

# Cape Cod Canal

## Timeline

### 18,000 Years Ago

#### Glaciers Retreat from Cape Cod

The location and overall shape of Cape Cod and the Islands were primarily formed by glaciers 18,000 - 25,000 years ago. Rock debris deposited by the glaciers and the glaciers' melt waters shaped the valley in which the Cape Cod Canal now resides. This resulting low lying valley connected by two bays made this an obvious location for the Canal. Large boulders, also left behind by the glaciers, would unfortunately pose a challenge in constructing the Canal.

### 1627

#### Aptucxet trading post Established

Aptucxet Trading Post is established along the banks of the Manomet River. Following a route they learned from the Wampanoag Nation's Manomet Tribe, Miles Standish of Plymouth Colony proposes a canal connecting Cape Cod and Buzzards Bay. A cut through this valley would make travel to the trading post and points south much easier. But, it would take almost 300 years before the Manomet River would become part of the Cape Cod Canal.

### 1776

#### Surveying the Route

The outbreak of the War for Independence added the danger of capture to the existing natural dangers of sailing around Cape Cod. For greater security, Massachusetts General Court approved a resolution to cut a navigable canal through the isthmus. Engineer and artillery officer, Thomas Machin was briefly detached from military command to make the survey. His report recommended building a canal with locks. Machin's report is the first survey on record. Many more would follow.

### 1824

#### The General Survey Act

Congress passes the General Survey Act, authorizing funding for the US Army Corps of Engineers to conduct surveys for roads and canals of national importance. The Corps details several optional routes for a Cape Cod Canal. But no action is taken to fund and construct the canal.

### 1880s

#### Shipwrecks

Cape Cod's outer shores are claiming an average of one shipwreck every two weeks. As more cargo, ships and lives were lost, pressure to build a canal mounts. Two different companies attempted to construct a canal during this time. Both attempts failed with little progress.

### 1909

#### First Shovelful

On June 22nd, construction of the Cape Cod Canal begins when August Belmont Jr. ceremoniously digs the first shovelful. He promises “not to desert the task until the last shovelful has been dug”.

## **1914**

### **Opening Day**

On July 29th, the Cape Cod Canal officially opens to ship traffic with a grand celebration that included a parade of ships. The passenger vessel S.S. Rose Standish leads the parade of ships through.

## **1928**

### **The Corps Takes Over**

March 31st, under the authority of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1927, Congress directs the US Army Corps of Engineers to operate and improve Belmont’s failing Canal.

## **1930s**

### **Reconstructing the Waterway**

The US Army Corps of Engineers undertakes a massive reconstruction project. The present Bourne, Sagamore and Railroad bridges are completed in 1935. The Canal is widened and deepened, and the approach channel in Buzzards Bay is straightened. Work is completed by 1940, making the Cape Cod Canal the widest sea level canal in the world.

## **1941**

### **World War II**

The numbers of vessels and tons of cargo that transit the Cape Cod Canal rise drastically as military and commercial vessels seek the safer intra-coastal route to avoid enemy fire from German submarines off the outer coast of Cape Cod. The railroad bridge is also heavily used as trains transport troops and supplies to Camp Edwards. To ensure safe movement of vessels, the 241st Coast Artillery Installation is established on Sagamore Hill overlooking Cape Cod Bay.

## **1972**

### **Marine Traffic Control**

To keep pace with steadily increasing Canal’s usage, the Corps designs and installs a centralized integrated ship traffic control system. Utilizing radar and closed circuit television surveillance, a single marine traffic controller can monitor all ships as they move through the entire Canal. Prior to this a team of controllers at 3 locations along the Canal were needed to monitor and direct ship transits.

## **Today**

### **A Safe and Viable Waterway**

The US Army Corps of Engineers continues to this day to operate, maintain and improve this toll-free Canal as a vital navigable waterway for thousands of commercial, military and

recreational vessels annually. Additionally the Corps manages the natural and cultural resources on the surrounding 1,150 acres of Federal lands, and provides diverse recreational opportunities to more than 3 million visitors each year.