

DUXBURY/MARSHFIELD, 1636
“Plymouth Colony Laws, 1623—1682”, Page 25

CUT RIVER CANAL

First Canal Dug in America
One of America’s First Public Works Project

The Cut River, a small tidal creek extending through the Duxbury marshlands, is the site of America’s first canal. Colonial merchants realized the security that an inland waterway would provide to the transportation of their goods running through a safer passage from Plymouth Harbor through Duxbury Harbor to Green Harbor and northern communities. The open water route around Gurnet Point and along Duxbury Beach was much too dangerous.

In 1636, it was ordered by the Court that “a boate passage shalbe made eightene foote wide and sixe foote deepe.” The court’s order further required everyone in the Colony to share equally in the cost of construction and that the Colonial Governor shall oversee the project appointing men to work in shifts of ten at a time to dig the canal.

By 1850, the increased size of ships and the twin lighthouses on Gurnet Point made the canal obsolete. Many boaters, canoeists and kayakers can still travel on portions of America’s first public works projects today.

Compliments of Register of Deeds John R. Buckley, Jr.
and Attorney John E. McCluskey
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