As soon as we got down to Canalside we stood at the side of the canal, facing the water. Immediately, I observed the vast and rocky water before us, the large grain elevators in the distance, which were used to get huge shipments on and off the boats, and a huge naval ship docked to the side of us. The sky was as gray as the water, and the water splashed audibly against the side of the canal. We were told that bodies were often seen floating by, in the sewage filled waters and the people would have to take hooks to get the bodies out. Just behind us I observed several mini bridges connecting the canal to the rest of Buffalo. I also observed these rock formations that we learned were ruins of past businesses such as “Doug’s Dive” (a bar that doubled as a stop on the Underground-Railroad) that were built during the early days of the Erie Canal. We were told that these businesses would often have 10-15 people working in them now that people could be hired to work unskilled labor jobs. I could hear the city behind us, people touring, the cars racing by overhead on the modern addition of the skyway, and workings of construction crews who were operating nearby along the canal.

We moved toward these sounds, along the side of the canal over by a patch of land on the brink of the city streets and the stretch before the water just under the skyway. The wind whipped over the water and around our tour group and it began to drizzle. The tour guide tried his best to speak loud enough for everyone to hear what he was saying about this patch of land we were all standing, on once being a
part of the canal, but he was being drawn out by the canal noise behind us and the
city noise before and above us. As he spoke I observed multiple people turning to
cough into their sleeves, some pulling their jackets and sweaters closer in an
attempt to get warm, and others who were staring off at the grand buildings that
were encroaching on the brink of where we were standing. He continued to speak of
19th century canalside explaining how there was a shift in society being observed
alongside the waters. Society was being shifted to a very consumer oriented society
due to the abundance of small commercial shops springing up near by. He concluded
by explaining the lure for the canal for trading because it moved trade quickly at a
low price and Buffalo lobbied to be picked as the terminus of this canal.

What surprised me the most while on this tour was how loud and busy
it was along Canalside and also by how cold it was the closer you got to the
water. The city behind us was very distracting and I could only imagine how
hectic it must have been in the 19th century when there was more hustle and
bustle there with the constant ships coming through the canal, and businesses
sprouting up all over the place. It must have been complete chaos. I also could
not imagine just how cold it must have been to work the docks during the
winter months, and walk back and fro each day for work while being whipped
by that harsh wind, and smelling the stench of the sewage polluted waters. I
could barely tolerate standing down there for the short while we were there
and the weather was not half bad. Therefore I could not imagine working
under worse weather and sanitary conditions and so I am shocked at how
successful Buffalo became during the 19th century.
What stunned me the most was just how hard it must have been to live in Buffalo during the early days of the Erie Canal. We were told that death was all around the people of the time. Between the constant epidemics and the unsafe drinking water, the people often woke up to dead bodies in the streets and in the waters. There was also lots of drinking going on during the time as people turned to alcohol over the water because it was so unsanitary. We were also told that there was great corruption in the leaders of Buffalo and so it seemed that the Erie Canal did not come without a cost as I was previously led to believe.

*During the 19th century using waterways specifically that of canals, sparked a transportation revolution. Waterways offered a faster and cheaper way of transporting people and goods and Buffalo had a grand lake to offer. The people of Buffalo wasted no time lobbying to be recognized as a good site to build a huge canal. Judge Samuel Wilkeson proposed that Buffalo came up with a plan on how to dig out the canal and create a harbor. With his efforts, “Buffalo was eventually chosen, happily for the citizens of Buffalo, over Black Rock for the western terminus of the Erie Canal” (Grasso 5).*

*Soon many people were moving to Buffalo to seek jobs and start business alongside the canal. The transportation revolution also revolutionized how modern business was conducted and sparked a market revolution. With faster and cheaper trade, more shops were needed to organize and sell the trade alongside the canal. We still see evidence of this today down at Canalside as the city of Buffalo still bustles around the waterways.*
The canal also encouraged industrial advancements. The shipments that were coming in were so massive that it was difficult for the people to transport them off and on the ships and so they needed to come up with a more efficient way to load and unload. Therefore, “by the early 20th century more than 40 elevators including some cement elevators were in operation, most of these on Buffalo’s waterfront” (Grasso 11). This added to the transportation revolution being most efficient on the waterways because it helped speed loading and unloading and therefore sent shipments away faster than before thus increasing the business being down here.

