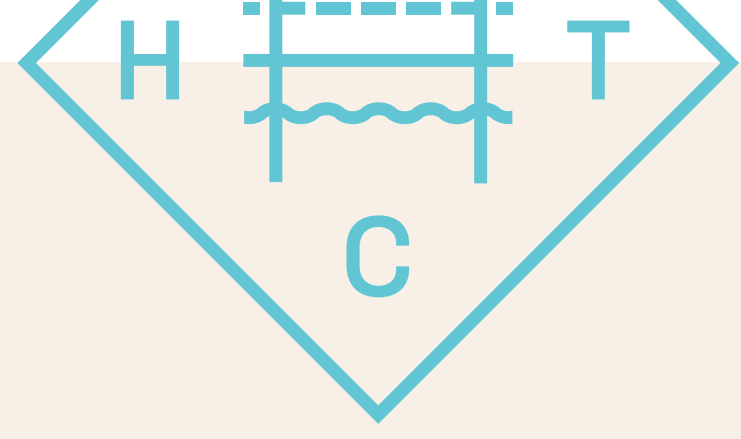
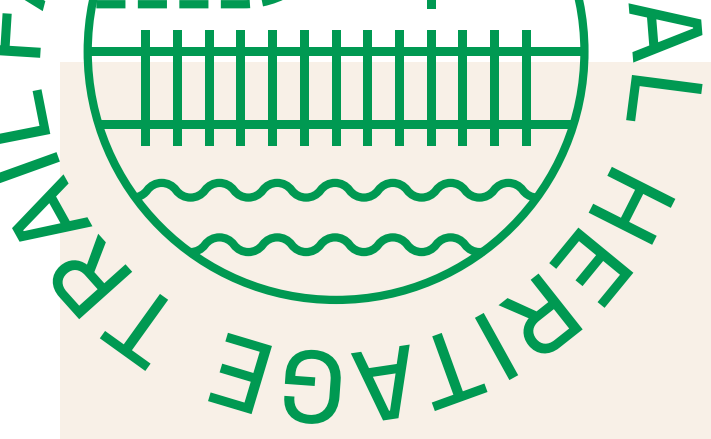
Heritage Trail ———•
Railroad ———•
Canal Path ———•



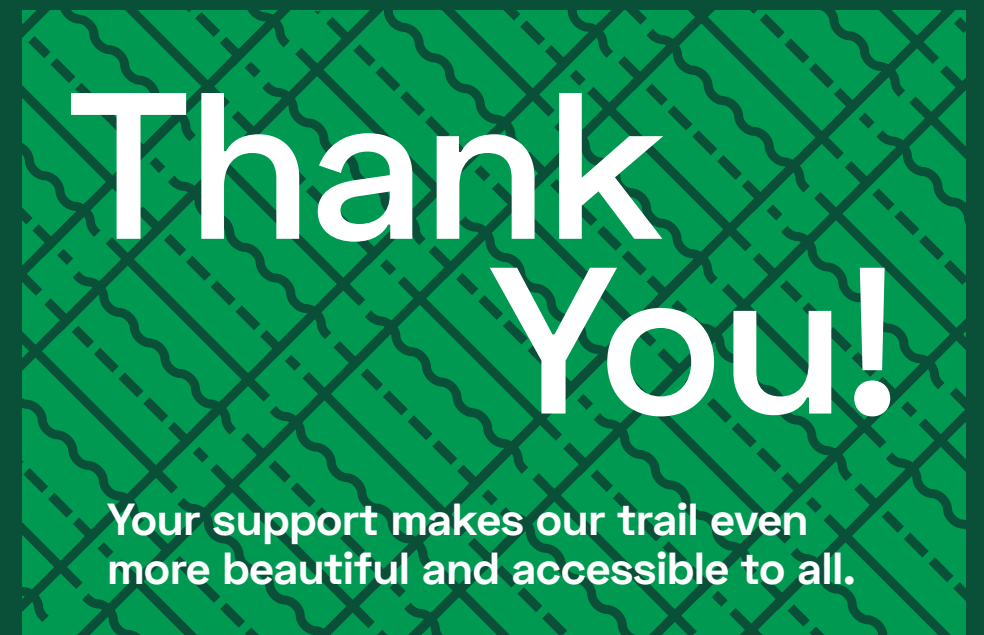
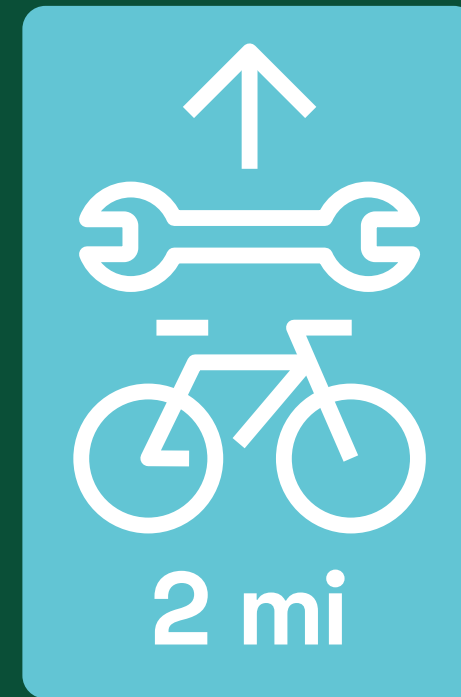
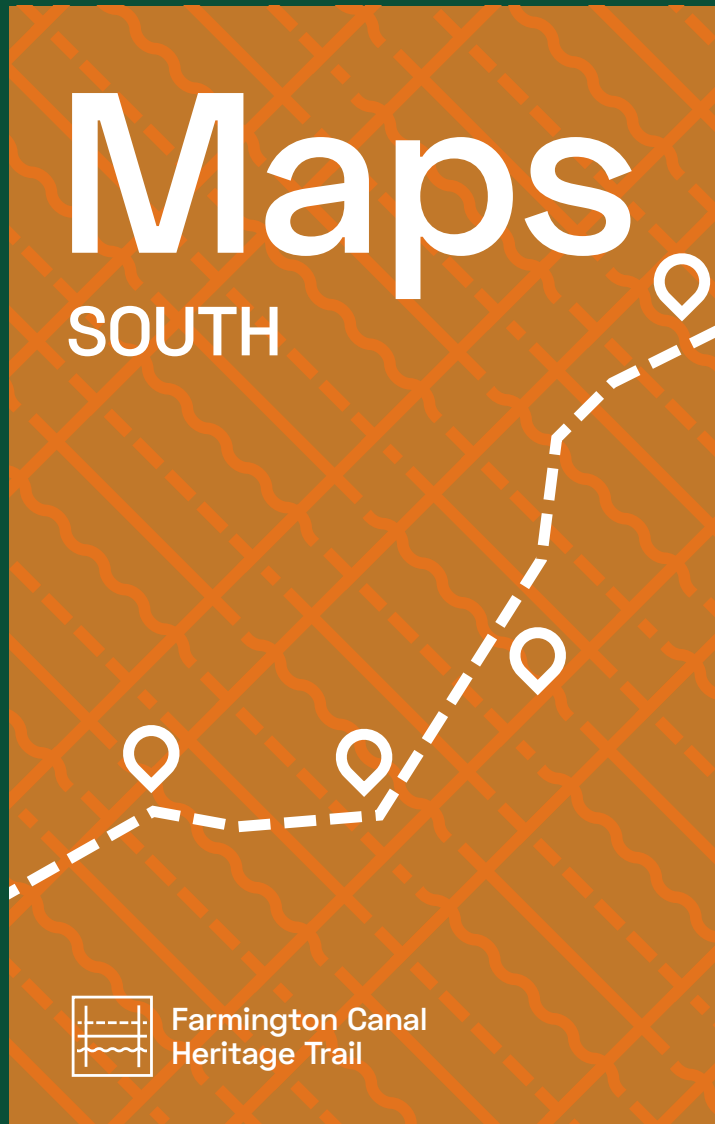
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail



