

The Richmond Aqueduct

Only some of the original 31 stone arches of the Richmond Aqueduct stand today as an indication of the important role that this aqueduct played in carrying boats on the Erie Canal across the Seneca River between Cayuga and Seneca Counties.

Soon after the completion of the original Erie Canal in 1825, the heavy volume of traffic led to enlargement and improvements to the ditch that was 40 feet wide and 4 feet deep. Because crossing the Seneca River near Montezuma was so difficult, New York State decided to relocate the canal route to higher ground and build an aqueduct to carry boats across the shallow river. The aqueduct was named for Van R. Richmond, the engineer who designed it.

Construction began in 1849 and was completed in 1852 at a cost of \$216,510.63. The second largest aqueduct on the Erie Canal, the aqueduct consisted of 110,000 linear feet of wood pilings that were driven into the soft ground to help provide support for the 31 stone arches that were 11 feet high and 22 feet wide spanning the Seneca River. The aqueduct was almost 900 feet long and 86 feet wide, consisting of limestone masonry. The Richmond Aqueduct sped up movement of boats and barges on the Erie Canal because they did not have to deal with an intersecting Seneca River.

The central sections of the Richmond Aqueduct were taken down in 1917 to give boats on the new Cayuga-Seneca Canal of the Seneca River a clear run. Between 1905 and 1918 the Seneca River had been dredged to a uniform 12 foot depth, making the Richmond Aqueduct obsolete. Today as many as seven of the arches remain on the east (Cayuga County) side of Seneca River and three on the west side (Seneca County) side.

In 2005, the Seneca River Crossing Canals Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This historic district is located in Montezuma (Cayuga County) and Tyre (Seneca County) and includes more than a mile of enlarged and improved Erie Canal including the Richmond Aqueduct crossing the Seneca River and remnants of the original Erie Canal.