

Press Release

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Moving Frontiers: Early Transportation in the Mohawk Valley

August 20-November 4, 2009

At the Arkell Museum at Canajoharie



David Maitland Armstrong (1836 - 1918), Grocery Store on the Erie Canal, 1881, Arkell Museum Collection

Canajoharie, NY, --This exhibition of images, objects and revealing quotes provides a glimpse back to a time when people and supplies traveled only by river, road, canal and train. Photographs, paintings, trade signs, a model of the DeWitt Clinton train, a canal boat model and a sleigh manufactured in the 19th century will be on display next to the words of European visitors who traveled through the Mohawk Valley in the 18th and 19th centuries. Ron Burch, Curator of Art and Architecture at the New York State Museum, developed the exhibition from objects found at the Arkell Museum, private collections, historic societies and his own New York State Museum. The exhibition was developed in conjunction with the symposium *Moving Frontiers: Early Transportation in the*

Mohawk Valley (October 17-18, 2009) and supported in part by the New York Council for the Humanities. The exhibition will be on display at the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie from August 20, 2009-November 4, 2009.

The exhibition begins with images of travel by bateau and ox cart -- and continues on to present images and objects associated with the turnpike and plank road. In colonial and post-colonial America, travelers sought, and customarily found, food and lodging at private residences along their route. Signs, many brightly painted, were hung before taverns to attract travelers. Seen from a distance, their presence announced an "accommodation," even to travelers with limited reading ability.

Visitors to the museum will see a Cutter Sleigh made by John C. Meyer in the late 19th century. Sleighs, introduced into North America by the Dutch of the New Netherland colony, were utilized as a means of transportation in the Mohawk Valley where winters were often longer and more severe than in the British Isles. Trodden snow and frozen ground made for a much firmer road surface, able to support the weight of passengers and freight, than the often muddy and rutted dirt roads of other seasons.

By the end of the 18th century, the idea of a canal, utilizing the Mohawk Valley to help link the newly settled lands of western New York with the markets of the eastern seaboard via the Hudson River, was a notion whose time had come. In the summer of 1810, DeWitt Clinton and other members of the newly appointed Canal Commission explored the Mohawk River and points west to Lake Erie by bateau and carriage to determine a possible route for the canal. A model canal boat and images of life along the canal is on display in the exhibition.

The Mohawk Valley was the site of the first permanent railroad in New York, which was also one of the first railroads in the country. A model train and images of the DeWitt Clinton train can be seen in the exhibition. The Mohawk and

Hudson Railroad was chartered by the state in 1826 and began operations in 1831, providing a faster alternative to the Erie Canal between Albany and Schenectady. In 1836 the Utica and Schenectady Railroad extended the line up the north side of the Mohawk River to Utica. Within a few years, rail lines extended across the state.

The exhibition also includes bird's eye views of cities and villages along the Mohawk River created during the second half of the 19th century. Guest Curator Ronald Burch noted that "These views were usually from an imaginary point high in the sky: the view from a bird's eye. From this vantage point the viewer could appreciate the connection between rivers, canals, roadways, and railroads, and the geography which shaped their courses."

The exhibition opens with an afternoon of family activities on August 22, 2009 and continues through November 5, 2009.

The Arkell Museum at Canajoharie completed a major addition in September 2007 which included new galleries, classroom and program spaces. Permanent exhibitions include paintings by Winslow Homer, American Impressionists, and The Eight. Mohawk Valley history and Beech-Nut Packaging Company advertising are also featured in exhibitions. The museum presents concerts, films, family activities, and school programs. The Arkell Museum is open Monday-Friday 10:00 am-5:00 pm, Saturday –Sunday 12:30 -5:00 pm. The Arkell Museum is located half way between Albany and Utica — just three blocks from exit 29 on the New York State Thruway (I-90). For information call 518-673-2314 or visit www.arkellmuseum.org .

Digital images of the paintings in this exhibition are available to the media. Please contact Diane Forsberg dforsberg@sals.edu for a complete list of available images.