

Buffalo Human Rights Law Review

Volume 8

Article 7

9-1-2002

Erins on the Erie: A Historical Labor Study

Ryan Patrick Hanna

University at Buffalo School of Law (Student)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/bhrlr>



Part of the [Labor and Employment Law Commons](#), and the [Legal History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ryan P. Hanna, *Erins on the Erie: A Historical Labor Study*, 8 Buff. Hum. Rts. L. Rev. 189 (2002).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/bhrlr/vol8/iss1/7>

This Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Human Rights Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

ERINS ON THE ERIE: A HISTORICAL LABOR STUDY

*Ryan Patrick Hanna**

INTRODUCTION: A HISTORICAL LABOR STUDY

“Neither statesman nor politician could make or break the fate of the Erie Canal.”¹ “It was not the Canal Commissioners, sitting all day with their feet on their desks and smoking cigars, who have made headway in construction.”² “This power lay in the strong hearts and hands of thousands of starving Irishmen who had been harried and dispossessed by misrule and the failure of their agricultural economy. . .”³ “It’s the rugged Irish, working all winter in thin, worn clothes in the bitter winds and in the icy swamp water in broken boots from dawn until dark seven days a week, who have built the canal after everyone had about given it up.”⁴

The following is a historical labor study of the Irish immigrant laborers who participated in the construction of the Erie Canal in New York State. This study will examine the process and circumstances under which the Irish came to America and how they ended up on this mass public work project. Moreover, this study will delve into what it was like to live and work on the Erie during its construction. It will seek to illustrate how these Irish canal laborers overcame exploitations generated by ideologies, ethnic and religious prejudice, and the poverties associated with canal life to make an impact on both New York State and America, in general.

In 1817, state funded construction began on the Canal while famine in Ireland encouraged the immigration by the Irish from their homeland.⁵ Before most of the Irish had come to America, the Canal’s course had already been plotted, but this project would entail a great supply of both skilled and unskilled labor.⁶ In 1818, droves of Irish began immigrating to the United States “with the clothes they were wearing, their faith to sustain them, and little else.”⁷ These “[I]ndustrious men of ambition had come to America, eager to learn, eager to advance themselves by labor, and alert for

* University at Buffalo School of Law, J.D.-M.B.A. candidate 2003.

¹ HARVEY CHALMERS II, *HOW THE IRISH BUILT THE ERIE* 16 (1964).

² *Id.* at 88.

³ *Id.* at 16.

⁴ *Id.* at 88.

⁵ See CAROL SHERIFF, *THE ARTIFICIAL RIVER: THE ERIE CANAL AND THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS 1817-1862* 40 (1996).

⁶ See CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 16.

⁷ *Id.*

opportunity.”⁸ In the process, these Irish laborers would participate in the construction of one of the greatest achievements of the western world and would cement their places in the history and future of American culture.

PEASANTS TO PROLETARIANS

What led the Irish to laboring on North American canals, such as the Erie, is but “a fragment of a larger story in which a traditional peasant culture was broken down and capitalist society put in its place.”⁹ Irish peasants were transformed into proletarians, or wage earners, by a process which started in late seventeenth century Ireland and ended on North American public work sites such as the Erie Canal.¹⁰ “Their story [is one of] gradual separation from the land, transfer to wage labor and migration to where the market dictated.”¹¹ Therefore, “[t]o characterize [the Irish immigration] as a rational decision made in light of prevailing social and economic conditions is to miss the fact that conditions for two centuries and more had been increasingly stacked against those involved and imposed an ultimatum more than a free choice.”¹²

Even through the eighteenth century, Irish agrarian society was arranged around a communal system, where land was shared in order to ensure equitable distribution between individual households and families.¹³ However, “from the late seventeenth century, this communal system came under pressure as Ireland was drawn into the British market” and English “landlords confiscated land, evicted peasants, and converted it for commercial production.”¹⁴ To adjust to this change in the market and the scarcity of land, the communal Irish agricultural society “was replaced by . . . conferring the ownership of land on the oldest male offspring.”¹⁵ Younger siblings thus “ultimately faced a tough decision: landless status at home, always on the edge of poverty, dependent wage labor, or emigration abroad, which also meant proletarianization for most.”¹⁶ Therefore, “[b]y the early

⁸ *Id.* at 132.

⁹ PETER WAY, *COMMON LABOUR: WORKERS AND THE DIGGING OF NORTH AMERICAN CANALS 1780-1860* 90 (1993).

¹⁰ *See id.* at 98.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 93.

¹³ *See id.* at 91(citing KERBY MILLER, *EMIGRANTS AND EXILES: IRELAND AND THE IRISH EXODUS TO NORTH AMERICA* 27-28 (1985)).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at 93.

nineteenth century, Irish society was resolving into two classes with diverging interests, the landed and landless."¹⁷ "This process. . .[of] commercialization was [thus] a protracted one, not being completed until the Famine of 1817."¹⁸

The once sovereign nation of Ireland was reduced to but a British colony and its people, resources, and wealth were utilized to serve only the needs of the English economy.¹⁹ "The Irish government promoted this growing commercial orientation, and the construction of the Grand and Royal Canals was among its most significant initiatives."²⁰ Thus, by being stripped from their land, many Irish had already had their first experience with wage labor by working on Britain's public works, such as the Grand and Royal Canals.²¹ Since "the majority of Irish emigrants had prior experience with commercial relations and wage labor. . .[they] cannot be viewed as peasants. . .[because this] emigration was largely a result of the breakdown of the peasantry."²²

THE ERIE CANAL "TAPS" THE IRISH WORK FORCE

The Irish made up a significant portion of the unskilled laborers on Britain's internal improvements, especially in constructing canals.²³ But the Irish workers that escaped Ireland and went to England to find work on these public projects found that wages were so low that they still had trouble surviving.²⁴ However, "the seeming plethora of jobs and higher wages in North America made migration an attractive proposition for both experienced canallers and laborers in general. . ."²⁵ More specifically, the Erie Canal would require experienced engineers and many common laborers, but at that time, there were not enough men in New York State with sufficient experience in building canals.²⁶ Therefore, if the Erie Canal were to be built, this Irish labor supply in Great Britain would have to be

¹⁷ *Id.* at 92.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 91 (citing MILLER, *supra* note 13, at 28-33).

