"Touring on a Packet Boat"
Adapted from an article by Carol Sheriff, College of William and Mary

When Clarissa Burroughs left her New Jersey home in 1835 to travel on the Erie Canal, she brought with her more than a diary in which to record her experiences for her mother. She also brought a host of expectations about what she would see and what her journey should accomplish.

* List as many ways as you can imagine for Clarissa Burroughs to get from her home in New Jersey to the packet-boat at the start of her journey.

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Burroughs did not set out with blind optimism. By the time she began her voyage (trip), many tourists had already traveled along the Erie Canal and recorded their thoughts in published journals or in personal correspondence. Burroughs thought she knew what to dread as well as what to anticipate eagerly. Yet her experiences often defied her expectations.

Although she was pleasantly surprised, for example, to find some obliging boat hands and some agreeable fellow passengers, she disagreed vehemently with earlier tourists who had written glowingly about the sleeping accommodations. Burroughs was constantly worried about being tossed from her bed when the boat thumped against the sides of a lock.

She frequently complained about the dirty, cramped, and noisy interior. Yet, she had known enough about the discomforts and tedium of boat travel to plan part of her journey on railroads and horse-drawn stagecoaches.

If the delays and other details of packet boat travel were sometimes annoying, Burroughs nonetheless found plenty to celebrate in the slow-paced canal. The Erie Canal was a wonder of human ingenuity. Its "art" represented nothing less than "the powers of mind, the enterprise & industry of man."

People came from all over the world to admire its locks, aqueducts, and artificial gorges, which were the engineering marvels of their day. Where nature had thrown obstacles in humanity's way, humanity had responded by leveling mountains, lifting an entire waterway into the air, and seemingly making water run uphill.
The Erie Canal stood for progress, the ability of humanity to subdue nature and to craft a civilized society out of wilderness. Because of the canal, dense forests and Indian villages had been replaced by what Burroughs and her fellow tourists saw as signs of progress: gardens, churches, paved streets, literary societies, and a statehouse.

The mid-1830s was a time of rapid change in the northern United States. Along with the revolution in transportation had come market expansion, industrial growth, and urban development. When boat workers were surly or haggled with passengers, Burroughs was reminded that "in traveling everyone is for himself" and that in society as a whole people seemed increasingly individualistic, competitive, and harried.

As the nation underwent rapid economic growth, many middle-class people like Burroughs worried that social decay would accompany it. She set out on her trip in hopes of finding reassurance that such need not be the case.

* Look back at your completed map of New York State.

* Trace Clarissa Burroughs journey from her home in New Jersey to the Erie Canal.

Ms. Burroughs traveled on many waterways. List them here.

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List all the cities she through which she traveled.

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