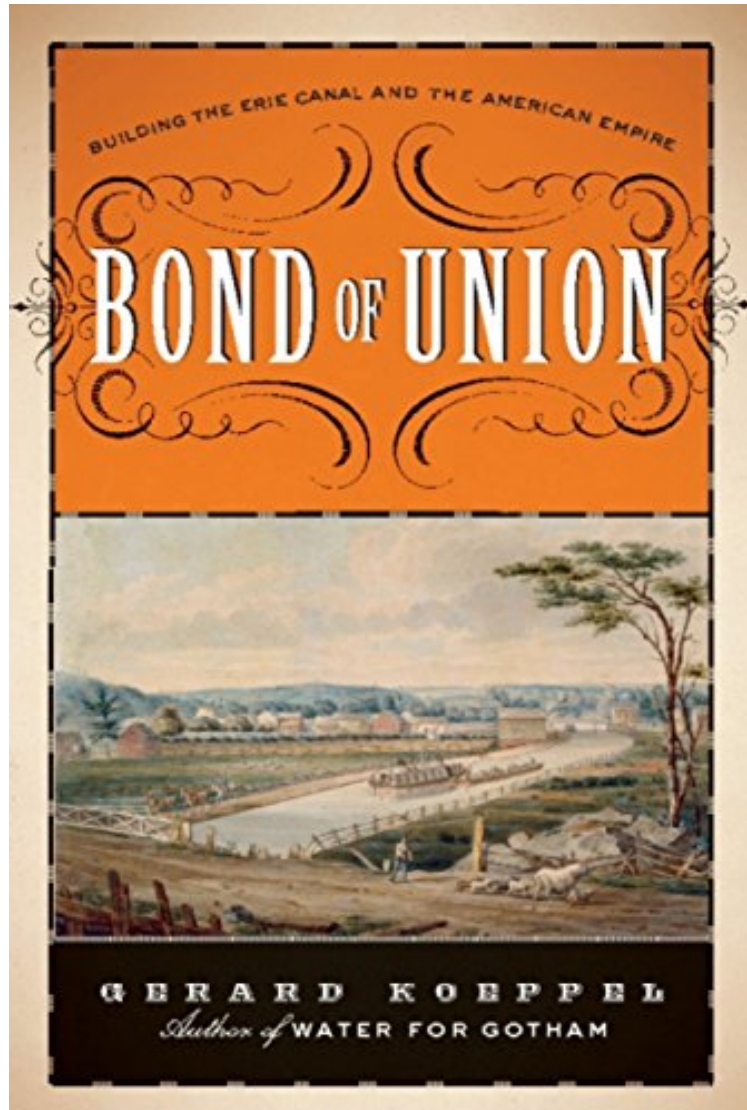


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Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire

Gerard Koepfel

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Gerard Koepfel : Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. good - but a bit of a struggle
By Roald Euller
Bond of Union, Gerard Koepfel I have to confess up front that I had a difficult time getting through Bond of Union. Please note that my struggles did not affect my star rating. Bond of Union is a professionally researched book about a fascinating topic in American and NY State history. The author is supremely knowledgeable about his subject and it is clear to me that the book is a labor of love. Hence my rating of four stars, which is a high rating from me. So what were my struggles?

What I was hoping for was a book along the lines of David McCullough's *The Path Between the Seas*. A grand narrative history of canal building, except that the focus would be the Erie rather than Panama Canal. Instead, *Bond of Union* is a detailed analysis of the political maneuverings and infighting of Dewitt Clinton and a vast cast of characters during the early decades of the 1800s. If you are interested in accounts of debates within the NY State legislature, media duels between anonymous newspaper editorialists, and behind the scenes financial negotiations, then I can highly recommend *Bond of Union*, for it is meticulous in this regard. If you are looking for something written from more of an engineering perspective, then you may want to look elsewhere. All in all an excellent and professional effort, but not quite to my personal taste. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Good Reference, Some Flaws

By L. B. Hughes This is the definitive story of the building of the Erie Canal, with prodigious research but still quite readable. We who like the nitty gritty will discover in the first few pages that this is the McCoy. He has done a lot of work on this thing, built a monument, and deserves congratulations. Koepfel has a "warts and all" approach, which is a bit too heavy on the warts. He doesn't like most of the characters, e.g., chief engineer Benjamin Wright and Governor DeWitt Clinton. He also doesn't like Masons, Mormons, anyone who goes to church, and anyone who made money on the project. (How he thinks it could have been done without anyone making money, he does not say). Those 21st century prejudices are a flaw, however, when imposed on 19th century people, and serve no useful purpose except to inform the reader that the author is politically correct. I think his characterization of Wright as an amateur civil engineer and homespun provincial is a mistake. He tells us twice, for instance, that Wright's sobriquet as "father of American civil engineering" was not awarded until 1969, to suggest his contemporaries would not have voted him the same honor. Most of his best contemporaries had been his pupils, and called Wright in for advice on later jobs, as Koepfel himself carefully records in this book...In addition, the author doesn't mention Wright was a Mayflower descendant of inherited wealth, well educated at Litchfield, whose father and grandfather were Yale graduates, and whose father had been an officer in the continental army, promoted after the disastrous retreat from Long Island. Since such trivia about lesser figures was included in the book, my guess is that Koepfel was not aware of this background. There is a pearl of a quote from Jefferson's letter of congratulations to DeWitt Clinton in this book, which shows that the sage of Monticello, late in life, did indeed recognize the dynamic power of free market capitalism. That piece alone should make Koepfel's work a valuable reference. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Illuminating look at the history of the Erie Canal

