

Kirkus Reviews

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Koeppel, Gerard

BOND OF UNION: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire

A comprehensive history of the building of the Erie Canal.

Author of *Water for Gotham: A History* (2000) and a contributor to *Water-Works: The Architecture and Engineering of the New York City Water Supply* (2006), former CBS News editor Koeppel continues to explore the subject of the Big Apple's crucial connections to its waterways. The commitment to extensive research he brought to previous works is evident here as he ably tells the story of the many strong-willed visionaries who helped bring the Erie Canal into being. Chief among them was frontier merchant Jesse Hawley, who in 1807 wrote a series of essays from debtor's prison expounding on his dream of an overland waterway. Possessing little education and no engineering background, Hawley studied books and maps to craft a plan for a canal to connect Lake Erie with the Hudson River. His essays caught the attention of many prominent New Yorkers, including surveyor and city planner Joseph Ellicott, influential businessman Elkanah Watson and Gov. De Witt Clinton, who began to argue forcefully, in the face of widespread skepticism, for the building of the canal. Koeppel details the political twists and turns that surrounded the conceptualizing, funding, engineering and building of the Erie Canal. Finally completed in 1825, it was the first major link between the seaboard states and the landlocked interior. It proved an unmitigated boon for merchants, and the author convincingly argues that the canal hastened the birth of America as a continental nation. At times, the level of detail can be daunting—the author spends several pages expounding on a controversy about a patent for waterproof cement, for example—but there is little doubt Koeppel's history is the most complete and well-researched to date.

Authoritative and important.

(Agent: Russell Galen/Scovil Ghosh Galen Literary Agency)