

START

Erie Canal

IVE GOT A MULE HER NAME IS SAL FIFTEEN MILES ON THE

ERIE CANAL SHE'S GOOD OLD WORK AND GOOD OLD PAL

FIFTEEN MILES ON THE ERIE CANAL WE'VE HAULED SOME BAR-

GES IN OUR DAY FILLED WITH LUMBER COAL AND HAY AND EV-

RY INCH OF WAY I KNOW ALBANNY TO BUF-----FA-----LO

END

Traditional lyrics

I've got a mule and her name is Sal
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal
She's a good old worker and a good old pal
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal

We've hauled some barges in our day
Filled with lumber, coal, and hay
And every inch of the way I (we) know
From Albany to Buffalo

Chorus:

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge cause we're coming to a town
And you'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If you've ever navigated on the Erie Canal

Get up there Sal, we've passed that lock,
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal
And we'll make Rome before six o'clock
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal

One more trip and back we'll go
Through the rain and sleet and snow
And every inch of the way I (we) know
From Albany to Buffalo

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge for we're coming to a town
And you'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If you've ever navigated on the Erie Canal.

Alternate lyrics

I've got a mule and her name is Sal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
She's a good old worker and a good old pal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal

We haul'd some barges in our day
Filled with lumber, coal and hay
We know every inch of the way
From Albany to Buffalo

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge, we're comin' to a town
And you'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If ya ever navigated on the Erie Canal

We'd better look around for a job, old gal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
You can bet your life I'll never part with Sal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal

Get up mule, here comes a lock
We'll make Rome 'bout six o'clock
One more trip and back we'll go
Right back home to Buffalo

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge, we're comin' to a town
You'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If ya ever navigated on the Erie Canal

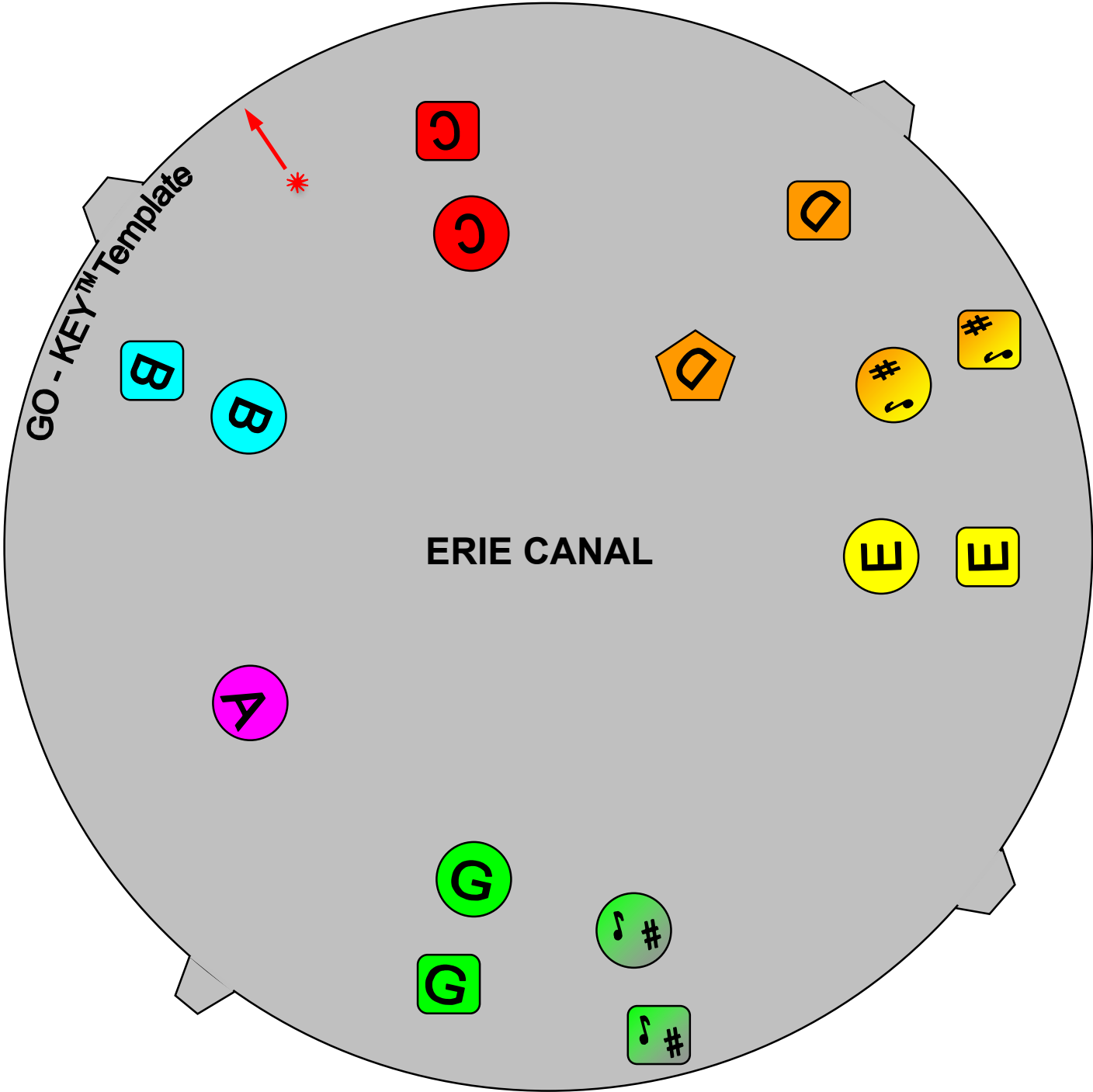
Where would I be if I lost my pal?
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
I'd like to see a mule good as my Sal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal

A friend of mine once got her sore
Now he's got a broken jaw
'Cause she let fly with an iron toe
And kicked him back to Buffalo

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge, 'cause we're comin' to a town
You'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If ya ever navigated on the Erie Canal

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge, we're comin' to a town
You'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If ya ever made a livin' on the Erie Canal

(Low bridge, everybody down)
(Low bridge, we're comin' to a town)



History and Origin

"Erie Canal" was first known as the popular song "Low Bridge, Everybody Down" and was written in 1905 by Thomas S. Allen after Erie Canal barge traffic was converted from mule power to engine power, raising the speed of traffic. Also known as "Fifteen Years on the Erie Canal", "Fifteen Miles on the Erie Canal", "Erie Canal Song", "Erie Barge Canal", and "Mule Named Sal", the song memorializes the years from 1825 to 1880 when the mule barges made boomtowns out of Utica, Rome, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, and transformed New York into the Empire State.

The song refers to travelers who would typically ride on top of the boats. The low bridges would require them to get down out of the way to allow safe passage under a bridge.

Recordings and Other Uses

- Billy Murray
- Vernon Dalhart
- Jack Narz
- Glenn Yarborough
- Pete Seeger
- The Weavers
- The Kingston Trio
- VeggieTales
- Sons of the Pioneers
- Dan Zanes included it on a children's album with Suzanne Vega singing lead
- Bruce Springsteen recorded the song on his 2006 album *We Shall Overcome*
- The cartoon series *Animaniacs* parodied "Low Bridge" with their song about the Panama Canal
- The lyrics are also the text of the book *The Erie Canal* (1970), illustrated by Peter Spier

Variations (See Alternate Lyrics on page 2)

As with most folk songs, the lyrics have changed over time. The most obvious changes from Thomas Allen's original version has been changing the word "years" to "miles". Allen's original version commemorates 15 years of working along the canal with Sal. The new version using the word miles refers to the average distance a mule would tow a barge before resting or being relieved by another mule. Dave Ruch's research on this change has been documented in an extensive article.

Another change is in the second verse. The current line "Git up there mule, here comes a lock" is a change from the original line "Get up there gal, we've passed that lock". The original refers to how mules would rest while waiting for barges to lock through, and then need to be instructed when to start again. The current implies speeding up when a lock is within sight — not a standard course of action.