By P. Sheehy Really fantastic, well-told history. Koepfel goes into great detail about how the project was financed, the back door business/political machinations that made it happen, and how it was conceived by a man in jail who wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper suggesting it. Koepfel also details the pressure New York politicians and other state big wigs felt because Virginia was also planning to build a canal that would serve as a waterway from their ports to the Ohio River and Lake Erie. Fascinating.

In this elegantly written and far-reaching narrative, acclaimed author Gerard Koepfel tells the astonishing story of the creation of the Erie Canal and the memorable characters who turned a visionary plan into a successful venture. Koepfel's long years of research fill the pages with new findings about the construction of the canal and its enormous impact, providing a unique perspective on America's self perception as an empire destined to expand to the Pacific.

From Booklist A historian of an aqueduct crucial to the nineteenth-century growth of New York City (*Water for Gotham*, 2000), Koepfel adopts infrastructure of comparable significance: the Erie Canal. Its economic impact—vaulting NYC over Philadelphia as the commercial capital of the U.S.—was ably recounted by business historian Peter Bernstein in *Wedding of the Waters* (2005); Koepfel adds greater emphasis in his narrative to the constellation of promoters and politicians who brought the canal into existence. Naturally, the name of DeWitt Clinton shines brightly, but who was Jesse Hawley? His story typified the mania for canal construction that swept America in the early 1800s: he was a bail-jumping upstate New Yorker with big ideas for improving transportation that he advocated in newspapers, and whose realization he witnessed when Clinton made his celebrated canal-opening voyage from Buffalo to Albany to New York in 1825. Similarly obscure but vital actors (such as legislators and engineers) in the Erie Canal saga populate Koepfel's lively account, which ought to hook fans of construction-project dramas. —Gilbert Taylor *Named a "Great Lakes, Great Reads"*; pick by the Great Lakes Independent Booksellers Association Booklist, 3/1/09 [The Erie Canal's economic impact—vaulting NYC over Philadelphia as the commercial capital of the U.S.—was ably recounted by business historian Peter Bernstein in *Wedding of the Waters* (2005); Koepfel adds greater emphasis in his narrative to the constellation of promoters and politicians who brought the canal into existence... [A] lively account. —Bob Kerrey, president of the New School, former U.S. Senator "Every page of this exceptionally well written and researched book brings to light and life some story about some previously unknown individual or incident that shaped our present world beyond what I had known. Anyone who wants to understand the story of New York and how a single public works project transformed our country should read it." Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History at Columbia University and Director of the Herbert H. Lehman Center for American History, author of *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, editor in chief of the *Encyclopedia of New*

York City, and executive director of the New York Academy of History "Visually, the Erie Canal was little more than an unimpressive little ditch. But in the development of the United States in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Erie Canal was approximately as important as the Mississippi River and the Ohio River combined. Gerard Koeppel's *Bond of Union* is a sweeping narrative of the remarkable men who built a waterway and transformed a nation." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 3/1/09

"Koeppel's superb history shows that the canal, by more tightly drawing the states together through increased commerce, helped create the conditions for a continental nation. Now, as the nation readies public works projects to aid the plunging economy, it is instructive to examine what historian Paul Johnson has called 'probably the outstanding example of a human artifact creating wealth rapidly in the whole of history.'" *Detroit Free Press*, 3/15/09

"This engrossing account of an important achievement in U.S. history shows evidence of an awesome amount of research." *Augusta Metro Spirit*, 3/18/09

"Reminds readers of the importance of independent historical research in [a] world often inundated with information and yet often lacking serious consideration." The gripping tale of how the Erie Canal came to be.

Offers an extensive view of an amazing structure.

With detailed precision and smooth narrative chimes, Koeppel offers a fascinating look behind the scenes of one of the more impressive structures of American history.

A highly acclaimed author already (*Water for Gotham*), Koeppel calls forth his next masterpiece by revitalizing a historical occasion that hasn't seemed so relevant in a long time.

InfoDad.com, 3/26

"A meticulously researched and exhaustive history." *Bond of Union* may end up being the last word on a story whose last word seemed to have been written long ago.