Farlington Canal Heritage Trail









Friends of the
Farmington Canal
Heritage Trail

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Trail Clean Up

Saturday, August 5
9am–12pm

Help keep
the trail
beautiful for
all to enjoy!



Farmington Canal
Heritage Trail



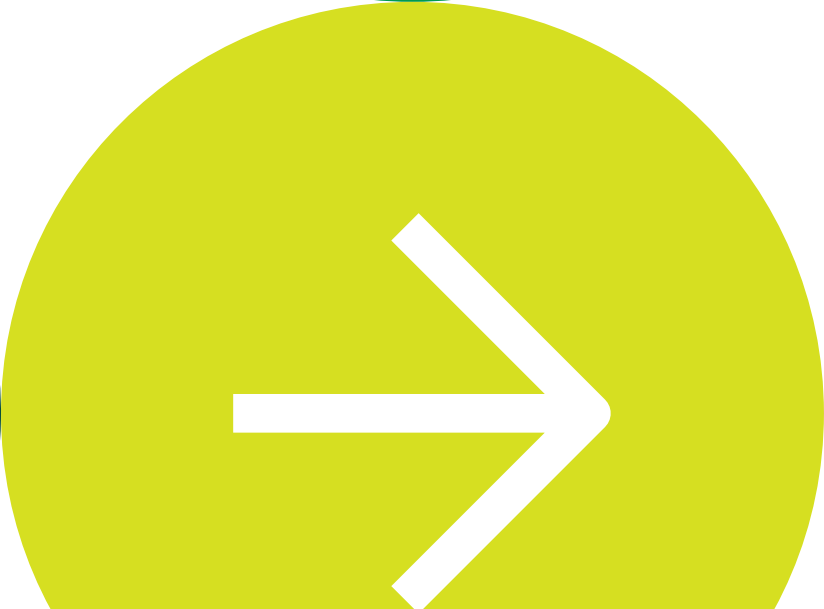
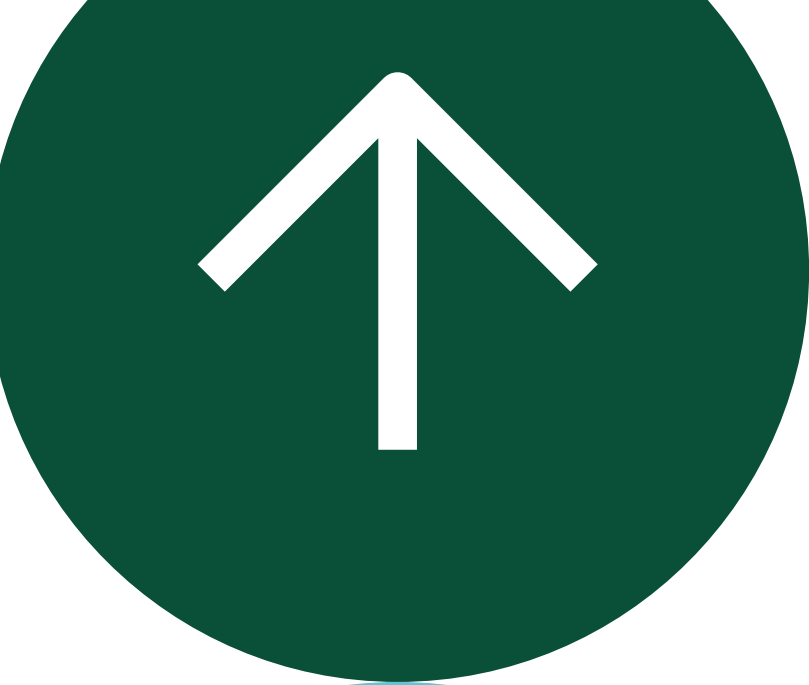


*Friends of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail
invite you to our ribbon cutting ceremony*



*Saturday, 23 September 2023
10am • Temple Street*





Panel Display

The story of the Farmington Canal is so unique and intriguing that the designers wanted everyone to be able to engage with it. The panel displays arrange the trail's history into the three "eras" in an easy-to-follow timeline and include explanatory diagrams and maps to help viewers follow along.

