

**Save our Canal  
Renaissance Hennepin Canal  
Report  
September, 2010**

The Hennepin Canal is on the U.S. Registry of Historical Places, and is owned and maintained by the State of Illinois. The Friends of the Hennepin Canal (FHC) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization that is dedicated to the canal's welfare.

The century-old canal's existence is threatened by the ravages of time and limited public resources. To avoid the canal's continued decline, the Friends, with the cooperation of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), is undertaking a project that promotes the canal's historic value and offers a promising future by capitalizing on its potential as a major tourist attraction.

**Renaissance Hennepin Canal: History and Plans.**

In early 2009, the Friends began a plan for producing working locks along a 50 mile section that joins the Rock Falls and Geneseo communities. Restored canals in Europe, particularly England and Ireland, serve as the model for this enterprise. Canal cruising is a major tourist activity in the British Isles and much of Europe, as well as on parts of the Erie Canal. The project, "Renaissance Hennepin Canal," will offer canal travel that is unique to the entire United States.

The idea of having a navigable Hennepin Canal, with working locks, has motivated Friends since that group organized in 1998. Nearly a decade ago, we wrote:

*"Imagine tourists taking small commercial canal boats from, say, Colona to Bureau Junction or Rock Falls. Some of these boats have restaurants and decks; some have bicycle racks for people wanting to combine their canal voyage with bicycle rides. See these comfortable little canal boats gently passing farms, crossing an aqueduct high over Green River, gliding ... past wildlife of all sorts. Passengers admire horses and wave to riders along the tow path. The boats make stops for picnics and walks under ancient cottonwoods or stop for refreshment and to stroll main street of a village such as Sheffield, Atkinson, Annawan and Geneseo. Other passengers are staying overnight at Bed and Breakfasts, or hotels, picking up a returning boat the next day. . . ."*

*...The Hennepin Canal is one of the best-kept secrets in the U.S. It offers history, beauty, recreation and even romance. "Build it and they will come." We have the vision; it needs a plan....."*

By restoring only three locks, boaters will travel without portage, through three counties (Whiteside, Bureau and Henry) and leisurely cruise fifty miles of quiet countryside, from one urbanized area to the other. We believe, just as restored canals of the British Isles are now significant resources, this fifty-mile waterway will create abundant recreational, cultural and economic benefits to northern Illinois.

From the time when the Friends presented the idea to community leaders early in 2009, Renaissance Hennepin Canal has taken hold and continues to spark imaginations and excitement. A summary of achievements and plans demonstrate the momentum this project has developed.

- March, 2009, Rock Falls, Il., two Friends presented the idea for Renaissance to a small group of citizen leaders and local IDNR personnel, resulting in an enthusiastic encouragement for the project.
- July, 2009, Annawan, Il., leaders from communities adjacent to the canal met to learn of the Renaissance plans and organized into Renaissance Hennepin Canal under the auspices of the Friends of the Hennepin Canal.
- October, 2009, volunteers began a depth and condition survey of the targeted 50-mile waterway. This survey was completed in late November and concluded that there was adequate depth for boats having up to a 30 in. draft.
- November, 2009, RHC Steering Committee met with Regional and Springfield IDNR to explain goals.
- Feb., 2010, In cooperation with Illinois State Archaeologist, the RHC submitted Request for Proposals for a Historic Structure and Condition Report (HSCR) for preserving and/or rehabilitating Locks 22, 23, and 24. A HSCR is a feasibility study for the project. The RFP's were sent to engineering and architectural firms that specialize in this work.
- April, 2010, the Friends received a general assessment of conditions of the canal along the targeted 50-mile section. This is not a formal engineering study; it is an estimation of the current conditions and a "worst case scenario" if major flooding occurred. The assessment confirms the Friends belief that, without intervention, the canal's future is in jeopardy.
- April, 2010, Friends representatives met with area State Legislators and staff to express concerns for the stability of canal locks and levees.
- April, 2010, Friends selected Johnson Lasky Architects, Chicago, as its choice for conducting the HSCR.

- March, 2010, Friends were bequeathed \$14,000 for canal restoration from the estate of Mr. Steve Zintel, who participated in the depth and condition survey.
- July, 2010, RHC Steering Committee met with IDNR Deputy Director Leslie Sgro to discuss and seek approval of plans, resulting in a letter of approval from IDNR for the HSCR phase.
- August, 2010, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service granted the Friends of the Hennepin official 501(c)(3) status.
- August, 2010, The Friends announced its new Website: *friends-hennepin-canal.org* This website will become a main conduit for the Renaissance communications.
- September, 2010, the Friends and the IDNR reported plans of a Renaissance Hennepin Canal public announcement, to take place on Oct. 12, 2010 at Lock 24, near Geneseo.