

Guide to the Cayuga Lake and Inlet Collection

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Cayuga Lake has long been a focal point of life for many in Tompkins County and beyond. A major transportation artery for Native Americans as well as European settlers throughout the 19th century, it is now used for recreation and industry and serves as the water supply for many thousands. It is fed by several major creeks as well as the Inlet.

Of the major creeks that flow into Cayuga Lake, none have been altered as much as the Inlet has. Its natural windy path through Ithaca was straightened and channelized as early as the mid-19th century. Its most significant alteration came in the 1960s with the construction of the Flood Control Channel. This was part of the Ithaca Flood Protection Project, and was considered an essential mitigation measure to forestall the kind of devastating flooding that had occurred in 1857, 1901, and 1935. (See folder 14 for more information.)

The Inlet Valley area became an early commercial center with numerous boat builders, coal yards, lumber yards, planning mills, and grist mills providing seasonal work for local residents. The Inlet was the transshipment point for goods brought to Ithaca and shipped north on the lake to the Cayuga & Seneca and Erie Canals (opened between 1822 and 1828).

During the latter part of the 19th century the northern part of the Inlet area became known as the Rhine (supposedly because of its distant resemblance to the Rhine River in Germany), and Silent City, because residents supposedly refused to cooperate with police on their frequent visits to this troubled neighborhood. Many of Ithaca's poorest residents lived there, many unemployed or only seasonally employed, squatting on land they did not own, living in simple shanties built with scrap lumber. Conditions were desperately poor and disease was rife. By the mid-1920s the city moved the few remaining families to Floral Avenue and demolished the remaining shacks.

Commercial activity in the Inlet area died down in the early 20th century with the rise of railroads for the movement of people and goods. It rapidly became what it has remained – an access point for the flourishing recreational activities of this lakeside community.

This collection contains materials dating to the 1850s. Some, like a report on draining local wetlands, address the natural environment, while others examine municipal oversight and planning for major water-related initiatives.

CONTAINER LIST

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Cayuga Lake Preservation Association (1967-1970)	4
Citizens Committee to Save Cayuga Lake (1968-1969)	5
Cayuga Lake Basin Interboard plan (1973)	6
Cayuga Lake/Finger Lakes general newspaper clippings (late 20 th century)	7
Cornell University Water Resources and Marine Sciences Center educational leaflets in a series on Cayuga Lake: (Loose in box)	

Regional water resources boards in New York State: With a supplement on the Cayuga Basin Board (1972)

A Primer on Lake Pollution: With a supplement on the quality of Cayuga Lake (1972)

Examining lakes: An introduction to how it's done: With a supplement on technical methods used on Cayuga Lake (1972)

A brief survey of state agencies with functions relating to the state's water resources: With a supplement on local state agency offices and functions in the Cayuga Lake Basin (1972)

Lake systems: Satisfying the concerns of many users: With a supplement on the varied uses of Cayuga Lake (1973)

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