In addition to design, the team also conducted research for the panels, wrote much of the text, and collected all historical imagery.

Map

Now

What was once the path and railroad! The Ficht Trail (FCHT) is now a path and historically these signs to learn the last 200 years.

- Northampton
- Springfield
- Avon
- Hartford
- Southington
- Cheshire
- Hamden
- New Haven



Diagrams

Why Build a Canal?

Locks are a series of chambers and gates that allow boats to go up and down hills by altering the level of water in a canal. To get up a hill an upstream gate, a boat enters the lock chamber, and the chamber is filled with water by opening small holes in the gates, and when the water reaches the level of water in a canal, the boat can continue its journey through the upstream gates.

How does a canal lock work?

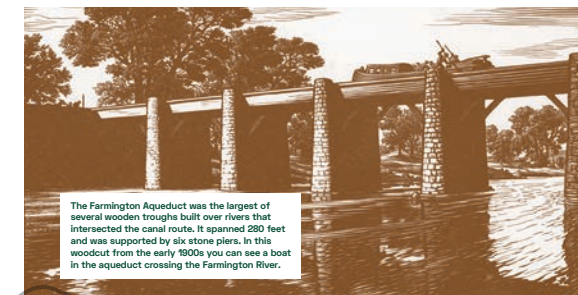
1. Lower canal
2. Lock chamber
3. Upper canal

The Farmington Canal had 25 locks to account for the 200-foot difference in elevation between New Haven and Granby, Connecticut.

Canals, or man-made waterways, played an important role in the history of infrastructure development in the United States. The inspirational model for American canals was the Erie Canal that connected the Atlantic Ocean at New York City's harbor to the Great Lakes. As the Erie Canal's success ushered in the Canal Era, New Haven sought to improve commerce at its own seaport. The Connecticut River to the east served as the main transportation route for ships to navigate the interior of the region. The canals were only started until the 1850s, when the steam engine was invented and canals were gradually abandoned for railroads. Lack of funds for maintenance and failure to maintain water levels also contributed to the end of the Farmington Canal.

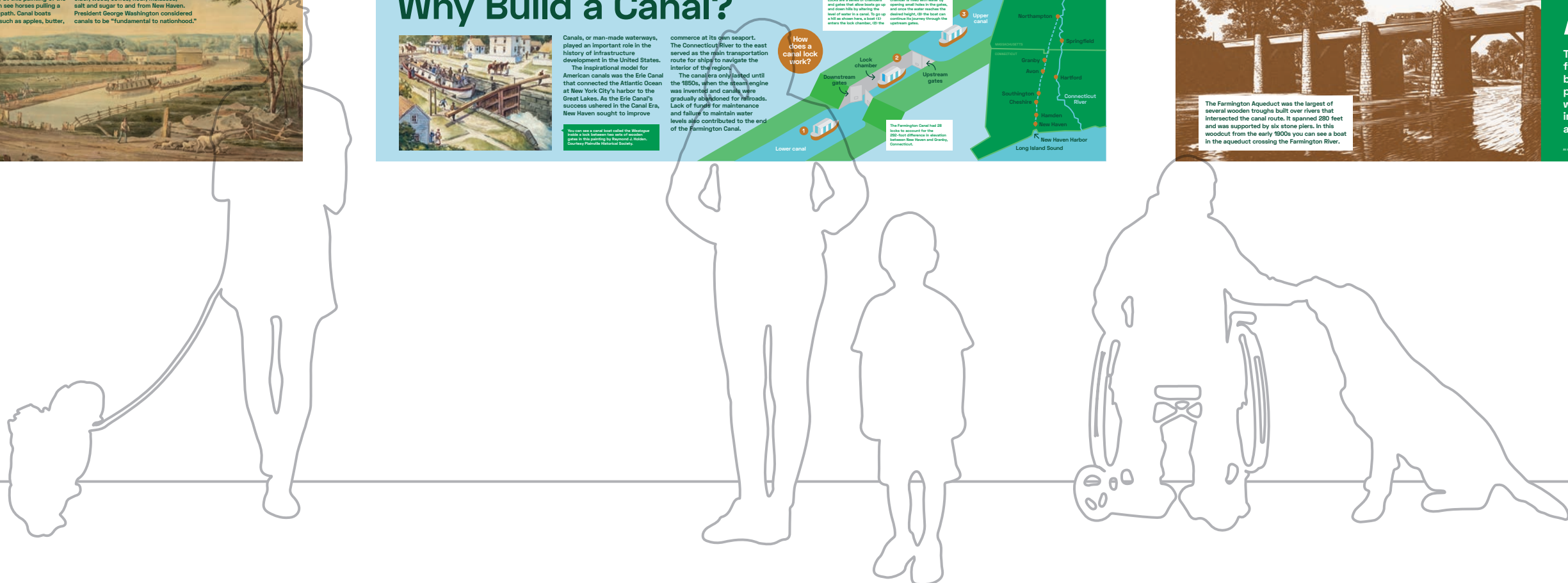
This can see a canal boat called the Whittier inside a lock between two sets of locks. Photo by the author. In: American Canals: A History of the American Canals Society.