¹⁹ *See id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *See id.* at 93-94.

²² *Id.* at 96.

²³ *See id.* at 94.

²⁴ *See* CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 26.

²⁵ *See* WAY, *supra* note 9, at 74.

²⁶ *See* CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 17.

“tapped.”²⁷ As a result, the “[c]anal companies and contractors sent over recruiting agents and [New York State] set up immigration commissions.”²⁸

“Engineers from the Erie Canal made a fact-finding trip to England in 1816, and news of opportunities in North America percolated among the navvies.”²⁹ “The following year, Canvass White, a New York engineer, returned to England to recruit a force of experienced Irish workers” for the Erie.³⁰ Notices of the opportunity that the Erie Canal presented to laborers were placed in Irish newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.³¹ One North American canal company’s advertisement in Great Britain read simply, “Meat, three times a day, plenty of bread and vegetables, with a reasonable allowance of liquor, and ten or twelve dollars a month for wages.”³² “In 1817, *The Exile*, an Irish newspaper in New York City, promised that the Canal ‘will afford steady and permanent employment, as laborers will work winter as well as summer.’”³³

Another editor for an Irish-American newspaper stated that, “so long as necessary canals, roads, and bridges remain unfinished or unattempted, so long must we feel the necessity of increasing the population by adding thereto the laborious and scientific foreigners. Then let emigration be encouraged, and this most solid of all riches flow in without interruption.”³⁴ Charles Mercer, the president of the C & O Canal Company, “argued that emigration would relieve Great Britain ‘of a wretched surplus population, by transferring it to America, where its presence is much needed, and its labour would be amply rewarded.’”³⁵

Some of the Irish who could not afford passage to America entered into limited-term indentures with canal companies in return for paying their travel expenses.³⁶ “During the passage, the labourers were fed too little and what they got was often rotten, leading them to threaten the company’s

²⁷ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 94 (citing VINCENT E. POWERS, *INVISIBLE IMMIGRANTS: PRE-FAMINE IRISH COMMUNITY IN WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS, 1826-1860* 89-90 (Ph.D. dissertation, Clark Univ. 1976)).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *See id.*

³² *See id.*

³³ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 41.

³⁴ *See* WAY, *supra* note 9, at 90, (citing SHAMROCK, Aug. 17, 1816, *quoted in* GEORGE SVEJDA, *IRISH IMMIGRANT PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ERIE CANAL* 16 (Division of History, National Park Service 1969)).

³⁵ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 94.

³⁶ *See id.* at 95.

agents.”³⁷ Therefore, “it was no surprise, then, that many were in sorry shape on landing.”³⁸ Canal “contractors complained that they arrived ‘destitute of the comforts of life, and we have been compelled to clothe them.’”³⁹

Another supply of Irish laborers was found in New York’s prisons and jails. In 1821, Governor DeWitt Clinton conditionally pardoned many Irishmen in New York City jails and Auburn State Prison on the condition that they agreed to work on the Erie Canal for the rest of their prison terms.⁴⁰ The pardoned prisoners received “standard, prevailing wages”, but if they escaped and were caught, they were returned to prison to serve their terms from the beginning.⁴¹

New York State did not keep any records on the Erie’s laborers; therefore, the exact number of Irish who participated in the Canal’s construction is not known.⁴² “Nativist in outlook, the [canal] commissioners noted with pride that very few of the contractors were foreigners who had recently arrived in America and that the majority were ‘native farmers, mechanics, merchants and professional men’ who resided near the canal.”⁴³ “The commissioners reported in 1819 that three-fourths of the workers were ‘born among us,’” and “most canal workers. . . have been recruited locally.”⁴⁴ Therefore, Irish laborers who worked on the Erie during this early construction period were probably already New York State residents who lived in the Canal’s region.⁴⁵ At this time, there were only a limited number of immigrants in New York State.⁴⁶ However, after 1819 and by the Erie’s completion in 1825, the number of foreign workers on the Canal continued to dramatically increase and by the 1830’s, the Irish would compose the majority of laborers on other North American canals.⁴⁷

³⁷ *Id.*, (citing Letters by George Gill (Nov. 18, 1829), Peter Powell (Nov. 18, 1829)).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *See id.* at 99; *see also* CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 26.

⁴¹ CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 26.

⁴² *See* SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 36.

⁴³ RONALD E. SHAW, *ERIE WATER WEST: A HISTORY OF THE ERIE CANAL 1792-1854 90* (1966) (quoting Laws, I, 403.)

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 90-91 (citing Walter B. Smith, *Wage Rates on the Erie Canal 1828-1881*, 33 J. ECON. HIST. 305 (1963)).

⁴⁵ *See id.* at 91.

⁴⁶ *See* SHERIFF, *supra* note 9, at 36.

⁴⁷ *See id.*

Therefore, later North American canal construction forces would be mostly made up of Irish immigrants.⁴⁸ Many of these Irish immigrants had no other means of making a livelihood upon their arrival in America; consequently, they turned to canal work out of necessity for survival.⁴⁹ “They swarmed public work sites, making them virtual Irish villages,” as they were well “accustomed to flock in masses from work to work.”⁵⁰ One engineer complained that, these “are men of unsettled habits, having no established home, and consequently not bound by the moral ties which influence a settled population.”⁵¹

DIGGING, CUTTING, AND BLASTING

Canal work itself seemed like it was left untouched by any of the mechanical or technological improvements of the era.⁵² “It remained largely the same throughout the period, powered by human and beast using traditional tools, shovels, picks, wheelbarrows and carts.”⁵³ The Erie Canal was to stretch “three hundred and sixty-three miles long, crossing rivers, streams, and marshes on aqueducts, penetrating the lofty granite escarpment at Lockport, and surmounting the sharp rise in the terrain between the Hudson River and the Mohawk Valley.”⁵⁴ In 1819, “the Erie Canal was dug through the notorious Montezuma marshes at the outlet of Cayuga Lake near Syracuse.”⁵⁵ “The Irish laborers worked in six to twelve inches of water, legs swelling from the inescapable dampness, leeches fastening onto them, and mosquitoes driving them to distraction while infecting them with diseases.”⁵⁶ “The situation was so bad that excavation was rescheduled for winter, when the ground was frozen and mosquitoes were blissfully absent.”⁵⁷

⁴⁸ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 97.

