



*Preserving the Past
is our Present
to the Future.*

Lockport Area Genealogical & Historical Society

We bring the people of the Lockport area together
to preserve and share our family histories and our local heritage.

Issue No. 20

NEWSLETTER

March 2003

Since May 12, 2001 ~ Incorporated January 26, 2002

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Dr. Reno G. Caneva

Message from the President

~ ~ ~

As spring approaches and we raise our hopes for warmer weather, the Society will also "spring" into high gear. Our focus this month will be the old but refurbished City Hall in Lockport's Historic Downtown.

As a youngster growing up in the downtown area, I regarded the building with awe, respect, and admiration. It was a friendly place at Christmas time with Santa Claus handing out candy. There was always a Christmas tree sparkling with those old fashioned big green, red, and blue bulbs.

The building housed the fire department and during hot summer days -- before air conditioning -- the fire chief would cool off by sitting outside in the front of the station. When the fire siren sounded, the whole town was alarmed with the thought that someone needed help somewhere.

Oftentimes various merchants as well as the semi-retired would be the first to gather at the fire station upon receiving a phone call from the dispatcher. I can still picture Francis Miller donning his fire gear as he went running out his hardware store to get his place on the truck.

Also, as a child I feared the part of the building that housed the police station and jail. I can still hear my parents letting us kids know that if we weren't good we would spend a night in there. This admonition worked for my kids as well. Keep in mind that our vision of the jail was that it was a miniature Stateville Penitentiary which we could see across the valley.

It is fitting that Gordon McCluskey serve as the coordinator for this special program, having been the City Administrator for some years. The interior of the building has a whole new look, so come and see how it is being used. We'll reminisce about the old days and bring your memories to share.

Join us on March 22, 2003.

! Remember that we will vote on the Bylaws Revision !

—Dr. Reno G. Caneva

The Irish Build the Canal

NEWSLETTER, LAGHS MARCH 2003

In observance of St. Patrick's Day author-historian John M. Lamb has granted permission to reprint the article, which originally appeared in The Lockport FREE PRESS/"Old Canal Days" Special/Thursday, June 15, 1978.

This is the latest of a series on the history of Lockport by John Lamb. Lamb, a resident of Lockport, is president of the Illinois Canal Society. This selection deals with early discrimination against Irish canal workers.

The building of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in the 1840s brought an influx of people into northern Illinois lured by the prospect of prosperity on the line of the uncompleted canal. One group that came was not lured by future prosperity, but by the cash promised for hard labor. These were the Irish laborers.

Most of the common laborers on the canal and some of the contractors were Irishmen fresh off the boats. The number of laborers employed along the canal varied from 350 in the winter to 1700 in the summer when construction was in full swing.

While the Irish laborers built the canal, they were not generally appreciated. As the saying went, 'To build a canal you needed a pick, a shovel and an Irishman.'

As one experienced canal contractor, David Weber, observed; he had worked on Pennsylvania canals and the I. and M. Canal, and had concluded that "...one experienced Irish laborer will do as much of any kind of canal work as three raw Hollanders."

Despite this acknowledged ability as a laborer, the Irish as a group were despised. They were thought to be dirty, poor and drunkards. They were considered as necessary as a freezing spring rain, but their

benefits could best be appreciated once they had moved on.

In 1840 a Scotch traveler wrote the following about some Irish canal workers near Utica in LaSalle County. "We had scarcely got beyond the edge of town before we came to a colony of Irish laborers employed on the Illinois Canal, and a more repulsive scene we had not for a long time beheld.

"The number congregated here were about 200, including men, women and children, and these were crowded together in 14 or 15 log huts, temporarily erected for their shelter. I had never been in the south of Ireland and cannot say how far the appearance of this colony differed from that of villages there, but certainly in the north of Ireland, over which I have traveled from Dublin to Londonderry, I never saw anything approaching the scene before us in dirtiness and disorder.

"For this, here at least, poverty could be no excuse, as the men were all paid at the rate of a dollar a day for their labor, had houses rent free, and provisions of every kind abundantly cheap. But whiskey and tobacco seemed the chief delights of the men. Of the women and children, no language would give an adequate idea of their filthy condition, in garments and person. It required only a little industry to preserve both in a state of cleanliness, for water was abundant in the river close at hand, and soap abundant and cheaper than in England. It is

not to be wondered that Americans conceive a very low estimate of the Irish people generally, when they have such unfavorable specimens of the nation, as these almost constantly before their eyes.