Large images



A Water Highway

The Farmington Canal was planned to run north from New Haven Harbor to the Massachusetts border and beyond. Canal boats carried market products to and from towns upstream. The canal was intended to boost New Haven's economic importance and help the city overtake Hartford as Connecticut's main rival to New York City.



Timeline & historical images

High-contrast, legible text

1828-1847

1828 In April, the first excursion boat, the New England, is launched for passage between New Haven and Burlington. The Whittier, Esplanade, and Rowland Right are also passengers as pleasure excursions up and down the canal.

1829 The canal boat Southern arrives in New Haven from Massachusetts in October carrying passengers from Burlington, the Whittier, Esplanade, and Rowland Right. The passengers are pleasure excursions up and down the canal.

1832 On August 25, the New Haven Register claims that while subsidies are expected to increase the growing popularity of excursions. The canal will continue to receive profits for the State of New Haven, and revenue from tolls is sufficient to maintain the canal as a public work.

1835 On July 25, the canal opens to the Connecticut River in Massachusetts.

1844 Canal commerce flourishes, though drought and decreased canal activity and the need for repair funds. Many farmers lease barges to carry their produce to market. The canal is a profitable enterprise for the State of New Haven.

1847 Despite progress in commerce and shipping, the Farmington Canal never becomes profitable. During most years, the canal is operated only enough to maintain and repair the canal. By year's end, the Farmington Canal ceases operation.



Railroad Era 1833-1991

1833 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1835 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1847 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1858 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.













1868 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1872 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1914 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1935 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.

1991 The New Haven & Northampton Railway is chartered to connect New Haven and Northampton, Massachusetts.



Heritage Era 1986-Today

1986 The City of New Haven initiates the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail project.

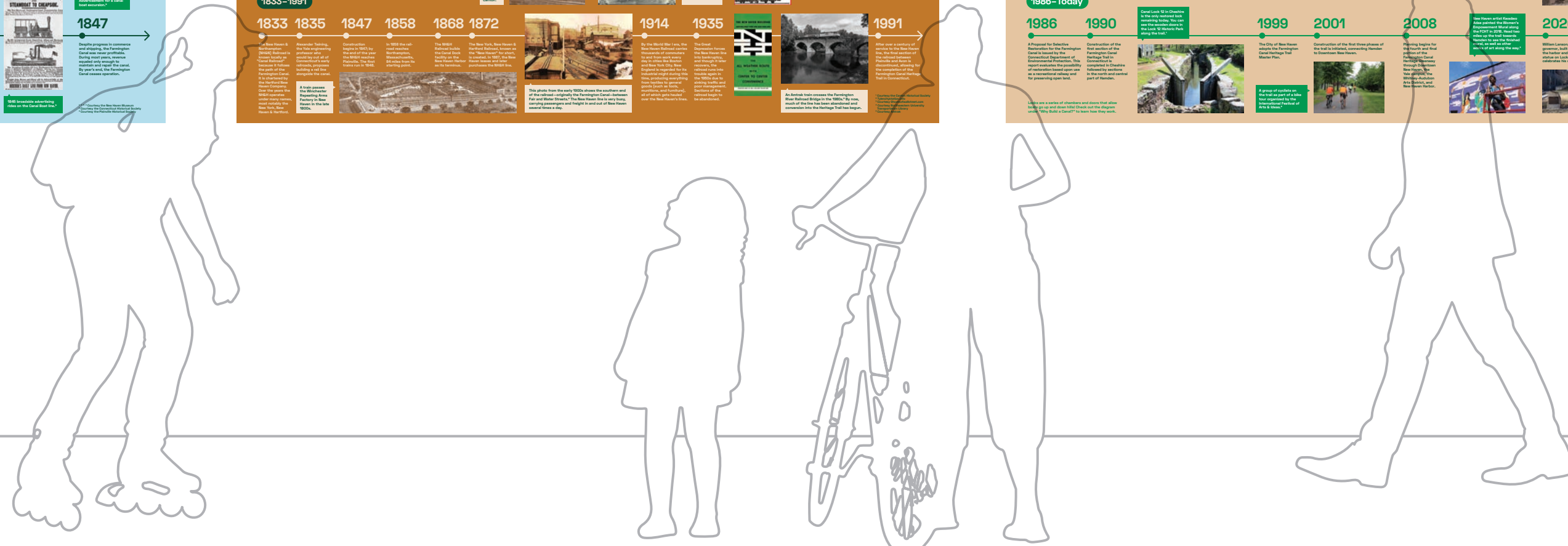
1990 Construction of the first phase of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail begins.