⁴⁹ *See id.* at 96.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 98 (quoting Letter from Charles Atherton to Hope (Mar. 29, 1843)).

⁵¹ *Id.* (quoting Letter from Charles Atherton to Hope (Mar. 29, 1843)).

⁵² *See id.* at 10.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ NATHAN MILLER, *THE ENTERPRISE OF A FREE PEOPLE: ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NEW YORK STATE DURING THE CANAL PERIOD 1792-1838* 61 (1962).

⁵⁵ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 138.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.* (citing SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 125).

Canal construction presented the harshest of work environments and conditions, as most of the labor was performed in ditches of mud.⁵⁸ Land and riverbeds had to be wiped clean of trees and rocks and laborers only had shovels, axes, and picks at their disposal to perform the task.⁵⁹ Reading the terrain for the canal line also meant the occasional cutting of a new water channel and always required the tasks of leveling and excavating the land and canal bed.⁶⁰ “Towpaths had to be ten feet wide and at least two feet above the water line.”⁶¹ “The rock cut at Lockport, New York, involved carving a channel twenty-seven feet wide and thirteen to thirty feet deep through a mountain ridge, in all two miles of solid rock” as the “blasting went on almost without stop.”⁶²

The Canal’s construction was completed by both small and relatively large groups of laborers.⁶³ Furthermore, the contractors even utilized crude production lines to simplify and speed up the work’s progress.⁶⁴ “A sense of industrial time and discipline was developing, as indicated by the implementation of strict workplace supervision” and “work quotas were also sometimes set.”⁶⁵ The canal companies also utilized the positions of the foreman and the straw boss to find workers and to provide discipline and instruction in the actual work setting.⁶⁶ The foremen needed the respect of their men; therefore, the companies often employed Irish as foremen because they understood their fellow Irish workers’ nature and when to “push” them.⁶⁷

LONG HARD DAYS

“The workers suffered as a result of the nature and pace of the work” and “foremost, it made for long hard days.”⁶⁸ The typical workday for most North American canallers was fairly standard. “To begin at sun rise, and work until eight o’clock; then to work until twelve o’clock, and be

⁵⁸ See *id.* at 142.

⁵⁹ See *id.* at 32,136.

⁶⁰ See *id.* at 32.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 140 (citing Minutes of the New York Canal Commission and Superintendent of Public Works vol. I at 2, June 5, 1817 New York State Archives).

⁶² *Id.* at 139.

⁶³ See *id.* at 32.

⁶⁴ See *id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ See CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 136.

⁶⁷ See *id.* at 136, 138.

⁶⁸ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 32.

allowed one hour for dinner, and then to work until sun set."⁶⁹ In the summer, laborers toiled up to fifteen hours every day of the week; the length of winter workdays were slightly shorter and were dictated by the amount of daylight that was provided by the season.⁷⁰

THE ELEMENTS, EPIDEMICS, AND INJURIES

Since the Irish labored on canals out of necessity, they were forced to cope with a work environment that few other human beings could tolerate.⁷¹ "Local inhabitants, Pennsylvania Dutch, and Negroes from the South were all tried, but the Irish bog-trotters proved always the best of the lot."⁷² The Erie's work environment exposed the laborers to a variety of elements that deteriorated their physical conditions, not to mention their mental health.⁷³ Winters brought the harsh, brutish, and frigid conditions of upstate New York, causing canallers to face common colds, the flu, and frostbite.⁷⁴ They were plagued by heatstroke and epidemics during the extraordinary hot and humid summer months of Central New York State.⁷⁵ "The wet, swampy areas where much of the work took place also brought more serious health risks in the form of insect-born diseases like malaria and yellow fever."⁷⁶ One canaller complained that, "at night, the mosquitoes were so persistent that sleep was rendered impossible."⁷⁷ "A legislative report in 1958, romantically remarked that, 'the Irishmen left their famine-stricken island to dig in waist-deep mud and water through the mosquito and malaria infested Montezuma marshes'" of New York State.⁷⁸

As in any construction work setting, canallers also faced the occupational hazards associated with manual labor.⁷⁹ "Injuries abounded, from such minor ailments as cuts, bruises, and strained muscles to maimings, loss of limbs and loss of life."⁸⁰ Some canallers felt the wrath of collapsing

⁶⁹ See *id.* (quoting ALB. GAZETTE, Nov. 6, 1792).

⁷⁰ See *id.*

⁷¹ See LIONEL D. WYLD, *LOW BRIDGE! FOLKLORE AND THE ERIE CANAL* 56 (1962).

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 33.

⁷⁴ See *id.*; see also SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 44.

⁷⁵ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 44.

⁷⁶ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 33.

⁷⁷ CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 89.

⁷⁸ WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 9-10 (quoting Report of the Joint Leg. Comm. (1958)).

