

Enfield Falls Canal

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Windsor Locks Canal and railroad bridge (postcard mailed in 1909)

Specifications

Length	5.25 miles (8.45 km)
Locks	1 (north end); 3 (south end)
Status	Closed
Navigation authority	

Enfield Falls Canal (Windsor Locks Canal)

[U.S. National Register of Historic Places](#)

Nearest city	Windsor Locks, Connecticut
Area	55 acres (22 ha)
Built	1829

NRHP reference #	76001998^[1]
Added to NRHP	April 22, 1976
History	
Construction began	1827
Date completed	November 11, 1829
Geography	
Start point	 41.9866°N 72.6053°W
End point	 41.9169°N 72.6248°W

Enfield Falls Canal (Windsor Locks Canal) is a [canal](#) that was built to circumvent the shallows at **Enfield Falls** (or **Enfield Rapids**) on the [Connecticut River](#), between [Hartford, Connecticut](#) and [Springfield, Massachusetts](#). It is situated along the west side of the river, adjacent to the towns of [Suffield](#) and [Windsor Locks](#) in [Hartford County](#) in the state of [Connecticut, USA](#). Windsor Locks is named after the series of [locks](#) on the canal.

History^[edit]

Prior to the opening of the canal, the [scows](#) or flat-bottomed boats which plied the Connecticut River could only ascend the falls by engaging local fallsmen to propel the craft forward utilizing set poles. One fallsmen was required for each ton of cargo. Not only did the added labor costs make this method of overtaking the falls expensive, but the amount of cargo that could be transported was limited to approximately ten tons. Any additional freight had to be offloaded at Warehouse Point on the east bank and warehoused for later transport or carried around the falls by [ox](#) teams.



Windsor Locks Canal Company buildings alongside the canal. [Amtrak's New Haven-Springfield Line](#) is visible in the foreground.

Construction of the canal commenced in 1827 and it was opened on November 11, 1829. The canal was $5\frac{1}{4}$ miles (8.4 km) long and had a vertical drop of 32 ft (9.8 m). The locks admitted craft up to 90 ft (27 m) long and 20 ft (6.1 m) wide. The canal was unique among canals of the era in that it was designed with structural reinforcement to facilitate steam tug boat traffic. The design of the canal included a massive head gate with apertures that could be opened and closed to precisely control water levels not only within the lock chambers but within the canal itself. The design feature supported the incorporator's dual intent to profit not only from tolls charged on canal traffic but from the sale of mill sites and the leasing of water rights to mill operators along the last mile of the canal bank.

Once the canal was opened, boats were able to carry much larger loads, and the anticipated [steamboat](#) services were introduced using newly designed vessels capable of passing through the lock chambers. [Charles Dickens](#) traveled along the canal on February 7, 1842. However, by 1844 the [Hartford and Springfield Railroad](#) had started operation, and navigation on the Connecticut River gradually reduced. The profits realized from the sale of water rights proved to be the more lucrative of the canal's two purposes.

Today^[edit]

Today the canal is listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#), but closed to navigation and privately owned by the [Ahlstrom Corporation](#),^[2] which has a manufacturing facility adjacent to the canal.^[3] The locks themselves still exist, but have not been usable since the 1970s.^[4] Most of the towpath is open for hiking and cycling as the [Windsor Locks Canal State Park Trail](#). While the canal is nominally open April 1 through November 15,^[5] the Southern end may be closed due to a pair of [bald eagles](#) which has nested there since 2011.^[6]