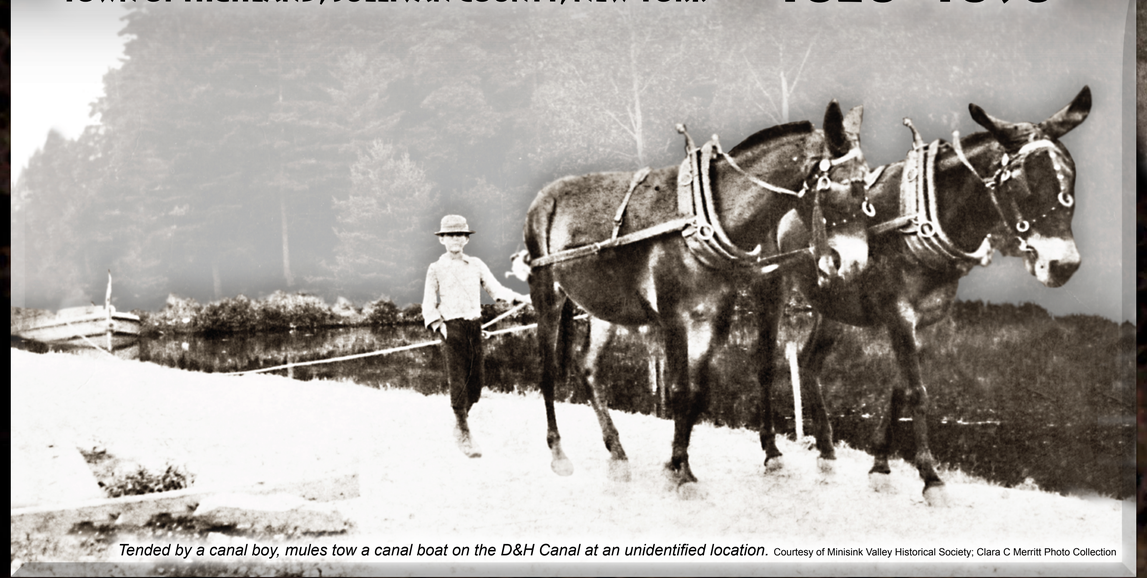
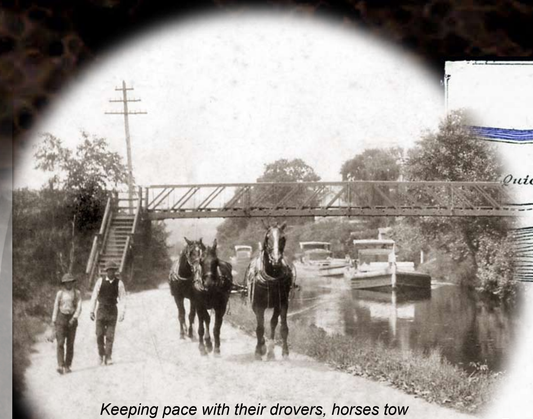
Barryville's D&H Canal Connection

Town of Highland, Sullivan County, New York

1828-1898

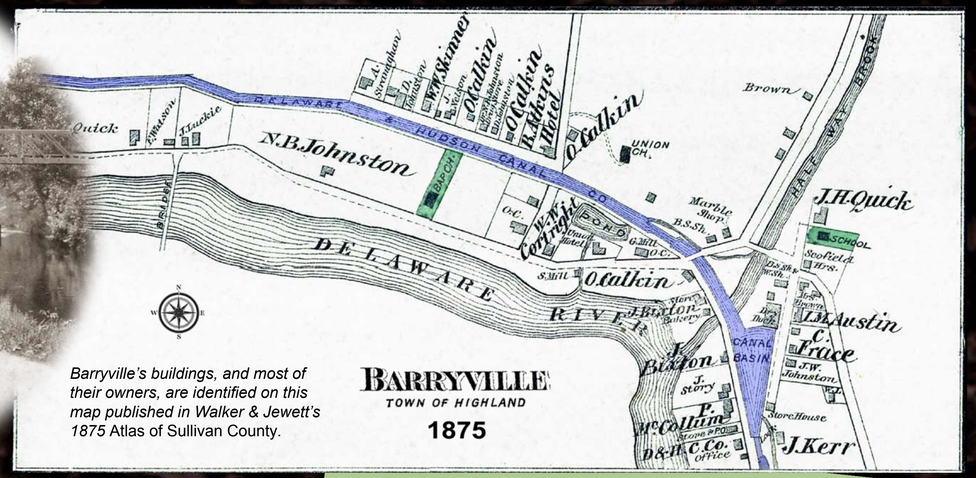


Tended by a canal boy, mules tow a canal boat on the D&H Canal at an unidentified location. Courtesy of Minisink Valley Historical Society; Clara C Merritt Photo Collection



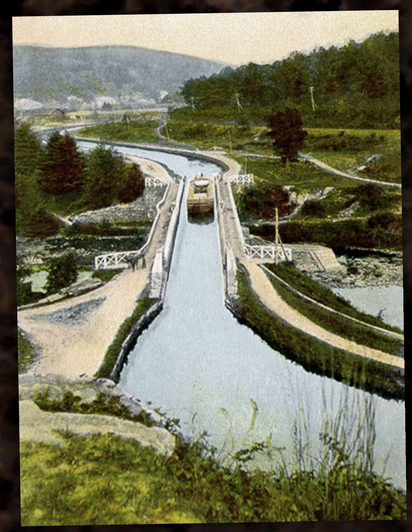
Keeping pace with their drovers, horses tow canalboats beneath the Main Street bridge in Port Jervis, New York, the southernmost point on the Delaware division of the D&H Canal.