1999 The City of New Haven initiates the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail project.

2001 Construction of the first phase of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail begins.

2008 Planning begins for the second phase of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail project.

2020 The City of New Haven initiates the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail project.

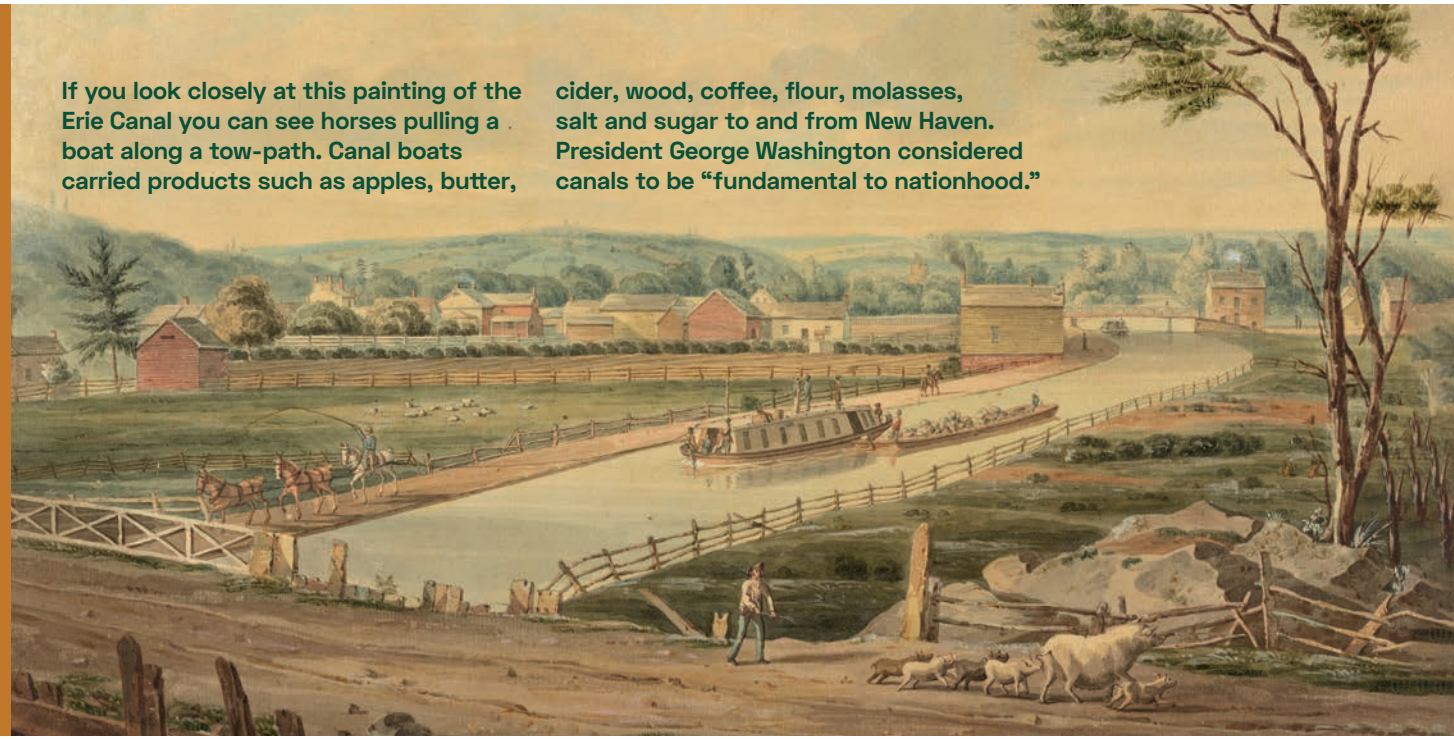


Panel 01: Introduction / You are Here

Then & Now

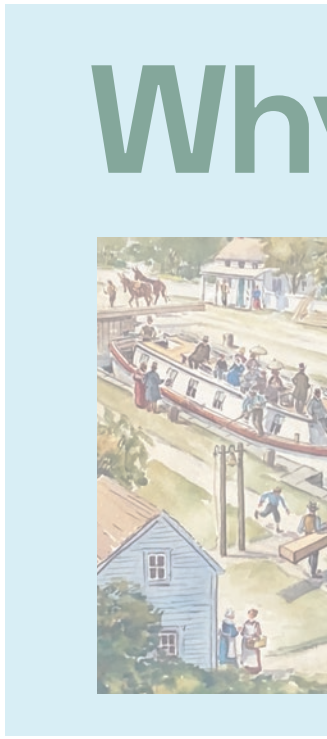
You've found yourself at what was once the bustling hub of a canal and railroad! The Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) is now a multi-use recreational path and historically significant site. Follow these signs to learn about the FCHT over the last 200 years.

At right: John William Hill, 1829. New York Public Library.



If you look closely at this painting of the Erie Canal you can see horses pulling a boat along a tow-path. Canal boats carried products such as apples, butter,

cider, wood, coffee, flour, molasses, salt and sugar to and from New Haven. President George Washington considered canals to be "fundamental to nationhood."



Panel 02: Why Build a Canal?

Why Build a Canal?