"Unhappily, of the immigrants who land at New York, the large majority are not merely ignorant and poor...but they are drunken, dirty, indolent and riotous, so as to be objects of dislike and fear to all those in whose neighborhood they congregate in large numbers. And yet the remedy is within their own reach to be clean, sober and industrious and is surely within the power of every man."

The opinion that the Irish men, women and children were drunken, dirty, ignorant beasts was all pervasive among the inhabitants of this area at that time. The references to the Irish were usually deprecatative. For example, Will County historian George Woodruff says that in the election of 1840 in Lockport the Irish voted as many as twenty times apiece, giving the Democrats an overwhelming majority. Woodruff also quotes with approval a story about an Irish wake in which the living participants were so drunk that they lost the casket and its contents on the way from Lockport to the cemetery. They went on their merry way unperturbed until they had to present something to the open grave. Then they retraced their steps, retrieved the remains of the principal participant and buried him.

The Yankee engineers and

overseers sought to woo the Irish away from demon rum but with no success. Buckingham interviewed the Superintendent of Laborers at Ottawa who told him that at first the Canal authorities said nobody who used "spirits" could work on the canal, but they could get no Irish workers with such a stipulation.

Next authorities said the consumption of spirits was all right as long as they were purchased by the Irish themselves. But in order to keep their men they were obliged to supply a gill of whiskey each day to each worker at the expense of the canal fund. It might be called the 19th century equivalent of the worker's martini lunch.

Finally, there were the Irish riots. Fighting between two Irish factions was particularly intense in the 1830s. The two factions were the "Corkonians" from the southern part of Ireland (Cork and Limerich) and the "Fardowners" from northern Ireland (Ulster and that area). In the riots of 1838 and 1839 the "Corkonians" always seemed to get the upper hand. Killing of "Fardowners" and "Corkonians" was not uncommon. There was a serious riot on July 4, 1839, in this area that ended only when the Sheriff in Joliet summoned a "Posse Comitatus" that met the victorious "Corkonians" at Romeoville, scattered them and arrested many. While the Irish may have killed each other in their fratricidal struggles, their non-Irish neighbors turned with

even greater savagery upon the Irish.

In 1838 a posse in LaSalle County stopped a group of "Corkonians" who had overrun the "Fardowners" marching toward LaSalle. At Split Rock the LaSalle County Sheriff and his men shot down seven, and three more Irish were found dead in the tall grass, and no one knew, or seemingly very much cared how many more had been killed.

From the Irish side it must be remembered that they were on the lowest step on the economic ladder, and were hurt the worst by the canal's financial difficulties in the 1830s and 1840s. The script the canal commissioners issued from Lockport in 1840 finally came into the hands of the Irish who found that few would accept it as money.

The dollar a day that was praised by Buckingham in 1840 was a dollar that could buy little and frequently not the needs of life. It could be used to purchase land though, and some of the Irish canal laborers did purchase farm land and did settle down to become prosperous farmers.

One of these was Patrick Fitzpatrick of Lockport who bought land on the west side of the Des Plaines river.

But from most of the Irish canal workers, the reward for their hard work was canal script that was not worth anything outside the canal area, nor worth very much along the line of the canal.

The workers, like all such

exploited people, were sometimes easily used by various political demagogues who were anxious to promise them anything so that the laborers could be used for the demagogue's own political gain.

In 1847 the State Trustee of the canal, Charles Oakley, was engaged in a bitter fight with the canal administration, and to get a leg up in this struggle he was able to encourage a strike on the Summit level of the canal, that stretch between the Chicago River and Lockport.

The "turn-out" was triggered by a demand for \$1.25 a day for laborers. The workers still used English denomination and demanded eight shillings. The "turn-out" was a failure although it stopped work on that segment of the canal for about a week.

What was demanded by the strikers was \$1.25 a day or reduction of working hours 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. with two hours off for breakfast and dinner, and board. But as their strike failed, they were forced to return to work at \$1 a day for 16 hours of hard labor.

