

# Did the Irish Build the Erie Canal?

(Continued from Page 1) held near Brushville. (Brushville is now called Tuscarora.) —Apparently the only way in which we can find out more details about the Irish contribution to the Erie from 1817 on is from family traditions. If any of our readers can help, please do so.

Do you who read this have any ancestors who labored on the canal system within the diocese of Rochester? If so, in what years were they so employed, and where did they eventually settle down?

You are asked to direct your answers to the writer of this column, 2240 Lake Avenue, Rochester, N.Y., 14611. Please write, if you have any data. Several New York State historians are in search of this sort of information.

The Erie Canal was a commercial success from the start. According to Ulysses P. Hedrick's charming (and misnamed) "History of Agriculture in the State of New York," during the first year of the Canal's operation it was no uncommon sight to see fifty boats start west from Albany in a single day. This shipping industry gave birth to a hundred small towns along the route. Many of them took names with a seaside sound that had an odd ring amid the upstate farmlands: Spencerport, Port Byron, Wedsport. The canal settled the destiny of older settlements. Thus, in 1817 Canandaigua (founded 1789) and Rochester (founded 1812) were neck-and-neck in the race to become the metropolis of the area. Then came the canal, through Rochester and quite far away from Canandaigua. This caused the rise of Rochester into the original "boom-town." Canandaigua, on the other hand, remained a rural county seat, with a population in 1867 of a little less than ten thousand.

In addition to being a commercial carrier, the Canal also transported passengers. People who were in a hurry still used stagecoaches along the Seneca Turnpike or the Great Western Turnpike, both of which connected Albany and Buffalo. In summer the coaches could cover forty miles a day. In winter, twenty-five miles. But if there was no rain, travel on the canal boats could be very pleasant.

One James Kite took a trip from New York to Montezuma, Ithaca, Oswego, and Montrose, Pennsylvania in the late spring of 1835. The manuscript account of his journey is in the collection of Regional Historians, Cornell University.

He left Schenectady in a canal boat on June 10. The boat, he said, was about ten

feet wide, and seventy feet long. It was practically a house built on a ship-bottom, for it had a drawing room, dining room, kitchen, bar, work room, provision room, and cabins. As was usually the case, the travellers could sit in fair weather on top of the canal boat, which formed a flat deck. Travel cost 2 1/2 cents per mile, and this included meals.

The canal boats were of course not provided with motors. They were towed at the end of a 120 foot rope by a "driver" mounted on a horse who plodded along the tow-path bordering the canal. The drivers, wrote Kite, were boys, sometimes no more than ten years old. The adult "canal-

ers" — boatmen and rousters — were strong of arm and language, and the boy drivers quickly learned their vocabulary and their wiles. Said Kite of the lads, "As a class they are a sad set of reprobates, well skilled in all the intricacies of iniquity."

The Irish immigrants who worked on the canals — whether at the original diggings or on repair crews — didn't usually consider their canal jobs the ultimate aim. Shanty-life with a construction gang, now here, not a few miles farther down the right of way, was at best a temporary existence for men who were looking for promotion or a better sort of job.

So it was that William D. Lynahan, a well-educated Irishman, having reached New York almost penniless in 1855, got a job with a shovel on the canal in Orleans County. He was unused to such cold, and since he could not afford gloves, he had many a painful hour wielding his ice-covered spade. But he

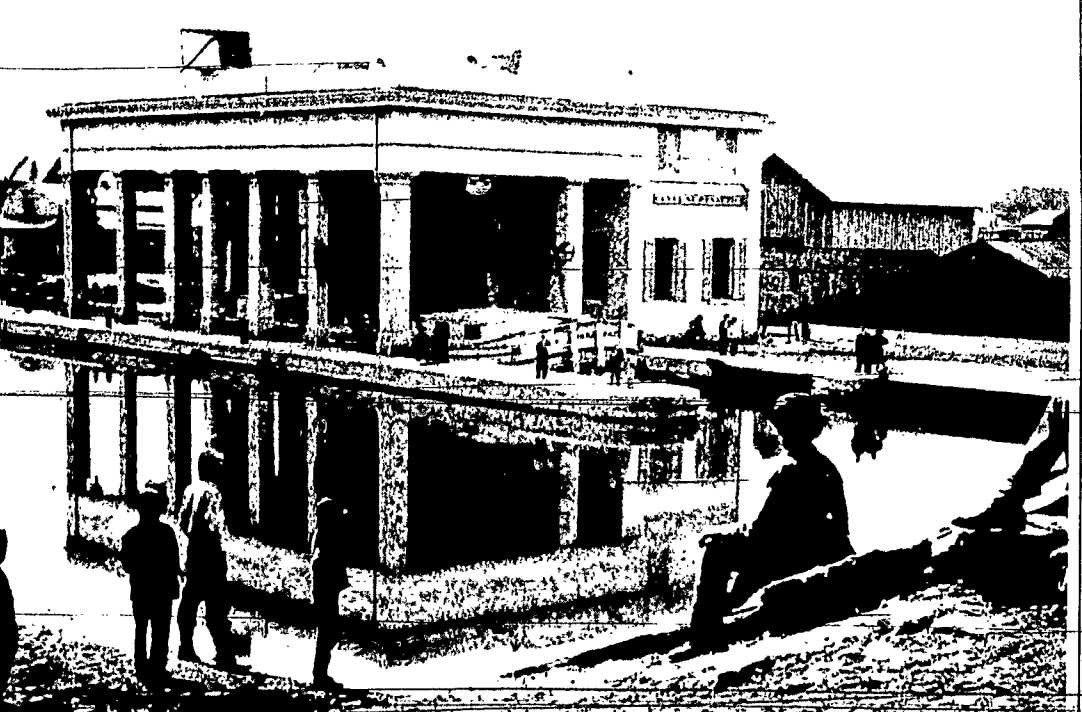
earned "seven shillings American" per day, with a raise to \$1.00 per diem in the offing; room and board cost him \$2.50 per week, laundry and mending included. The food was abundant — far better in quantity and quality than the diet of the family he had for the time being left back home across the sea. But when he was able to, he graduated himself from the labor corps, became a teacher, brought his family across by means of his earnings, and turned into a worthy American citizen.

