

“Lockport Viewed by 1840s Visitor.” *Lockport Free Press*. “Old Canal Days” Special, 15 June 1978.

### Lockport viewed by 1840's visitor

*This is the fourth in a series of articles on the history of Lockport by John Lamb. Lamb is a professor of history at Lewis University and active in the Will County Historical Society and the Lockport Historic Preservation Council. This article deals with Lockport in the early 1840s.*

By 1840 Lockport had become a settled village, expanding rapidly because of the promise of water power from the canal.

In 1837 the first sale of lots in Lockport had occurred, yielding \$6000. By 1840 there were a number of buildings in Lockport such as the Canal offices and the Congregational Church, now the Lockport Youth Center. General Fry, a veteran of the Blackhawk War and a canal commissioner, had built a fine residence on the present site of the Heritage First National Bank. The house was part of the old library building which was torn down in the 1960s. Next to Fry's house was one built by General Thornton, another canal commissioner.

The stonework for the canal was completed at Lockport, though nowhere else on the canal. As a result, there was a great deal of stone quarrying going on. It had been discovered that Lockport stone made a high quality hydraulic cement necessary for canal structures such as Lock Number 1, near present-day Division Street.

Joe Buckingham was an Englishman on his way to Chicago

in 1840. After fording the Des Plaines River, he entered Lockport and first noticed the canal works. He then noted that about 200 homes were built and “...the

attractive scene.

Having arrived, the visitor could put up at one of the local public houses. Generally, these establishments had a bad reputation. Public houses in Lockport, however, were never so characterized.

John Davis, a renowned Massachusetts Whig governor and

arrive in Lockport after first crossing the boulder-strewn Des Plaines Valley. He would then find the canal works, a well laid out and immense engineering project in the midst of the Northern Illinois Wilderness.

The walls of the canal were nine feet high and built from local stone. The canal was 100 feet wide. The canal had very little water in it, making the structure even more impressive. To the south of the village lay Lock Number 1, the only lock as yet completed. It was a massive, stone structure. One eastern observer called it, “A very beautiful lock.”

The village lay several hundred feet east of the canal, and behind the large houses and lots rose the wooded ridge of the Des Plaines River Valley. It made quite an

prairies. They all appear to be some miles distant, but to one accustomed to such scenes, it is a little startling to witness the bright to one