



The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs

Ulrich Keller

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In 1889 the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique declared bankruptcy. The French firm's optimistic and ill-planned attempt to construct a canal across the Isthmus of Panama had resulted in the death of 22,000 workers (most from yellow fever, typhoid fever, and malaria); the complete loss of one and a half billion francs for the company's 800,000 shareholders; and the bitter failure of Chief Engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps — the man responsible for the Suez Canal.

On August 15, 1914, the S.S. *Ancon* took nine hours and forty minutes to traverse the lock-and-lake waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. What occurred in the quarter century between 1889 and 1914 is a larger-than-life true story of adventure, revolution, ordeal, and accomplishment: the building of the Panama Canal — perhaps the greatest engineering marvel of the early twentieth century.

In 164 magnificent historic photographs and a well-researched text, noted photohistorian Ulrich Keller tells the compelling story of this hitherto unparalleled technological achievement. Selected from an archive of over 10,000 images amassed by Ernest Hallen (Official Photographer of the Isthmian Canal Commission), these historic prints document the Canal's construction and its way of life: 450 miles of railroad; housing for 60,000 based on a caste system; the exotic settings; tremendous hardships and health risks; leisure activities; the Canal Zone's internal government, administration and policing; dredging operations, including spectacular movements of earth and water; unheard-of engineering feats and disastrous failures; and finally, victory!

Photographers, historians, engineers, and students of industry and technology will immediately recognize this volume as an important primary source of industrial archaeology. Photography enthusiasts and lovers of true adventure will delight in the vibrant, you-are-there sensation imparted by the photos and Ulrich Keller's exceptionally informed text and meticulous captions. *The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs* takes the reader back to a different era, and one of the proudest episodes in what the author calls "the 'heroic' age of industry."

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