Thomas Grasso, “The Erie Canal’s Western Terminus,”

On October 22nd, my History 140 class took a trip to the Buffalo Waterfront. Nathan Montague gave us the tour. We began the tour on a little patio where Nathan talked to us about the market revolution and the connection it had with agriculture and industrialization. He explained to us that because industrialization was increasing, agriculture improved as well. Agriculture products were able to be sent out to further places than before because of railroads and canals. Montague also said that the market revolution was driven by merchants and capitalists. Steam power was one of the improvements that Montague talked about, therefore boats were then able to travel not only downstream but also upstream, which was a major improvement. Owing to the fact that there was an increase in technology this led to an increase in the value of land. Nathan said how everyone was wanting to buy land in downtown Buffalo, the land was thriving. Nathan also mentioned that before 1820 the land was a swampy area and it was viewed as not valuable. There were sandbars that prevented the ships from coming in, therefore rowboats were used. Montague also mentioned the Central Wharf where ships unloaded. Samuel Wilkeson was also mentioned. Wilkeson played an important role in Buffalo. He also mortgaged his own property. It was also mentioned that a dam was built in the creek, and a pier was as well. Therefore, Buffalo was picked as the terminus of the Erie Canal, thanks to Samuel Wilkeson, lobbying and state money. In 1825 the Erie Canal officially came to Buffalo. The price of the land increased significantly because it was a high demand, everyone wanted some land there. This also led to an increase in the work force, thousands of people began working there too.

Throughout the tour Nathan Montague was walking around having us follow him while he was pointing out a few things and explaining them into more detail. He mentioned that Joseph Dart built the grain elevator using steam power. Montague also showed us the foundations of some buildings. There were one to three story buildings, each having three or four businesses, such as a blacksmith or a small grocery store. Although, by 1840s and 1850s, more large businesses began taking over the building and the smaller businesses in them. The independent businesses went to the wagers and the small tie businesses went to the factories. Nathan also mentioned that taverns and brothels were coming about during this time which led to an increase in crime rates. He explained how people would have to fish dead people out of the water. An example of a tavern was Doug's Dive, which harbored escaping slaves. Montague began to tell us that once the runaway slaves got to the ferry that basically guaranteed that they would get across. Montague also said how there were remarkable social changes during this time. Epidemics, such as cholera and typhoid, were breaking out because there was sanitation. Nathan told us how raw sewage would flow into the canal and get into the water. There were also a lot of beer and liquor bottles, which were the only “safe” thing to drink.

Montague also mentioned a person named Benjamin Rafman who used credit. There was a small depression because of the passing around of bad bank
notes, and he was called out for it. During this time, people were also evolving from people owning a few necessities to becoming a consumer. Society was demanding toys, tools and less necessities, they had more wants. At this time, people were able to afford it. Montague talked about how mass production was becoming a thing. During the 1850s railroads came about. These railroads took over the work of the canals, they were able to go anywhere and also run in the winter. Eventually the canal died out. In the 1920s the canal was being filled in and in the 1930s a memorial was built and many of the buildings were knocked down. Montague explained how there are none of the original buildings remaining, they were all rebuilt. Although, by the 1960s, law were created to preserve old buildings.

This was not the first time I have learned about the Erie Canal or have been to Canalside before. Although, I feel that this trip has been the most informative. I went on a fieldtrip to the Erie Canal when I was in fourth grade and an interactive tour. I feel as if I do not recall much from that field trip because I was so young and did not understand it all. However, I feel like I learned so much from this trip because I am older and have more knowledge and understanding of the canal. I thought the amount of information given to us from Nathan was very good, however it lacked visual. I felt as if we just walked around in a circle and did not really see much. I guess I got my expectations up of being able to see more. I felt like this was more of a lesson than a tour because of how much he was talking to us.

I thought that Nathan did do a very good job talking about the Erie Canal. I was able to somewhat picture what it was like during the 1800s when the Erie Canal was thriving. When he was explaining about the taverns and crime that really made sense but I never had thought about that before. When he explained how the water was not clean and there was no sanitation I understood that raw sewage was flowing in the water. I never thought about that before and how unsanitary it would be, mainly because of the people all moving there and now working. Many taverns were then opening because alcohol was the only “safe” thing to drink, because it was not unsanitary. I wished there was more for us to see rather than just walk around and have Nathan talk to us. Although, I understand that it’s difficult because they rebuilt everything at Canalside. I also thought that this field trip was very short, and a lot of information was crammed into a little amount of time. At points it was difficult to hear Nathan talking to us either because of the wind or he was walking and talking. Overall, I do feel as if I have learned much more about the Erie Canal and it makes a lot more sense because the pieces fit together as to one things happening and then causing another. There was definitely cause and effect because of the creation of the Erie Canal.

