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Why did they build the Blackstone Canal?

It took three tries to finally settle Worcester. The first two settlements were destroyed during the wars between the colonists and Native Americans. Even after Jonas Rice established a permanent settlement in October 1713, Worcester remained a small, isolated farming community. Even by 1765, Worcester's population was only 1,475. Brookfield, Lancaster, and Mendon were all bigger than Worcester was even though Worcester was where the county courthouse was.

One reason Worcester stayed small was because it was hard to travel between the towns. There was no access to the sea to help trade grow and roads were primitive. It took seven hours to travel from Boston to Worcester! This made it difficult for people to travel to other towns or to trade with people in other places. There was no easy or inexpensive way for people to bring goods to Worcester and the surrounding area or to send them to other places. Who would want to live in a place that you cannot get into or out of?

Then, in 1792, John Brown of Providence, Rhode Island had an idea. He thought it would be a good idea to build a canal connecting the seaport of Providence to Central Massachusetts. He knew that there were a lot of people in the Worcester area who wanted to trade but could not because of poor transportation. Canals were being built all over Europe and parts of America as an easy way to carry goods from one place to another. John Brown thought a canal connecting Worcester and Providence, called the Blackstone Canal, would make lots of money because so many people would want to use it. Many people in the Worcester area also wanted

the canal so they could trade with distant areas. They wanted to be able to import goods from other markets as well as export their produce to markets outside of Boston and Worcester. Canals offered a cheap alternative to land travel and could move a lot more cargo at once.

Unfortunately, many people in Boston did not like the idea of the Blackstone Canal. There were not enough people in and around Worcester to convince the people in Boston to let them build the canal. Without the canal, the merchants of Boston controlled Worcester's trade with other ports and many wanted to keep it that way. This opposition continued until 1823, when the merchants of Boston finally gave in. The canal was finally completed in 1828, with the first canal boat, the *Lady Carrington*, arriving in Worcester on October 7, 1828.

Time line: 1713-1830

- 1713: Permanent settlement of Worcester
- 1731: Worcester named the Shire Town of Worcester County
- 1765: Population of Worcester: 1,475
- 1790: First American textile mill, using water-powered spinning machines, opens in Pawtucket, RI
- 1792: John Brown has an idea of building a canal, linking Worcester, MA to Providence, RI
- 1800: Thomas Jefferson elected President. Population of Worcester: 2,411
- 1803: Louisiana Purchase
- 1810: Population of Worcester: 3,650
- 1812-1815: War of 1812
- 1813: New England capitalists found the Boston Manufacturing Company and build the first large-scale American factory
- 1817: Workers begin building the Erie Canal.
- 1825: Erie Canal opens
- 1825: Workers begin building the Blackstone Canal.
- 1828: Blackstone Canal opens
- 1830: Population of Worcester: 4,172



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Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

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Reading Questions

1. What was Worcester's population in 1765?

2. In the 1700s, how long did it take to travel from Boston to Worcester?

3. The Blackstone Canal was thought up by _____

as a way to connect Worcester and _____.

4. Why was the canal important to the people of Worcester? _____

5. In which city did people not like the idea of building the canal?

_____ Why? _____

6. The first canal boat, _____,

arrived in Worcester on _____.