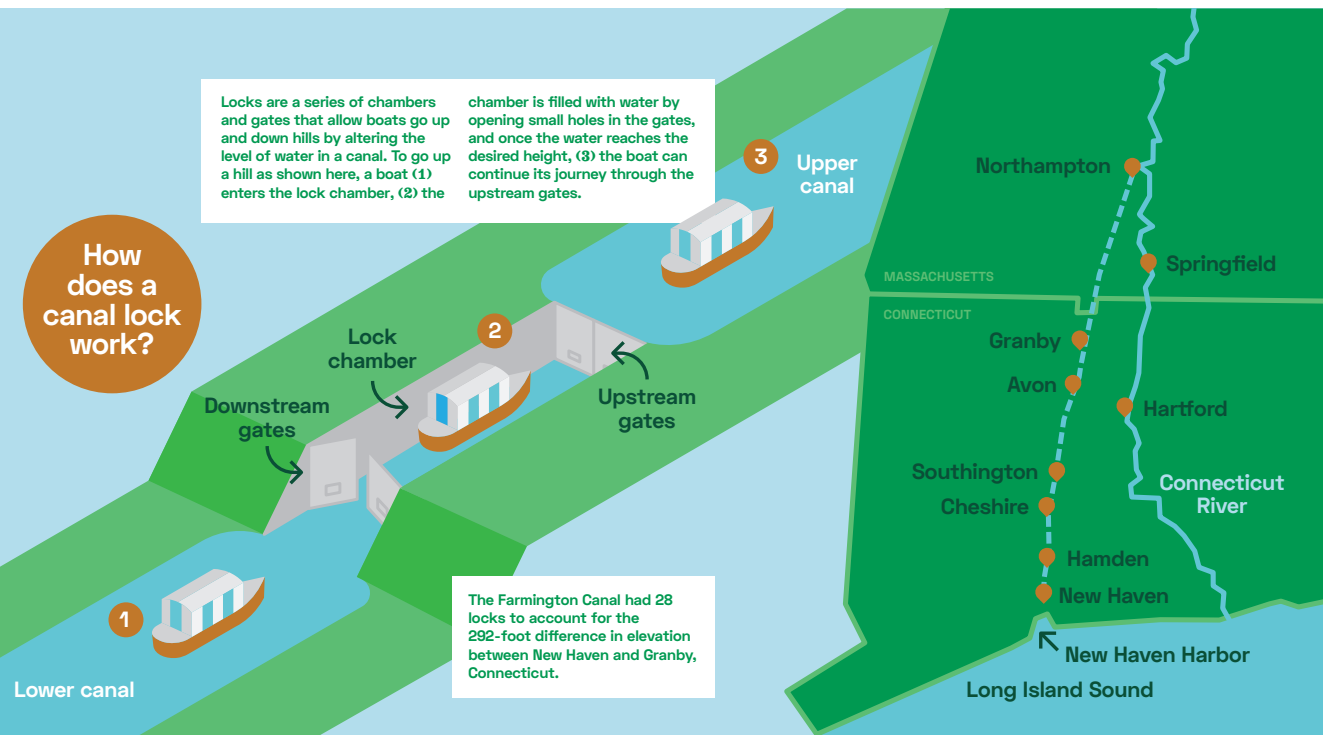


Canals, or man-made waterways, played an important role in the history of infrastructure development in the United States. The inspirational model for American canals was the Erie Canal that connected the Atlantic Ocean at New York City's harbor to the Great Lakes. As the Erie Canal's success ushered in the Canal Era, New Haven sought to improve

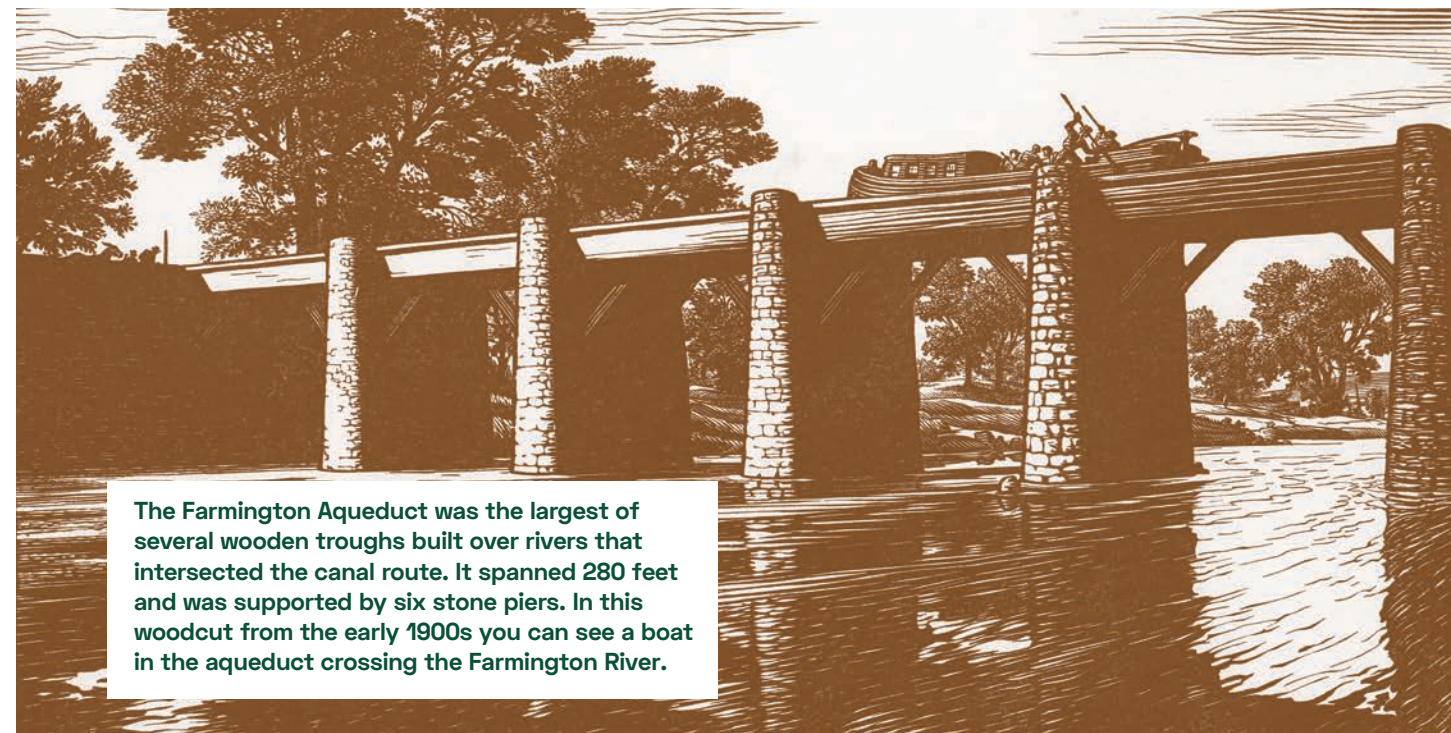
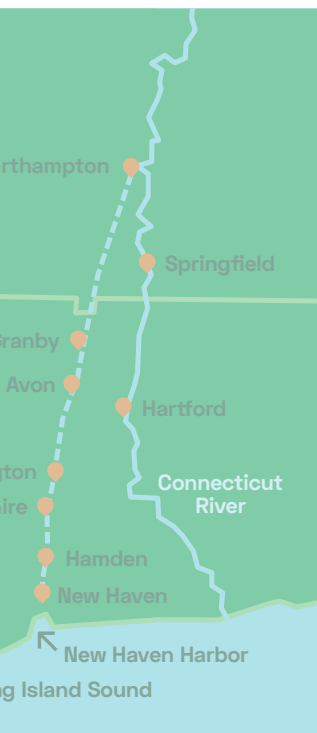
You can see a canal boat called the *Weatogue* inside a lock between two sets of wooden gates in this painting by Raymond J. Holden. Courtesy Plainville Historical Society.

commerce at its own seaport. The Connecticut River to the east served as the main transportation route for ships to navigate the interior of the region.