Nathan Montague’s tour was extremely similar to Thomas Grasso’s, “The Erie Canal’s Western Terminus.” Nathan mentioned during the tour that there was frequent flooding because the area was swampy, which caused it to not be very valuable land. In the reading it got into more specific details of how Joseph Ellicott laid out the village of New Amsterdam, and afterwards settlers began purchasing land. New Amsterdam became known as Buffalo. In the reading, Samuel Wilkeson was also mentioned as the “Father of Buffalo” and Nathan also mentioned him briefly in the
tour. Montague also mentioned the Central Warf, and in the reading it went into more detail explaining that it was between Commercial Slip and Main Street. The Central Warf was the top staging area for when ships would come and go. Montague mentioned briefly about the gran mills and Joseph Dart who established the grain elevator. The reading goes into further detail about them. Nathan also explained how downtown was full of crime and helped up imagine what it would be like. More taverns were coming about causing more crimes and the area to be unsafe. The reading also mentions this.

An important part mentioned both by Nathan Montague during the tour and in the reading is the increase in industrialization. Railroads came about in the late 19th century causing major change. The canal began to die down and the railroads became very popular because they were able to travel further, year round.

The market revolution was the most important idea mentioned by Nathan Montague and what was taught in class. The market revolution was the expansion of goods being distributed to further areas because of the advancement in transportation, as we learned in class. The economy was able to improve because of this, furthering the nation. The transportation revolution caused the market revolution to happen.
History of the Erie Canal: Reflection Journal

On Thursday, October 22, 2015, my History 140 class took a trip to Canal Side in Downtown Buffalo, NY. Nathan Montauge, a Senior Research Support Specialist with the Archeological Survey at the University at Buffalo, gave a brief history of what Canal Side was like during the Market Revolution and the affects it had on Buffalo. The Market Revolution marked a switch in the economy as new technology was created. Farmers from New England set out to Buffalo to generate new farms in order to be able to provide for their families and the local market, in hopes to one day pass the land down to their children. Some citizens, including Henry Clay and Dewitt Clinton, were not satisfied. They wanted to make the land more valuable.

Buffalo started out on a bluff. As technology became more advanced, such as the plow and invention of steam power, Buffalo began to change. Transportation began to transform the city as roads and waterways were used to transport goods. But the swampy land was still not valuable. A leading business man in Buffalo’s transformation was Samuel Wilkinson. He saw the land differently and as an opportunity for change. With money and a vision, the harbor was renovated and was eventually picked as the terminus for the Erie Canal in 1825. Everyone in the area pitched in to help construction and land prices began to rise as Buffalo was becoming an important port as it connected the Buffalo River to the Great Lakes.

Business exploded during this time! The Erie Canal allowed farmers and merchants to buy and sell things from other areas in the east. Land speculation boomed and the population rose. Joseph Dart created dozens of grain elevators up and down the canal. Every inch of Buffalo was covered with brick buildings, some three to four stories high. Today, at part of
Canal Side, you can see some of the original brick foundations. The original buildings held three to four businesses each. Larger business began to take over the buildings, marking the switch between individual, small time businesses to the creation of factories, wage workers, and mass production.

This time was an exciting time in Buffalo, but people started to run crazy. There were taverns, brothels, and a lot of crime. A part of the canal was called “The Hooks” because in the morning a large hook would drag dead bodies out of the water. Doug’s Dive, a bar in the area, also became an important stop on the Underground Railroad. They would harbor escapee slaves and help them escape across the river to Canada. There was a lot of communication about Buffalo as a place slaves could safely stay, and in turn, people learned about Buffalo. There were other social changes happening Buffalo at this time, including cholera and typhoid epidemics. People did not know much about sanitation at the time. A lot of people drank, considering alcohol was the only safe thing to consume.

