

Endnotes...

The Bicentennial Voyage of the Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* Commemorating History and Celebrating Community

THIS SUMMER, A REMARKABLE JOURNEY IS underway—and it starts right here in Western New York!

To mark the 200th anniversary of the Erie Canal's opening, the Buffalo Maritime Center has built a full-scale replica of the Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief*, the boat that first made the historic voyage from Buffalo to New York City in 1825. This handmade wooden boat—constructed by volunteers, students and craftspeople—is setting off on a modern-day voyage that honors the past while looking toward the future.

The Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* Bicentennial Voyage will take place from September 24–October 26, 2025. The *Seneca Chief* will travel 500 miles, stopping in 28 communities along the canal corridor and the Hudson River—from Buffalo's Canalside to New York Harbor. The

and cultural significance. On shore, additional displays and activities introduce the Buffalo Maritime Center's mission, traditional woodworking and the Erie Canal's lasting environmental and economic impact.

At many stops along the voyage, local dignitaries and community members will gather for meaningful ceremonies that reflect both celebration and reflection. Eastern White Pine trees—The Great Tree of Peace—will be planted at each stop to honor the *Haudenosaunee* and promote sustainability. In a modern echo of the 1825 “Wedding of the Waters” ceremony, communities will contribute local canal water to a barrel aboard the *Seneca Chief*, which will be used to water the final tree in New York City—symbolically uniting the state in a gesture of remembrance and renewal.



The replica of the Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* in Buffalo's Commercial Slip, once the terminus of the Erie Canal. Buffalo Maritime Center

voyage includes a series of special events, educational programs and experiences that invite people of all ages to reflect on the legacy of the Erie Canal.

When docked, the *Seneca Chief* welcomes the public aboard to meet the crew and explore a floating exhibit, titled *Navigating History*. Visitors can walk through recreated crew and passenger cabins—complete with bedding, cookware and a shared table—to experience what life was like aboard an 1825 canal boat. As they enter through the cargo hold doors, they'll learn about the goods once carried by the original *Seneca Chief*, with displays of Great Lakes lumber, beaver fur and Indigenous goods, including a birch bark canoe. These artifacts help tell the story of the trade networks and economies that shaped early New York, while also acknowledging the cultural contributions of Indigenous communities.

Interactive touchscreens and an audio tour featuring voices from history deepen the experience, while docents guide guests through the boat's construction, purpose

According to Buffalo Maritime Center executive director Brian Trzeciak, “This voyage is about more than retracing history—it's about reexamining it. The Erie Canal was a powerful force for change, but that change came with both progress and displacement. As we honor the 200th anniversary of its opening, we're also committing to telling a fuller story—one that includes the environmental and cultural impact on the *Haudenosaunee* and others. The ceremonies along the route are our way of creating a new tradition. Each stop is an opportunity for communities to connect with the past and contribute to a shared future.”

The Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* is accompanied by two other Buffalo Maritime Center vessels: the historic *C.L. Churchill* tugboat and a newly built push boat, appropriately named *Buffalo Sal*. This traveling fleet and crew proudly represent the spirit of craftsmanship and community. As they make their way across New York State, they're inviting people to rediscover the Erie Canal, not just as a historical achievement, but as a living story that continues to shape who we are today.

“The narrative of the Erie Canal is more complex, interesting and relevant than people might realize,” says Trzeciak. “Our hope is that when people step aboard the Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* and engage with the Buffalo Maritime Center crew and volunteers, they leave feeling more connected—to the past, to their community and to one another.” ■

Visit BuffaloMaritimeCenter.org for the Bicentennial Voyage map, schedule of events, and real-time ways to follow the *Seneca Chief* along the canal.