

Pioneers coming to Michigan traveled along dirt roads that followed the routes of Indian trails. These roads were full of holes and often muddy. After traveling on one of these early roads, one pioneer wrote that she had been “jolted to a jelly.”

Many other pioneers, especially those coming from New York, arrived in Michigan by boat.

They started their journey on the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal looked like a small river. It was 4 feet deep and 42 feet wide, but it stretched 363 miles across New York state.

Passengers traveled on flatboats—large wooden boats that looked like a box. These flatboats were pulled by horses that walked along the edge of the canal.

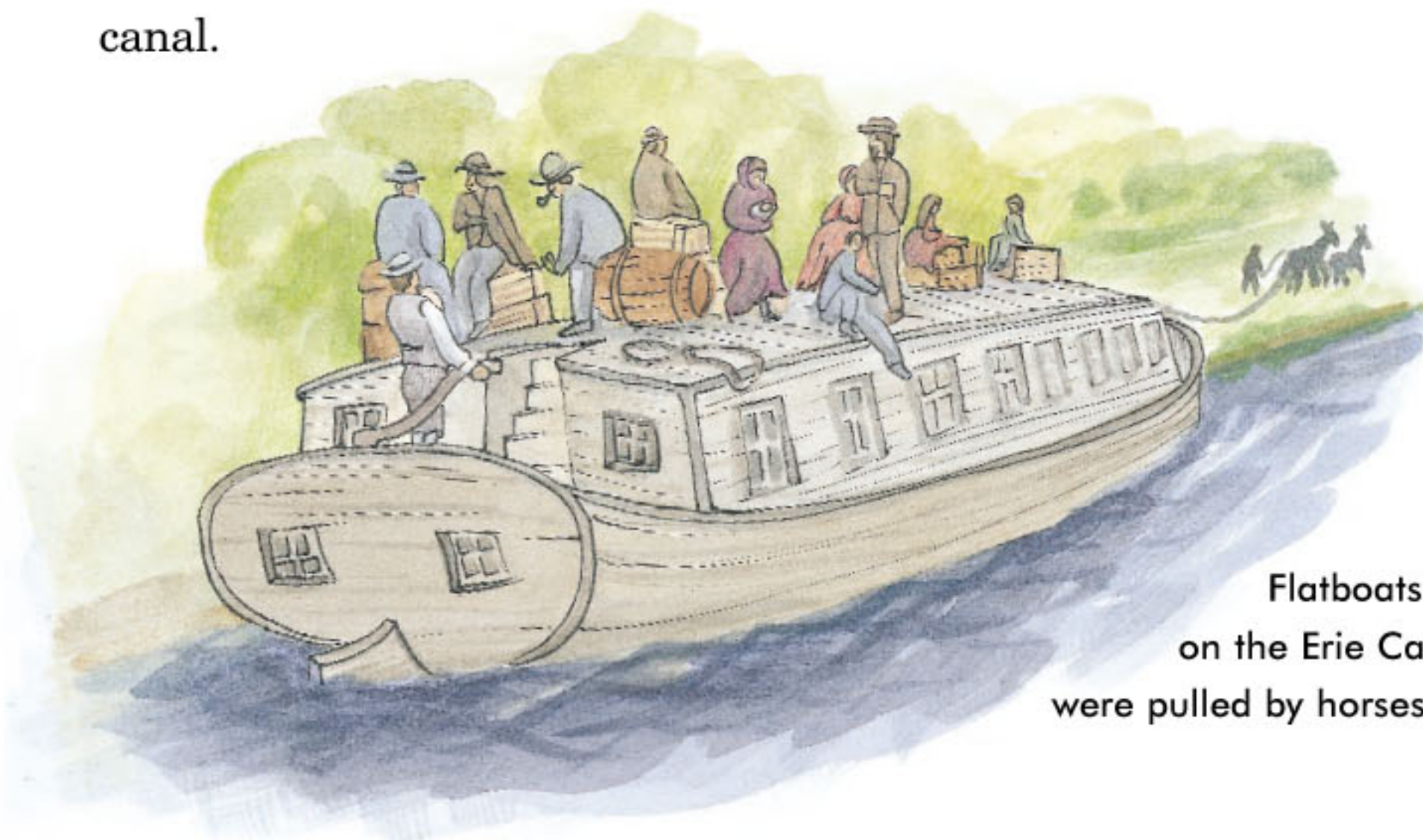
During the day, passengers remained on the boat’s deck. They sang or talked with the other passengers. At night, travelers slept in the cabin. It was not a pleasant place to sleep. The straw-padded bunks were often dirty and smelled. The cabin’s door and windows

THE ERIE CANAL How They Got Here

were closed to keep out the mosquitoes and the bad smells of the canal.

This left the cabin hot and stuffy.

Erie Canal flatboats traveled about 2 miles per hour and cost the passengers about half a penny a mile. When flatboats reached Buffalo, New York, passengers boarded steamboats for the three-day journey through Lake Erie to Detroit. Once in Detroit, the pioneer families headed inland to settle the Michigan wilderness.



Flatboats on the Erie Canal were pulled by horses.

Where to Take Your Family

Walker Tavern

From 1836 through 1855—when a stagecoach ride from Detroit to Chicago was a five-day trip—a favorite stopping place to change horses, relax, enjoy a meal, or spend the night was Walker Tavern. Today, exhibits at Walker Tavern in Cambridge Junction include an 1840s parlor, barroom, dining room, kitchen and barn. The historic site is open Memorial Day through Labor Day and the remainder of



the year by special appointment.

Telephone (517) 467-

4401 or contact the Michigan Historical Museum. Visit on-line at www.sos.state.mi.us/history/museum/musewalk.

The Michigan Historical Museum

Visitors can experience what it was like to ride on a plank road in the Statehood and Settlement gallery at the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing. Also, the Michigan Historical Center’s Web site offers lesson plans and activities relating to Michigan’s pioneer era. Telephone (517) 373-3559, TDD: (800) 827-7007. Visit on-line at www.sos.state.mi.us/history.