⁷⁹ See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 148.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

beds; others plunged from locks and aqueducts or drowned to their deaths.⁸¹ Blasting may have been the primary source of occupational hazards created by the canal construction environment.⁸² At this time, blasting was still very much a primitive art that was performed by the inexperienced, in a setting that lacked adequate safety precautions.⁸³ Workers compensation was a relatively unheard of practice. "Canal contractors shared in the prevailing belief among employers that they were not responsible for injuries sustained on the job, maintaining that the work's inherent risk was assumed by the laborer when he decided, as part of the free labor bargaining process, to take the job."⁸⁴

50 CENTS A DAY

Workers' wages varied according to what contractor they were employed by.⁸⁵ Although a canal laborer's earnings were comparative to similar occupations of the period, workers still had trouble surviving economically.⁸⁶ Each individual's position and the requirements and tasks of his job dictated his pay or contract.⁸⁷ "Laborers on the Canal received from \$8 to \$12 a month or 50 cents a day," although certain jobs commanded higher wages.⁸⁸ "The cash part of workers' wages fluctuated with the supply of laborers and the demand of contractors, and it varied in different locations on the Canal."⁸⁹ "Some contractors provided room, board, and often liquor as part of their wages; others paid higher wages but provided no amenities."⁹⁰ "Peter Way, in his study of North American canals, has seen the former arrangement as an attempt to create a paternalistic bond between employer and employee, which would allow employers to maintain a certain amount of control over their workers' habits."⁹¹

⁸¹ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 44-45.

⁸² See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 148.

⁸³ See *id.* at 149.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 150.

⁸⁵ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 42.

⁸⁶ See *id.*

⁸⁷ See SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 92.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at 91.

⁸⁹ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 42-43.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 42.

⁹¹ *Id.*

THE SHANTIES

During the Canal's construction, the Irish called the shanty their home.⁹² "By all accounts, workers were housed in these shanties like animals in barns; their very living conditions were dehumanizing."⁹³ The laborers moved with the progress of the canal line. Therefore, their housing took on an uncomfortable, transient character.⁹⁴ These shantytowns also provided the canallers with a "sinful" environment to indulge in during their off time.⁹⁵

"Contractors did not plan to hire these workers on a permanent basis, so their long-term character and work habits were of little import to their bosses."⁹⁶ "What workers did on their own time did not matter to their employers as long as enough of them showed up ready to dig the next day."⁹⁷ Back at the shanties, the Irish's "favorite pastimes were singing, drinking, fighting, and playing cards for money."⁹⁸ "They viewed drinking as a form of recreation, an activity that tightened the bonds between crew members."⁹⁹ "Along with the use of profanity and most fistfights, drinking alleviated boredom and relieved tensions produced by cramped living quarters, exhausting and monotonous toil, and poor pay."¹⁰⁰ Since the Irish canallers were often young and single and an ocean away from their kin, friendships with fellow Irish workers took the place of an immediate family.¹⁰¹ "Once together, they went on binges that helped them forget personal disappointments and anxieties and showed themselves that they had not lost their independence or fortitude."¹⁰²

Irish canallers had their own shanty camps and work gangs as they were mostly separated from other canallers of different ethnic heritages.¹⁰³ Therefore, the shantytown invoked the "old world" features of Irish culture

⁹² See WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 56.

⁹³ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 42.

⁹⁴ See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 10.

⁹⁵ See *id.*

⁹⁶ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 42.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 41.

⁹⁹ Roger Carp, *The Erie Canal and the Liberal Challenge to Classical Republicanism 1785-1850*, in 2 UMI DISSERTATION SERV. 623 (1986).

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ See *id.*

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 192.

and became a virtual "Little Dublin."¹⁰⁴ These shantytowns were also "a sign of dependence on canal work," and the Irish's lack of upward mobility and other opportunities.¹⁰⁵ "These shanties stood physically removed from the "civilizing" influences of the nearby settled communities."¹⁰⁶

In effect, Irish "canallers were set off from society by the type of work they did and where they lived, as well as by their lifestyle, a marginal existence reinforced by their ethnic background."¹⁰⁷ Here, such as with other instances throughout history involving different peoples, capitalism used ethnic and racial prejudice to justify the economic exploitation of the Irish canallers.¹⁰⁸ "The desperate shanty camps of the Erie Canal construction era reflected the Irish canallers' growing marginality."¹⁰⁹

DRAWING THE SCORN OF TOWNSPEOPLE

As was mentioned before, as opposed to other ethnic canaller groups, the Irish were more likely to be young, single, and male.¹¹⁰ Living in virtual gangs within the shantytowns, the Irish canallers drew the attention of outsiders, as large numbers of boisterous young men will often do.¹¹¹ "Living away for the first time from paternalistic oversight, whether of their parents or of bosses, many Irish workers apparently showed a proclivity for heavy drinking and carousing, which drew the vocal scorn of other New Yorkers, Americans, and foreigners alike."¹¹²

It is well settled that the local New York State residents living along the canal line region avoided contact with the canallers and they expected the same in return from the Irish.¹¹³ "These workers, according to widespread belief, posed a threat to civilized society; middle-class observers portrayed them as profane, lewd, and violent."¹¹⁴ The Canal, in short,

¹⁰⁴ See *id.* at 193.

¹⁰⁵ See *id.* at 246.

¹⁰⁶ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 42.

¹⁰⁷ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 10.

¹⁰⁸ See *id.*

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 37.

¹¹¹ See *id.*

¹¹² *Id.* (citing Letter from Stephen and Elizabeth Watson to Father and Mother (Oct 5, 1823), in TWENTY-FOUR LETTERS FROM LABOURERS IN AMERICA TO THEIR FRIENDS IN ENGLAND 14 (1829)). See also LAURA S. HAVILAND, A WOMAN'S LIFE WORK: LABORS AND EXPERIENCES, at 20 (1889); Letter from Archbald to Margaret Wodrow (Jan. 1, 1821), in ARCHBALD PAPERS.

¹¹³ See WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 56.

