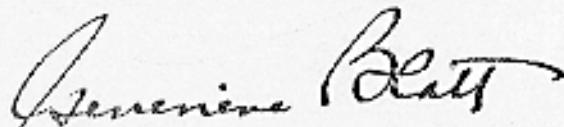


In brief, the Records of the Pennsylvania Board of Canal Commissioners are invaluable archives, indexing the industry and the transportation of an era, telling the story of the people, of the skilled mechanic, the brilliant inventor, and the engineer. The impression on their times of eminent figures in architecture, engineering, and government is transmitted intimately through their thousands of reports, letters, and day-by-day accounts. Here we find Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York and his distinguished builder of the Erie Canal, Benjamin Wright; David Bates Douglass, professor of mathematics at the West Point Military Academy and designer of the Croton Aqueduct for the water supply of New York City; William Strickland, Philadelphia architect and engineer; Josiah White, one-time canal commissioner, inventor, and leader in the foundation of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company; Moncure Robinson, builder of railroads and designer of locomotive engines; John A. Roebling, builder of suspension bridges, designer of the famous Brooklyn Bridge; Matthias Baldwin, whose name long ago became synonymous with locomotive engines; Nathan S. Roberts, brilliant on both the Erie and the Chesapeake and Ohio canals, planner of the canal works at Pittsburgh; William Milnor Roberts, as a young man, assistant and principal engineer on public canals in Pennsylvania and, at the height of his career, the builder of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railway.

Less striking than such celebrities in the history of architecture and engineering were Pennsylvania Governors Francis Rawn Shunk, William F. Packer, and John W. Geary; but it is true of each of these three that their first public services in the Commonwealth were rendered in clerical and supervisory capacities for the Board of Canal Commissioners, and that from early canal duties they rose step by step into executive leadership.

It has seemed worthwhile, therefore, to make the precious archives of the Pennsylvania Board of Canal Commissioners, 1825 - 1858, more accessible to the student of history, and I am most grateful to Dr. Hubertis M. Cummings who devoted innumerable hours of his expert talent in the compilation of this Descriptive Index of the Canal Commissioners' Records.



Genevieve Blatt
Secretary of Internal Affairs