Buffalo went through its ups and downs. Nathan noted that people transitioned from owning a few things to society becoming more commercial and consumer orientated. Products like toys and tools became cheaper, partly because of the enhanced transportation methods. People could afford more in the market driven economy. One person started to own a few buildings and mass production of items became the new standard. Railroads powered by steam were created across the country and began to take work away from canals. Work in the canals in Buffalo started to die down, and it was eventually filled in during the 1920s. The middle class and shop owners started to move out of the city, marking a separation of classes, as the poor and wage workers stayed in the city. Tenements and buildings began to fall down, and Buffalo began to go through another transformation.
Growing up and living in Buffalo, it was very interesting to learn about what the city was once like. It was cool to try and envision how Buffalo began, what it looked like, and how it changed. I have visited the Erie Basin Marina many times since I was a child. It has been a humbling experience not only to see it transform but also see the new development now known as Canal Side. Nathan mentioned that in the 1960s a federal law was passed to prohibit the construction of historic land sites and buildings. A fellow classmate of mine asked if there are any original parts of Canal Side from the time of the Market revolution. What surprised me the most was the only original parts are the few brick foundations of old buildings. Everything else is new and reconstructed. Whenever I am down at Canal Side I get wrapped up in the beautiful view or the people playing music or selling things or even the food. I have never really stopped to think about how Buffalo got to be where it is today and how the Erie Canal played a role in its transformation.

The Erie Canal is an important part of our history as Buffalonians and as New Yorkers. I remember learning about it in the fourth grade and even taking a trip to the Lockport Locks. If you asked me what the purpose of the Erie Canal was and the effects it had on Buffalo I would be able to answer the question. But if you asked me before the tour where the location of the canal was, I don’t think I would be able to give you a correct answer. This tour made me realize that I do not know much about the history of my home, and I have gained a better understanding of not only where the Erie Canal was, but how it influenced the area and the people of Buffalo. The canal was a great asset to the city of Buffalo, but there was also crime and craziness. I don’t remember learning about that in the fourth grade.
This tour gave me a sense of how Buffalo became to be and how important it is to know the history of Buffalo in order to understand the recent changes being made in the city. Buffalo has become an area of opportunity and the community atmosphere is positively changing. The city is being recognized as a leader for growth and development. When the Erie Canal was being built, Buffalonians came together to help build it, realizing what the opportunity would mean for Buffalo. Today, Buffalonians are realizing the opportunity we have to transform our home and are coming together to build a better Buffalo. The tour has helped me realize the true significance of the name “Canal Side.” It is not just a place where we can enjoy the beautiful view or grab a bite to eat, but it is a reminder of Buffalo’s rich history of the Erie Canal and Buffalo’s continuous growth and desire for improvement.

During the 1800s, the United States underwent dramatic changes. The Transportation Revolution was a time of rapid advancement of technology that affected the Market Revolution and the increased production of goods. Because of the construction of railroads and waterways, goods were able to be transported to farther areas faster and cheaper, connecting cities by trade. Cities began to grow and society had become industrialized. One important water way that helped connect cities and profoundly affected the growth of Buffalo, NY was the Erie Canal.

In the 1790’s, Buffalo was settled upon “a sand bluff ... perched some 25 feet or more above the level of Lake Erie but not a great distance inland (east) of its then glistening shoreline” (Grasso 2) by pioneers, naming it the “The Terrace.” Between the terrace, lake, and Big Buffalo Creek, there were swamps and bogs scattered among bushes and shrubs known as The Flats. The Erie Canal not only changed the terrain of Buffalo, but also contributed to major social and economic transformation.
“The state’s Erie Canal era began in 1817 and with it came new excitement for the potential economic benefits that would come to the site chosen for the western terminus of the Grand Canal” (Grasso 5). Buffalonians, including Judge Samuel Wilkeson, set out to improve Buffalo in order to be chosen as the location of the western terminus. Buffalo was eventually chosen, and the canal was completed in 1825. Trade during the 1830’s and 1840’s increased and “necessitated the planning and construction of new slips, basins and adjuncts to the Erie Canal and Buffalo’s vibrant harbor” (Grasso 8). Within ten years of the creation of the Erie Canal, “The Canal District came of age with a reputation” (Grasso). The area quickly became congested as the population grew and was associated with sin and crime. But by the early 20th century the district underwent another transformation, especially because of the effect the railroads had upon the area and economy.

The Canal District is much different than it was in the early 1900’s. The entire Canal District and surrounding area was demolished by an explosion on the morning of New Years in 1936. Throughout the 1940’s and so on, the Canal District was completely developed with little to no remnants left of early Buffalo. Buildings and apartments have been constructed on the original Erie Canal site and “other streets of the district that once built the City of Buffalo” (Grasso 17). There is only a small footprint of what Buffalo was once like during the time of the Erie Canal, and Buffalo continues to undergo transformation as the times change.