The canal era only lasted until the 1850s, when the steam engine was invented and canals were gradually abandoned for railroads. Lack of funds for maintenance and failure to maintain water levels also contributed to the end of the Farmington Canal.



Panel 03: Historical Significance of Canals



The Farmington Aqueduct was the largest of several wooden troughs built over rivers that intersected the canal route. It spanned 280 feet and was supported by six stone piers. In this woodcut from the early 1900s you can see a boat in the aqueduct crossing the Farmington River.

A Water Highway

The Farmington Canal was planned to run north from New Haven Harbor to the Massachusetts border and beyond. Canal boats carried market products to and from towns upstream. The canal was intended to boost New Haven's economic importance and help the city overtake Hartford as Connecticut's main rival to New York City.

At left: Courtesy of the Marian Hunter History Room, Avon Free Public Library

Panel 04: Canal Era Timeline

ay

Canal Era

1823–1847

1823

Benjamin Wright begins the detailed survey of the final canal route. The estimated cost of canal construction from New Haven to Massachusetts is \$420,698.88.



1825

The Farmington Canal Company votes to start construction. The canal dimensions were 86 miles long; 36' wide at its embankments; 20' wide at its bottom; 4' water depth; and a 10' wide tow-path on one side of the embankment.

At a ground-breaking ceremony in July of 1825, Governor Oliver Wolcott had the honor of turning the first shovelful of dirt. The spade broke—perhaps an ominous sign of things to come for the Farmington Canal.¹

1828

In April, the first excursion boat, the *New England*, is launched for passage between New Haven and Southington. The *Weatogue*, *Enterprise*, and *American Eagle* later take passengers on pleasure cruises up and down the canal.

1829

The canal boat *Sachem* arrives in New Haven from Massachusetts in October carrying passengers from northern Connecticut. According to the *Connecticut Courant*, freight is already being transported to and from New Haven, and revenue from tolls is sufficient to pay for repairs and canal expenses as needed.

1832

On August 25, the *New Haven Register* claims that while residents are expressing an interest in the growing popularity of railroads, the canal will continue to provide profits for New Haven “for years to come.”

The boat *Pioneer of New Haven* took passengers on pleasure cruises along the canal in the 1830s.²

1835

On July 29, the canal opens to the Connecticut River in Massachusetts.



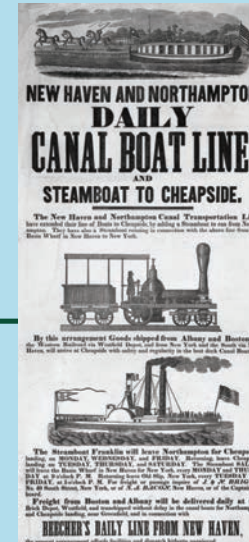
Three horses tow a canal boat in this 1820s drawing by John Warner Barber.²

The canal boat *Enterprise* passing through town.⁴



1844

Canal commerce flourishes, though drought and vandalism result in decreased canal activity and the need for repair funds. Henry Farnam hires engineer Alexander Twining to survey the canal line for a potential railroad to run alongside the canal.



1845 broadside advertising rides on the Canal Boat line.⁵



Advertisement for a canal boat excursion.⁶

1847

Despite progress in commerce and shipping, the Farmington Canal was never profitable. During most years, revenue equaled only enough to maintain and repair the canal. By year's end, the Farmington Canal ceases operation.

¹, ², ³, ⁴ Courtesy the New Haven Museum
⁵ Courtesy the Connecticut Historical Society
⁶ Courtesy the Plainville Historical Society

Panel 05: Railroad Era Timeline

Railroad Era

1833–1991

1833

The New Haven & Northampton (NH&N) Railroad is known locally as "Canal Railroad" because it follows the path of the Farmington Canal. It is chartered by the Hartford New Haven Company. Over the years the NH&H operates under many names, most notably the New York, New Haven & Hartford.

1835

Alexander Twining, the Yale engineering professor who would lay out all of Connecticut's early railroads, proposes building a rail line alongside the canal.

A train passes the Winchester Repeating Arms Factory in New Haven in the late 1800s.

1847

Construction begins in 1847; by the end of the year the NH&H reaches Plainville. The first trains run in 1848.



1858

In 1858 the railroad reaches Northampton, Massachusetts, 84 miles from its starting point.

1868

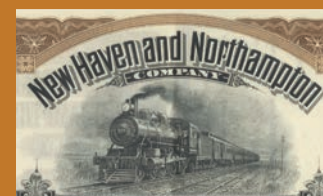
The NH&H Railroad builds the Canal Dock facility on the New Haven Harbor as its terminus.

1872

The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, known as the "New Haven" for short, is created. In 1887, the New Haven leases and later purchases the NH&H line.



Former NH&H passenger station in Canton.¹



Detail from a NH&H Company Gold Bond from the early 1900s.² The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad eventually purchases the NH&H line.