¹¹⁴ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 142.

had a reputation among the locals and townspeople as a "magnet for delinquents."¹¹⁵

"Our strongest image of canal workers comes from folklore, which portrays the typical construction worker as a young Irishman recently off the boat."¹¹⁶ However, the writings and letters of residents living in the canal region during this period have also contributed to this image.¹¹⁷ "Stephen and Elizabeth Watson, themselves immigrants from England, complained in 1823 that 'there [are] thousands of Irish' in Albany."¹¹⁸ "Laura Haviland remembered that the Irish came to Lockport in the 1820's 'by hundreds' and Mary Ann Archbald reported seeing many 'wild Irish working upon the Canal.'"¹¹⁹

THE LOWEST OF THE LOW

"Increasingly, canal work became stigmatized as the roughest of rough labor performed by the lowest of the low, Irish immigrants and slaves."¹²⁰ It was thought, sometimes even by the Irish themselves, that they were immune from hardship, exhaustion, disease, and danger.¹²¹ "Ralph Waldo Emerson maintained, 'the poor Irishman, the wheelbarrow is his country,' while Charles Dickens asked rhetorically, 'who else would dig, and delve, and drudge, and do domestic work, and make canals and roads, and execute great lines of Internal Improvement?'"¹²² These stereotypical beliefs of well-known authors and of ordinary citizens of the era, worked as justifications for limiting immigrant groups, such as the Irish, to only the most undesirable occupations.¹²³ Just as the Negro slave was best suited to pick cotton in the South, the Irish canallers were made to dig in

¹¹⁵ See *id.* at 143.

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 36.

¹¹⁷ See *id.*

¹¹⁸ *Id.* at 36-37 (quoting Letter from Stephen and Elizabeth Watson, *supra* note 111).

¹¹⁹ *Id.* at 37 (quoting HAVILAND, *supra* note 111, at 20). See also Letter from Archbald to Margaret Wodrow, *supra* note 111.

¹²⁰ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 10.

¹²¹ See CHALMERS, *supra* note 1, at 89.

¹²² WAY, *supra* note 9, at 90 (citing MATHEW CAREY, REFLECTIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF EMIGRATION FROM EUROPE 22 (1826)). See also Richard D. Borgeson, Irish Canal Laborers in America 1817-1846 24 (1964) (unpublished M.A. thesis, Pennsylvania State Univ)(on file with author); MAX BERGER, THE BRITISH TRAVELER IN AMERICA 1836-1860 68 (1964).

¹²³ See *id.*

ditches of mud.¹²⁴ Therefore, here, “as in the rest of society, ethnicity and race were used as justifications for exploitation within wage labor.”¹²⁵

Because the Irish lived in poverty-stricken shanties and were forced to toil for only fifty cents a day, conditions they had absolutely no control over, they were looked down upon by general laborers in other fields.¹²⁶ “One English couple wrote home that, ‘there is so many Irish that keep coming every day, and they work so cheap, that it makes it bad for laboring people.’”¹²⁷ “The idea that Irish immigrants hurt the prospects of workers in general certainly contributed to the tensions between the Irish and other ethnic groups,” native New Yorkers, and Americans.¹²⁸

“NOT-YET-FREE LABOR”

Another source of prejudice and disdain for Irish canal laborers was the popular view that they were not “free.” “Many of the people who were employed by the canal industry were seen as a form of ‘not-yet-free labor,’ caught between the worlds of traditional production and industrial wage work.”¹²⁹ Under the notions of nineteenth century Republicanism, in order to hold the political status of a “republican free man” or as a citizen, a man had to be white, self-supportive, self-employed, and answerable to no one.¹³⁰ Further, ownership of property was also needed for a man to qualify for citizenship.¹³¹ It was believed that a man who earned his income by laboring for someone else and who did not own any property was left to the control of his boss.¹³² Hence, the Irish laborers on the Erie Canal did not qualify to vote as citizens because of their economic status.¹³³

There were still other reasons behind the popular view that the Irish canallers were not “free men.”¹³⁴ “Even though it was a relatively new occupation in the United States, canal digging had a history associated with

¹²⁴ See *id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.* at 193.

¹²⁶ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 39.

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 39-40.

¹²⁹ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 30.

¹³⁰ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 37.

¹³¹ See *id.* at 38.

¹³² See *id.* at 37.

¹³³ See *id.* at 38 (citing DAVID M. ELLIS, A HISTORY OF NEW YORK STATE, 146-49 (1957, 1967)); DIXON RYAN FOX, THE DECLINE OF ARISTOCRACY IN THE POLITICS OF NEW YORK 273-274 (Robert V. Remini ed. 1919) (1965).

¹³⁴ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 40.

unfree labor."¹³⁵ Negro slaves built most of the canals in the South, while as mentioned before, New York State began to utilize prisoners on the Erie in 1817.¹³⁶ Therefore, "canal work, in nineteenth century eyes, merited the use of the most degraded, unfree labor" and most "nineteenth century New Yorkers and Americans would have disagreed that 'republican free men' had alone constructed the Erie Canal."¹³⁷

The Irish canallers were at risk of becoming part of a "permanent class of laboring poor."¹³⁸ "The colossal Erie Canal project demanded a large workforce of unskilled male laborers and nothing was more deadening to human sensibilities than the repetitive and brutish labor of digging ditches day after day for someone else."¹³⁹ "The narrator of *Marco Paul's Travels on the Erie Canal*, a children's instructional novel published in 1843, noted that, because the man was just a "common laborer," he probably performed his tasks without even understanding how the locks worked."¹⁴⁰

"Americans partially justified such labor as a temporary stage in the process of opening the West to settlement, a place where men's digging would be transformed into the more productive labor of tilling fields."¹⁴¹ However, this division of labor, which was thought by the likes of "eighteenth-century Scottish economist Adam Smith, to promote economic growth and social progress," at the same time, risked the possibility of "dehumanizing workers and making them stupid and ignorant."¹⁴² This division of labor was also contradictory to middle-class American views because it denied to this laboring class the chance of upward mobility, which was believed to be the cornerstone of societal growth and cohesiveness.¹⁴³ These contradictions in middle-class views led to "questions about the status of personal rights and the preservation of individual morality in a republic striving to become a model of enlightened self-rule."¹⁴⁴ Internal improvement projects sought to create jobs, and promote social growth and

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ *See id.*

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 37, 40, (citing GEORGE ROGERS TAYLOR, *THE TRANSPORTATION REVOLUTION 1815-1860* 292 (1951)).