Others went in for farming when they stopped canal work; still other worked into merchandising or some industry. For they shared with all other immigrants the American Dream.

People like this sowed the seeds of Catholicism in many of the towns and villages of the present Rochester Diocese. If their descendants will tell us more about them as individuals, they will be making a real contribution to the Erie Canal epic.



Erie Canal travelers leaving Pittsford around 1840. Picture, courtesy New York Historical Association.



A weigh lock on the Erie Canal in old Rochester.

## Guinea Expels Missionaries

Monrovia, Liberia — (RNS) — Six Roman Catholic priests, the first of more than fifty who are expected here, arrived from Guinea after being expelled by the government of President Sekou Toure. Other priests are reportedly en route to Monrovia in a caravan of jeeps, trucks and buses.

The total number of clergy involved in the expulsion is still unknown. So far, no Protestants have been reported expelled, but all non-African Christian missionaries will probably be forced to leave.

President Toure, who has repeatedly called for "complete

Africanization" of Christianity in Guinea, gave a speech on May Day setting June 1 as a deadline for the removal of non-Africans from all positions of leadership in Christian Churches. In the address, he called the foreign missionaries "apprentice spies."

According to a report from Upper Volta, some of the expelled missionaries may be replaced by native African (though not necessarily Guinean) priests and nuns. The report said that Upper Volta had sent five priests and a group of nuns into Guinea. Five more priests are expected to follow.



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Priests for Tom...

This will be the final article in the series, Priests for Tomorrow. I write on the subject in detail because it will sort out the total outlook and hopefully answer some of the questions expressed about seminarians of today.

There is at least a tendency today to judge 97% of teenagers by the bad publicity received by the other three percent. I suspect that the same thing is at least somewhat true of seminarians. When we read about protests and rebellions around the country, we tend to think that all seminarians are disobedient, arrogant, undisciplined and overly critical of their elders.

This judgment is no doubt true of a small percentage of seminarians but even these by their actions to move themselves inexorably toward the door.

What is the seminarian today really like? Perhaps could be accused of pride, but I like what I see very much. In fact there are many times when I sincerely wish that could have been like them.

The first word that comes to my mind about seminarians today is dynamism. They are very much alive to themselves, to the mission of the Church, to the world, to people. Some of them complain about the fact that they are not interested in this "business" of "finding the identity" of being individuals seeking to exercise initiative. Apart from the fact that they are the children of their time when existential philosophy had a very practical and powerful impact on our society, think these characteristics a wonderful if channeled and guided to their proper ends. In fact, I think they are nothing short of the operation of the Spirit in the Church.

The more individual we are the more we seek to be created in the image of God in ourselves. The fear, of course, is that this individualism will develop and be exercised outside the context of society, particularly that of the Church and with little or no regard for other persons. This, I feel, is groundless fear, because who is concerned about their individuality these seminarians? I know that "no man is an island" and that it is only within the context of society with its rules and restrictions that they can be truly effective. It is the arbitrary and useless restrictions which they challenge.

If there is some thing the seminarian of today is, he is concerned for the other. He is concerned about the problems of individual persons, of communities, as well as perennial problems: peace, hunger, race, and poverty. This proven very conclusively by eagerness of seminarians to help in "big brother" programs, tutoring, in inner city work, catechizing, in any program which can help underprivileged or handicapped persons. He is willingly surrendering huge portions of his free time to participate in these programs, not on a one shot basis, but rather week after week and month after month.

In Backet Hall there are a few seminarians who have taken on at least one major project of this type. He is...

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