Courtesy of Minisink Valley Historical Society; Clara C. Merritt Photo Collection

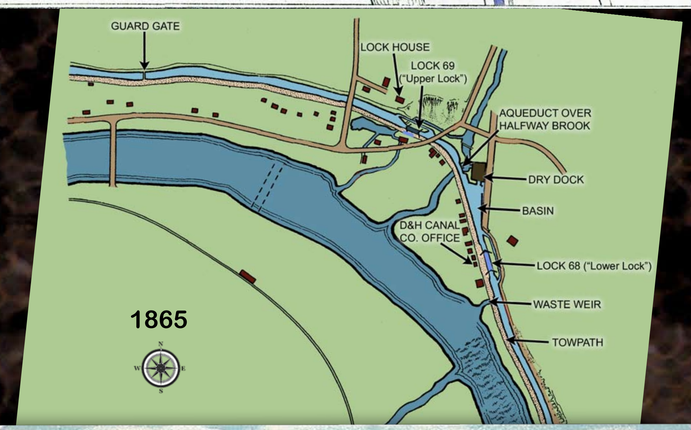


Barryville's buildings, and most of their owners, are identified on this map published in Walker & Jewett's 1875 Atlas of Sullivan County.

BARRYVILLE
TOWN OF HIGHLAND
1875



RIGHT: *Canal-related features are identified on a depiction of Barryville derived from a map surveyed in 1854, drawn in 1856, and revised in 1865.*



RIGHT, BELOW: By the time this southeastward view of the southern end of Barryville was recorded early in the twentieth century, the empty canal prism had grassed over, and the viaduct carrying the Canal over Halfway Brook had been removed. The former towpath now served as an unpaved roadway—the precursor of modern Route 97.

ABOVE: *A colorized postcard photo documents the passage of the last canal boat over the D&H Canal in the fall of 1898. The boat is navigating an aqueduct spanning the Lackawaxen River at Lackawaxen, 4½ miles upstream from Barryville. A smaller aqueduct carried the Canal over Halfway Brook at Barryville.*

BELOW: *Weighed down with Lackawanna or Wyoming Valley coal, eastbound D&H Canal Company vessel 113 prepares to enter a lock near Lackawaxen in the twilight of the Canal Era.*

Courtesy of Minisink Valley Historical Society; Clara C. Merritt Photo Collection

THE PARTIAL SKELETONS of at least two large quadrupeds were among the few compelling artifacts unearthed by archaeologists beside the eastern abutment of the Barryville-Shohola Bridge during a cultural resources evaluation conducted in 1995, prior to the Bridge's replacement. A forensic examination of the relics led investigators to conclude that two or more mule carcasses had been buried here 100-to-150 years earlier—a conclusion supported by the discovery of a scrap of leather harness and a muleshoe (or horseshoe) amid the bones.

The mules buried here may well have been draft animals employed on the Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Canal. Mid-nineteenth-century maps of Barryville (*far right, top and center*) show the riverside burial site to be just a stone's throw from the Canal's towpath—an earthen berm walked by countless mules and horses towing canalboats to their destinations.

Opened to traffic in 1828, the D&H Canal gave rise to dozens of hamlets along its 108-mile course between the Hudson River at Kingston, New York and Honesdale, the future Seat of Wayne County, Pennsylvania. Many of these settlements—including Barryville—grew up around the Canal's locks, where canalboats paused on their journeys while being raised or lowered to the next level. Two of the Canal's original 113 locks were located on either side of Halfway Brook where it flowed into the Delaware River on the wooded western border of New York's Town of Lumberland (from which the Town of Highland would be created in 1853). Each of these locks provided 10 feet of lift. The aqueduct built to carry the Canal across Halfway Brook was one of four aqueducts constructed by the D&H Canal Company along the 23-mile Delaware River section of the Canal.

Among the other canal-related elements of the growing settlement beside Halfway Brook were a waste weir (channeling overflow from the canal prism into the Delaware River), a D&H office and shop (across the towpath from the "Lower Lock"), a basin and adjoining dry dock (for canalboat parking and repair), a lockkeeper's house immediately north of the "Upper Lock," and a guard gate at the northwestern end of the village (providing adjustable protection from water surges in the Canal). All of these elements were in place as of 1865, according to a map of Barryville revised in that year (*far right, center*).

A post office established here around 1830 was named "Barryville" in honor of William T. Barry, the nation's Postmaster General from 1829 through 1835. In typical fashion, the office was housed in a store—one of several doing business along Barryville's watery lifeline by mid-century. The Canal had been conceived as a conduit for northeastern Pennsylvania coal and (to a lesser extent) lumber moving eastward to coastal markets, but communities along its route also benefited economically and socially from goods and ideas flowing in the opposite direction. Without its canal connection, Barryville would hardly have been home in 1875 to a Congregational church, a Baptist church, a public school, two hotels, a gristmill, a sawmill, a bakery, two blacksmith shops, a wagon shop, a marble shop, a drugstore, two-dozen dwellings, and a population of 260 souls. It didn't hurt that the New York & Erie Railroad Company had opened a line through Shohola, across the river from Barryville, in 1848, and that a suspension bridge had been thrown up between the two villages eight years later.

With so much riding on the Canal, Barryville was destined to decline as railroads siphoned business away from man-made waterways in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Upper Delaware region's Canal Era came to an abrupt end in the fall of 1898, when D&H managers voted to shut down their antiquated and unprofitable canal system. In the next century, as Barryville dealt with the loss of its lifeline, portions of the towpath were pushed into the canal prism, creating a bed for the highway known today as Route 97.

Text and images prepared in 2009 by Cultural Heritage Research Services, Inc. for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

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