¹³⁸ *See* SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 38.

¹³⁹ *Id.*

¹⁴⁰ *Id.* at 142.

¹⁴¹ *Id.* at 38 (citing DREW R. MCCOY, *THE ELUSIVE REPUBLIC: POLITICAL ECONOMY IN JEFFERSONIAN AMERICA* 37-38, 66, 149 (1980)).

¹⁴² *See id.*

¹⁴³ *See id.* at 175.

¹⁴⁴ CARP, *supra* note 97, at 529.

a cohesive, unified society; yet they were fostering severe labor divisions with permanent disenfranchised classes who had only limited employment opportunities.¹⁴⁵ “Challenging perceptions of republican citizenship,” the Irish canallers and laborers in general, “embarked on a quest to discover their own place in American history.”¹⁴⁶

The naturally proud Irish canallers also realized their degraded status and the need to escape this marginal occupation that they shared with slaves and convicts.¹⁴⁷ The Irish did not want to be recognized as “a class of men who permanently held the status of ditch digger.”¹⁴⁸ They did not suffer through the troubles of immigrating across an ocean to remain as landless, dependent wage earners, a status that they already suffered from in Ireland.¹⁴⁹ In short, they came to America because they had hopes of upward mobility, personal independence, land ownership, and eventual citizenship.¹⁵⁰ “The United States had promised freedom, not just from poverty but also from the control of landlords.”¹⁵¹ “It was a country that promised ‘power’ to men who earned their independence.”¹⁵² However, America was experiencing its own economic hard times when many of the Irish arrived in 1818.¹⁵³ This depression dashed dreams of upward mobility and hopes of even securing a job.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, because of the lack of employment opportunities during the late 1810’s in America, most of the Irish were forced into canal labor as it answered their immediate needs of survival and at least a limited source of income and self-worth.¹⁵⁵

FACTION FIGHTING

The economic status and social conditions of the Irish canal workers resulted in great tensions among the Irish men.¹⁵⁶ The “shared descent [of the Irish only] periodically convinced workers that they must work as

¹⁴⁵ *See id.*

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at 530.

¹⁴⁷ *See* SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 40.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.* at 39.

¹⁴⁹ *See id.* at 40

¹⁵⁰ *See id.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.* at 41.

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ *See id.*

¹⁵⁴ *See id.*

¹⁵⁵ *See id.*

¹⁵⁶ *See* WAY, *supra* note 9, at 246.

one to resist the deterioration of their condition."¹⁵⁷ Soon, ethnic and religious differences combined with job shortages to result in riots and divisions among the Irish themselves.¹⁵⁸

The North American canal work site was often the scene of bloody riots between different traditional Irish factions.¹⁵⁹ "Latent county-based allegiances came to the fore as a result, gained credence as terms of group identification and providing a context of social and economic organization."¹⁶⁰ Irish from opposing "old country" families, communities, counties, or religions utilized the faction fight to monopolize the jobs created by North America's public works projects.¹⁶¹ For example, in July of 1824, the lack of land and jobs resulted in a heated dispute between opposing religious factions in Lockport.¹⁶² "[T]he 'Orangemen' from Protestant Ulster set out to celebrate a national holiday. Three hundred 'Catholics,' whose affections were centered in the southern part of the Emerald Isle, turned out to disperse them, armed with guns, cudgels, and other instruments of persuasion."¹⁶³ A large-scale conflict soon resulted and the state militia was needed to separate the fighting Irish.¹⁶⁴

The quickly expanding numbers of Irish immigrants in the canal line region also aroused the religious prejudice of the local townspeople.¹⁶⁵ "Despite the Protestant affiliations of many early Irish immigrants, other New Yorkers tended to assume that all Irish were Catholic, a religion they feared because of its adherence to hierarchical and seemingly superstitious practices."¹⁶⁶ Therefore, although they divided themselves into different religious factions, both Catholic and Protestant Irish canallers fell victim to violence and assaults committed by local New York State residents.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁵⁸ See SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 19.

¹⁵⁹ See WAY, *supra* note 9, at 194, (citing Letter from Charles Atherton to Begly (Mar. 30, Apr. 5, 1843)); Letter from Joseph McDonald to H.H. Killaly (Apr. 3, 1843).

¹⁶⁰ *Id.*

¹⁶¹ See *id.* at 92 (citing Paul E. W. Roberts, *Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and Faction Fighting in East Munster 1802-11*, in IRISH PEASANTS: VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL UNREST 1780-1914, at 64-101 (Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr. eds., 1983)); MILLER, *supra* note 53, at 60-1.

¹⁶² See SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 132.

¹⁶³ *Id.*

¹⁶⁴ See *id.* (citing BUFF. PATRIOT, July 20, 1824).

¹⁶⁵ See SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 220.

¹⁶⁶ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 40.

¹⁶⁷ See *id.*

EMPLOYER ANIMOSITY

While Irish “canal laborers fought with each other. . . over perceived social differences or for the limited number of jobs available. . . increasingly they focused their hostilities on the foremen, contractors, and canal officials whom they [also] blamed for [their] assorted ills. . .”¹⁶⁸ In fact, the riots and faction fights, as mentioned above, can also be attributed to the animosity the Irish canallers held for their employers.¹⁶⁹ In response to the perceived hostilities displayed by the contractors, the Irish canallers formed various cultural and political groups to influence their economic and social status.¹⁷⁰

The Irish also had a tradition of forming secret societies, which utilized terrorist tactics to combat employer hostility and to monopolize the jobs offered by public works.¹⁷¹ In bargaining with the canallers’ employers, the societies knew the importance of control over the workers and unity within their ranks.¹⁷² “By culling out unwanted workers,” often those of other ethnic groups, the Irish societies “sought to create an artificial labor shortage, drive up wages, and impose their conditions on the line.”¹⁷³ Some companies refused to hire Irish workers to lessen the societies’ influence on canal labor affairs.¹⁷⁴ The Irish secret societies would then respond with additional violence and terrorist tactics against the non-Irish laborers and the contractors.¹⁷⁵ On some canals, companies used blacklists, legal instruments, and sometimes even the militia to combat the tactics of the Irish secret societies.¹⁷⁶

On the Erie, strikes were really not an option for the immigrant, Irish canallers because of their degraded economic and social statuses.¹⁷⁷ “[U]sually these young men protested their work conditions by simply quitting.”¹⁷⁸ However, on later canals that were constructed after the Erie, canal workers were better organized, enjoyed more power and more often utilized striking for better wages and improved conditions.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁸ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 11.