Koeppel manages to tell a story that is at times fascinating, at times genuinely gripping, and at times surprisingly modern in the way it interweaves American politics with every bit of the planning and execution of a major construction project.

Students of the byways of American history will find *Bond of Union* a fascinating tale of a bygone era whose political echoes, if nothing else, still resonate today.

Athens News, 3/16/09

"If American history is of interest to you, you will find it well worth the reading."

HistoryWire.com, 4/5/09

"[Koeppel] takes his readers behind the scenes of political chicanery at several levels to show how support for the canal project often had little to do with a backer's ulterior motives."

Tucson Citizen, 4/9/09

"This comprehensive history is lively, well researched and written by an author with a real talent for genuine story telling."

Buffalo News, 4/12/09

"Koeppel makes it clear that the canal was the first great piece of American infrastructure, the major bond between the seaboard America and the vast continental interior."

Schenectady Gazette, 4/12/09

"A complete, drily witty account of the design, financing, construction and operation of the Erie Canal." [Koeppel] is well-suited to revisit the story of the canal.

[and has a] witty, jaunty writing voice.

Among books about the Erie Canal, Koeppel's is noteworthy for showing how astonishing it was that the project was started and succeeded.

Smoke, 4/09

"Sheds new light on the politics, science, and rivalries that encompassed the creation of the Erie Canal."

Irish America, July, 2009

"The Irish role in one of early America's most important and ambitious construction projects is explored in *Bond of Union*." *Wesleyan*, 2009

"This well-researched book tells the complete story of the creation of the Erie Canal, from its conception in 1807 to its completion in 1825, as it became the first great link between the American seaboard and the vast continental interior. Koeppel's historical narrative involves a number of memorable individuals who were determined to see their visionary project succeed."

Talk of the Town, WTVF TV (CBS, Nashville), 5/5/09

"Building America's infrastructure is important to President Obama's stimulus plan and this history of the Erie Canal demonstrates the widespread political, social, and economic benefits of that kind of policy from the early 1800s through today."

American History, August 2009

"A detailed, well-crafted look at how one big-idea infrastructure project changed a nation."

Internet of Books, 5/22/09

"A detailed account of the construction of New York's Erie Canal...The author skillfully paints a picture of the rough-hewn artificial river system of canals and locks." A fantastic tale that happens to be true, recounted by an author who knows how to bring that era back to life. Political history buffs will love every minute detail.

Bookviews.com, June 2009

"Filled with interesting, passionate and determined characters." [and] all manner of drama."

Niagara Gazette, 5/13/09

"A fascinating account of an engineering marvel that captured national attention in the early 1800s."

Reference and Research Book News, August 2009

"Koeppel strips away the myth established by repetition to give a clear-eyed and perceptive account of the creation of the Erie Canal and the strong-willed and determined characters who made it happen."

Sacramento Book, 7/24/09

"A very well-researched account of a very impressive accomplishment." Koeppel shows how people with vision and initiative can overcome obstacles and achieve a goal, even over the opposition of others who are deficient in vision or initiative."

Magill Book, October 2009

"A lively account of one of the most famous transportation projects in history and its impact upon America." Excellent.

Explains why this waterway was necessary and how it was constructed.

Fascinating.

An enthralling tale of economic chaos, political intrigue, and monumental achievement. *Bond of Union* is history well worth reading."

Bloomsbury, October 2009

"Monumental public works inspire—and typically deserve—grand exposure in books. The Erie Canal is no exception, even 184 years after its completion. This book is hardly the first to examine that feat, but it is one of the best." *Bond of Union* provides some useful new information; but shines mostly as an engaging narrative, stitching together the

backstory and detailing the painful, step-by-step progress—and sometimes, lack thereof—as the grand ditch inched its way across the landscape. Journal of American History, December 2009 “A richly detailed account. A lively and often poignant account that is accessible to general readers and undergraduate students, while providing sufficient detail to engage historians. Koeppl reinvigorates this familiar story, deepening readers’ understanding of this crucial event in nineteenth-century America.” Rome Sentinel, 1/6/10 “You’ll learn a lot about the Erie Canal. Or maybe unlearn some.” Lima News, 12/27/10 “[A] compelling, sweeping narrative. Memorable characters. Koeppl unearths major new findings about the construction of the canal along with the surprising twists and turns of the bold venture.” Choice, February 2010 “Departing from the standard sole praise for DeWitt Clinton, Koeppl adds many other names to the historical record. The book is well-researched and a good read about the various leaders of the effort, the various difficulties encountered while building the canal, and the backroom politics that swirled all around the project. Recommended.” History in .org, 3/2/10 “Engaging. This popular history of the Erie Canal is wonderfully written in a flowing narrative style, and Koeppl’s research on the topic was obviously extensive as was hi...