

INTRODUCTION

PENNSYLVANIA BOARD of CANAL COMMISSIONERS' RECORDS

with

ALLIED RECORDS

of

CANAL COMPANIES CHARTERED by the COMMONWEALTH

During the years when the famous Erie Canal in New York State was approaching completion, Pennsylvania citizens and law-makers were much occupied with questions of the feasibility of creating artificial waterways within the boundaries of the Commonwealth and of the means for establishing more of them. The Union Canal and the Schuylkill Navigation Canal were in process of construction. Men of enterprise were weighing plans for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, for the Delaware and Hudson Canal, for the Delaware and Raritan Canal, and for a York Haven-to-Baltimore Canal, most of which plans, in order to be operative, would require both water and stream-side rights in Pennsylvania. Legislators had many a company application to review; they had also the cry of citizens, the propaganda of organizations such as The Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Improvement, and the resolutions of the August, 1825, Canal Convention at Harrisburg to consider. Beyond their power of legislative action, however, were the trade routes of more westerly states which tended to converge on Baltimore and New York harbors and to by-pass the Philadelphia waterfront. How best could the legislators bring the products of Pennsylvania to eastern markets or carry the products of Philadelphia and foreign imports coming up the Delaware River into far inland counties, to Ohio, and to the West?

While assemblymen acted, then, upon petitions of out-of-state canal companies for privileges within the state, they also kept in mind what might be to the maximum advantage of the interior counties whose electorates sent them to Harrisburg.

So it was that the three Canal Acts of 27 March 1824, 11 April 1825, and 25 February 1826 came into being. The first act instructed Governor J. Andrew Shulze to appoint three commissioners whose duties it should be, inter alia, to examine for a canal route to lead from the Great Valley of Chester and Lancaster counties along one or another set of natural waterways westward to Pittsburgh.