¹⁶⁹ *See id.* at 16.

¹⁷⁰ *See* CARP, *supra* note 97, at 459.

¹⁷¹ *See* WAY, *supra* note 9, at 216.

¹⁷² *Id.*

¹⁷³ *Id.*

¹⁷⁴ *See id.* at 217.

¹⁷⁵ *Id.*

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷⁷ *See* SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 162.

¹⁷⁸ *Id.*

¹⁷⁹ *See id.* at 98.

THE POLITICAL EFFECT OF THE IRISH CANALLERS

It is not quite documented what political effect or power the Irish workers exerted in New York State during the construction era of the Erie Canal. However, as was noted before, the Irish canaller held the economic status of a wage earner.¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, it was thought that such a person should not be a citizen because his economic dependence on his boss could lead to political coercion.¹⁸¹ Citizenship was limited to “[o]nly adult white men who produced for no one but themselves and their families” because it was believed that only they “could truly achieve the independence necessary to give reasoned thought to how they voted.”¹⁸² “For this reason, state constitutions in the early nineteenth century made property ownership a prerequisite for suffrage.”¹⁸³ Hence, the great majority of Irish canallers on the Erie did not qualify to vote because they worked for wages and most of them did not own any property.¹⁸⁴

The success of the Erie Canal produced a great enthusiasm for internal improvements, which was the main political issue in New York State at the time.¹⁸⁵ “The western part of [New York] state and rural regions at a distance from the canal clamored for further improvements that would benefit them and accordingly cast a majority of their votes for the candidates who stood for an extensive internal improvement system while the east opposed them.”¹⁸⁶ The Irish laborers most likely also supported political candidates who called for more public works because this would mean more jobs on improvement work sites, such as the Erie Canal.

Therefore, most Irish canallers in New York State probably continued to back the National Republican party, which supported the “working man” and the public works platform.¹⁸⁷ The Irish, like many New Yorkers of the era, related the success of the Erie Canal to the labors of DeWitt Clinton, the National Republican politician.¹⁸⁸ In the 1816 gubernatorial election, “[t]he day before [Clinton’s] nomination, a gathering of the Sons

¹⁸⁰ See *id.* at 37.

¹⁸¹ See *id.*

¹⁸² *Id.*

¹⁸³ *Id.*

¹⁸⁴ See *id.* at 38.

¹⁸⁵ JULIUS WINDEN, *THE INFLUENCE OF THE ERIE CANAL UPON THE POPULATION ALONG ITS COURSE* 84 (1900).

¹⁸⁶ *Id.*

¹⁸⁷ See *id.* at 75.

¹⁸⁸ See SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 78.

of St. Patrick in Albany celebrating their patron's day, toasted the Canal as Clinton's work. . ."¹⁸⁹

THE POPULATION EFFECT OF THE IRISH CANALLERS

The Irish canal laborers also had a lasting effect upon the population of New York State. After the Canal was completed, many Irish canallers settled in cities, factory, or mill towns where they were employed as unskilled laborers in the rougher parts of the building trades or learned to manipulate simple machines.¹⁹⁰ In 1845, foreigners from Great Britain and her dependencies, most of whom were from Ireland, accounted for almost one quarter of the population in Canal cities, such as Albany, Utica, Buffalo, and Rochester.¹⁹¹ Irish shanty communities "became permanent neighborhoods. . .like. . . Paddy's Land in Rochester, or formed the basis of towns themselves, such as. . . 'Irish Row,' [which] soon transformed into Lockport. . ."¹⁹²

Other Irish who had labored on the Erie went on to construct other canals in the Northeast and West.¹⁹³ "New York's success in canal building had triggered a craze for similar projects in other states."¹⁹⁴ "For example, when Erie engineer Benjamin Wright was chosen to oversee the Blackstone Canal in Massachusetts, he brought with him several veteran Irish builders, who prospered and laid the foundation of Worcester's Irish community."¹⁹⁵

Other former Irish Erie canallers also "managed to prosper; Patrick Cooney established a salt works near Syracuse."¹⁹⁶ Some purchased land, became farmers, and returned to their former "old country" occupations. "Pdraig Cundun, an Irish farmer who first worked as an Erie Canal laborer, observed in 1834, 'I have a fine farm of land now, which I own outright. No one can demand rent from me. My family and I can eat our fill of bread and meat, so I think being here is better than staying in Ireland,

¹⁸⁹ *Id.* at 78 (quoting N.Y. EVENING POST, March 31, 1817).

¹⁹⁰ See WINDEN, *supra* note 184, at 70.

¹⁹¹ See *id.* at 66, 68.

¹⁹² WAY, *supra* note 9, at 145.

¹⁹³ See *id.* at 63.

¹⁹⁴ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 50 (citing Letter from Webb Harwood to Daniel T. Terry (Nov. 25, 1821) (Valentown Museum)).

¹⁹⁵ WAY, *supra* note 9, at 63 (citing Letter from Latrobe to H.W. Swin (May 7, 1804), LATROBE COLLECTION, POWERS, INVISIBLE IMMIGRANTS, at 107-109 (1976); Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners, at 10 (1819)).