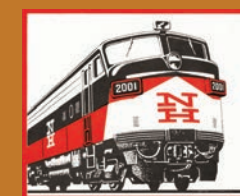
This photo from the early 1900s shows the southern end of the railroad—originally the Farmington Canal—between Fair and Water Streets.² The New Haven line is very busy, carrying passengers and freight in and out of New Haven several times a day.

1914

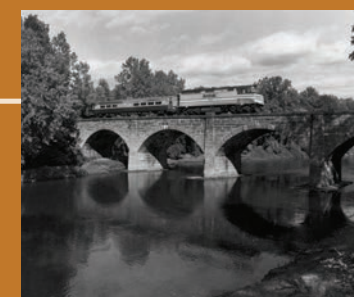
By the World War I era, the New Haven Railroad carries thousands of commuters to and from work every day in cities like Boston and New York City. New England is regarded for its industrial might during this time, producing everything from textiles to general goods (such as tools, munitions, and furniture), all of which gets hauled over the New Haven's lines.

1935

The Great Depression forces the New Haven line into bankruptcy, and though it later recovers, the railroad runs into trouble again in the 1950s due to sinking traffic and poor management. Sections of the railroad begin to be abandoned.



In 1954, noted designer Herbert Matter creates a striking, modern visual identity for the New Haven line unlike anything else in U.S. railroads at the time. You see the bold new logo on the illustration here and 1965 timetable below.⁴



An Amtrak train crosses the Farmington River Railroad Bridge in the 1980s.⁵ By now, much of the line has been abandoned and conversion into the Heritage Trail has begun.

1991

After over a century of service to the New Haven line, the final section of the railroad between Plainville and Avon is discontinued, allowing for the completion of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Connecticut.

¹ Courtesy the Canton Historical Society
² Tylercitystation.info
³ Courtesy Ghostsofwallstreet.com
⁴ Courtesy Northwestern University Transportation Library
⁵ Courtesy Amtrak



Advertisement for a canal excursion.⁶

1847

Despite progress in commerce and shipping, the Farmington Canal was never profitable. In many years, revenue was not enough to maintain and repair the canal. At the end of the Farmington Canal's operation.

⁶ Courtesy the New Haven Museum
⁷ Courtesy the Connecticut Historical Society
⁸ Courtesy the Plainville Historical Society

Panel 06: Heritage Era Timeline

Heritage Era

1986–Today

1986

A Proposal for Selective Restoration for the Farmington Canal is issued by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. This report evaluates the possibility of restoration based upon use as a recreational railway and for preserving open land.

1990

Construction of the first section of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Connecticut is completed in Cheshire followed by sections in the north and central part of Hamden.

Canal Lock 12 in Cheshire is the only restored lock remaining today. You can see the wooden doors in the Lock 12 Historic Park along the trail.¹



1999

The City of New Haven adopts the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail Master Plan.

A group of cyclists on the trail as part of a bike tour organized by the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.²

2001

Construction of the first three phases of the trail is initiated, connecting Hamden to Downtown New Haven.



2008

Planning begins for the fourth and final portion of the Farmington Canal Heritage Greenway through Downtown New Haven, the Yale campus, the Whitney-Audubon Arts District, and New Haven Harbor.



New Haven artist Kwadwo Adae painted the Women's Empowerment Mural along the FCHT in 2018. Head two miles up the trail towards Hamden to see the finished mural, as well as other works of art along the way.³

2020

William Lanson, New Haven's first Black governor, built the retaining wall for a basin at the harbor end of the canal in the 1820s. A statue on Lock Street by sculptor Dana King celebrates his many contributions to his city.⁴



2023

Efforts continue to beautify spaces along the trail. How will you use the FCHT?



Community leader Doreen Abubakar created The Learning Corridor on the FCHT near Shelton Avenue. Visit and find a butterfly garden, farmer's markets, bike repair station, and communication kiosk.⁵

letter creates for the New U.S. railroads logo on the le below.⁶

1991

After over a century of service to the New Haven line, the final section of the railroad between Plainville and Avon is discontinued, allowing for the completion of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Connecticut.

¹ Courtesy the Canton Historical Society
² Tylercitystation.info
³ Courtesy Ghostsofwallstreet.com
⁴ Courtesy Northwestern University Transportation Library
⁵ Courtesy Amtrak

¹ Ron Persan
² Daniel Shkolnik/Daily Nutmeg
³⁻⁵ Kathy Leonard Czepiel/Daily Nutmeg

Panel 07: Introduction / Summary

Transportation Transformation

The story of this 86-mile path begins in the early 19th century and reflects the progress of transportation infrastructure in the northeastern United States. The canal was built in the 1820s by a group of New Haven citizens and connected New Haven Harbor to the Connecticut River in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Soon after its completion, however, the steam engine train became the region's preferred mode of transportation and the canal route was converted to a railroad. Railroad use lasted from the 1840s until the late 1980s, when the path's conversion to recreational use began. How will you use the FCHT today?

1823

1848

1990

Canal

Railroad

Trail

Thank you to all who made this project possible.

Design and construction of the fourth and final stage of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in New Haven was made possible via generous grants from the federal government through various transportation improvements funds with additional assistance from the

Connecticut Department of Transportation and matching funds provided by the City of New Haven with Yale University. Federal grants were administered by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and City of New Haven, with assistance from VHB, Inc.

Special thanks to:
Mayor John DeStefano
Mayor Toni N. Harp
Mayor Justin Ellicker



Community leader
Green Abubakar created
the Learning Corridor on
the FCHT near Shelton
avenue. Visit and find a
butterfly garden,
farmer's markets, bike
repair station, and
communication kiosk.*

2023

Efforts continue to
beautify spaces along
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* Ron Persan
* Daniel Shkolnik/Daily Nutmeg
* ^ * Kathy Leonard Czepiel/Daily Nutmeg