¹⁹⁶ *Id.* at 269.

landless and powerless, without food or clothing.’”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, for these Irishmen, “the United States had fulfilled its promises of freedom from poverty and the control of landlords and ‘power’ to those who earned their independence.”¹⁹⁸

THE CANAL’S EFFECT ON NEW YORK AND AMERICA

Through their participation in the construction of the Erie Canal, Irish canal laborers made a lasting impact on the history and development of New York State. The area along the Canal’s course began to economically prosper.¹⁹⁹ “The Canal was a great stimulus to both the increase in population and the valuation of property along the entire waterway.”²⁰⁰ The residents of the region began moving to the new urban centers to make their livings.²⁰¹ “Across the state, towns and cities sprang up, owing their growth, as well as their very birth in some instances, to the Canal.”²⁰² “Rochester, Utica, and Buffalo became the nuclei of regional trading and social systems.”²⁰³

In short, “demographic growth, together with economic diversification and a spreading urban culture, confirmed that the Erie Canal had transformed New York’s western and southern regions from Lake Ontario to Pennsylvania.”²⁰⁴ Possibly more important, however, “it had guaranteed the supremacy of New York City as the largest port in the country and the commercial capital of the western world.”²⁰⁵ “New York State had indeed become the Empire State and the Canal the ‘pathway to empire.’”²⁰⁶

The Irish Canal laborers’ accomplishments and contributions on the Erie Canal soon impacted the entire nation. “[The Canal] unleashed a commerce greater than had been suspected, revolutionized transportation, and made economic history.”²⁰⁷ Other states also looked to make their own

¹⁹⁷ SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 41. See also Letter from Pdraig Cundun to Partolan Suipeal (Dec. 17, 1834), in PADRAIG PHIAIRAIS CUNDUN 1776-1856, at 24-30, (Risteard O’ Foghludha ed., 1932).

¹⁹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹⁹ See WINDEN, *supra* note 184, at 72.

²⁰⁰ *Id.* at 84.

²⁰¹ See *id.*

²⁰² WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 14.

²⁰³ CARP, *supra* note 97, at 458.

²⁰⁴ *Id.* at 455.

²⁰⁵ WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 14.

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

internal improvements.²⁰⁸ It also prevented national disintegration by strengthening economic ties between the east and west.²⁰⁹ Francis Lieber, a German traveler, referred to the Canal as “a clamp by which the west of this union is tightly fastened to the east and north.”²¹⁰ Progressions such as the Erie Canal also protected the viability of American manufacturers from foreign markets and competitors by providing American goods and products a means of transportation to “home market[s].”²¹¹

The Canal served as a great source of national pride. It was hailed as “a monument of American genius and American patriotism.”²¹² Contemporaries of the time spoke of it as “the product of American democratic institutions” and “achieved by the spirit and perseverance of Republican Freemen.”²¹³ “[The Canal] was frequently pronounced to be the greatest American achievement since the signing of the [Declaration of Independence].”²¹⁴ “‘Next to the establishment of American Independence,’ noted a New York gazetteer in 1822, ‘it is the greatest achievement of the age.’”²¹⁵

CONCLUSION: ACHIEVING “AMERICA’S PROMISE”

The Erie Canal’s “[e]xecution would confer honor on the projectors and political supporters. . .”²¹⁶ However, the Irish laborers would receive little recognition as they were usually excluded from official celebrations.²¹⁷ “In his official memoir of the Canal project, for example, Cadwallader Colden bragged that ‘every citizen deserves a share of the credit’ for the new waterway.”²¹⁸ “Colden emphasized the labor of the commissions, the foresight of the politicians, and the contribution of the citizens, who elected the politicians.”²¹⁹ However, he “offered no recognition of the largely dis-

²⁰⁸ See WINDEN, *supra* note 184, at 84.

²⁰⁹ See MILLER, *supra* note 53, at 40.

²¹⁰ See CARP, *supra* note 97, at 556 (quoting FRANCIS LIEBER, *THE STRANGER IN AMERICA* 198 (1835)).

²¹¹ See MILLER, *supra* note 53, at 41-42.

²¹² ROCHESTER TELEGRAPH, June 28, 1825 *quoted in* SHAW, *supra* note 42, at 407.

²¹³ See *id.* at 407, 408 (quoting ROCHESTER TELEGRAPH, June 21, 1825).

²¹⁴ *Id.* at 406.

²¹⁵ *Id.* (quoting GOODENOW, *A BRIEF MANUAL*, at 22).

²¹⁶ WYLD, *supra* note 69, at 14.

²¹⁷ See SHERIFF, *supra* note 5, at 49.

²¹⁸ *Id.*

²¹⁹ *Id.*

enfranchised men whose labor had bored through the New York landscape.”²²⁰

Due to their degraded status, the immigrant, Irish canal laborers experienced conflicts between townspeople, Americans, employers, and even themselves. If they were to achieve “America’s promise,” they would have to overcome economic exploitation generated by ideologies, ethnic and religious prejudice, and the poverties associated with shanty life. The experience of the Irish canallers and those who occupied similar unfavorable occupations and statuses helped lead the course of a quickly growing republic, but they were also excluded from the fruits of their labors and the expansion of the American economy and society. These Irish laborers would “challenge perceptions of republican citizenship” as they “embarked on a quest to discover their own place in American history.”²²¹

The Irish who worked on the Erie Canal were part of “a strong, useful, and able-bodied class of men who . . . aid[ed] [America] in [its] development.”²²² In the end, the Irish canal laborers would be well recognized for their toil on the Erie, other North American canals and public internal improvement projects, in general. These “uncivilized” men would get their due credit for their role in bringing “civilization” to the remote parts of New York State and America. More importantly, however, the Irish Erie Canal laborers and their descendents would become citizens of the republic and would share in the patriotism and pride of New York State and America’s Canal.

²²⁰ *Id.*

²²¹ CARP, *supra* note 97, at 530.

²²² WINDEN, *supra* note 184, at 72.