Despite these hard conditions the Irish contributed much to Lockport and northern Illinois. They built the canal after all, and contributed citizens such as Patrick Fitzpatrick, who raised a company to fight in the Civil War. His heirs contributed the land upon which Lewis University is built and also helped to build the St. Dennis Grade School.

Author's Note: The Old Canal, as it looked in its working days, was the result of long hours of work on the part of Irish laborers who came to the area in the 1840s looking for employment. The Irish then settled in the area and became an important part of the history of Lockport.

LAGHS would like to thank Judy Richardson for transcribing the article. Judy is working on a project with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources that will print the collected works of John M. Lamb, which will be made available to libraries and resource centers throughout the canal corridor.

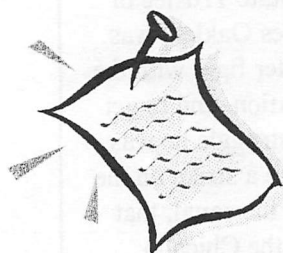
NEWSLETTER, LAGHS MARCH 2003

Chasing Your Tale

by Jacqueline Munch



Genealogy Workshop followup notes ...



Our Genealogy Workshop at last month's meeting was well attended, and our hope is that all of you will continue your research and fill out those Pedigree Charts. We look forward to having them included in our collection when you are finished.

Members — Preserve Your Pedigree Charts in the Archive.

Just bring your chart to a meeting or mail it to LAGHS. Preserving your Pedigree Chart and family stories in the archive is a benefit of membership.

Helpful Hints — Happy Hunting!

1. Take a look at the Pedigree Chart you filled out at the workshop:

✓Make a list of the records you need to verify the information you already have. You most likely have blank spots on your chart; think about what kinds of records you need to fill in those blanks.

2. Develop a plan!

✓Concentrate on one part of your family tree. If you get stuck, move to another part.

✓Keep a record of your searches, even if you don't find anything. Otherwise, you may unnecessarily repeat that search in the future.

✓As you acquire new information, add it to your chart.

3. Consider the source.

✓Record the source for each piece of data on the back of the Family Group Sheets and the Pedigree Chart, numbering each one and putting that number next to the data on the front.

4. File all documents, copies and notes in a file folder for each Family Group Sheet.

✓You should have a separate folder for **each marriage**, keeping a copy of the related Family Group Sheet in the front of that folder.

✓A separate file for **correspondence** is a good idea. Keep copies of letters you write, putting the most recent in back. When you receive a reply, attach it to your original letter and file in the related family file folder. Remember to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) when you write asking for information.

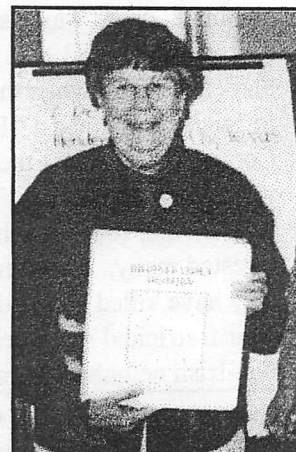
Genealogy Workshop ____ for beginners



Nancy Crilly (left) joined Jacquie Munch (workshop chair), Cathy Passas, Bonnie Carlson, and Georgene Bankroff (pictured in the photo at right) in presenting the workshop.

The workshop was interesting and informative. It provided the comprehensive overview that Nancy and I needed to get started in recording our family history.

— Lee Nelson



Georgene holds her family history binder. Several members brought binders for Share & Tell.

New Website for WGGs

Will/Grundy Counties Genealogical Society now has a website at wggs.org. On their website you can get information on membership, meetings and programs, publications, pioneer certificates, their library collection and helpful internet links. The library collection is listed online and there is a printable order form for publications.

WGGs Meetings

The next regular meeting for WGGs is Thursday, March 13^h, 7:00 p.m. at Coal City Public Library, 85 North Garfield Street, Coal City, IL.

Guest speakers

On March 13, Father Kevin Shanley will present information on "Irish Research." On May 8, the speaker will be Dave Cosper from the Naperville Family History Center with a program on "Tracing Your German Roots."

!! BEWARE OF SCAM !!

The national GenWeb project is warning genealogists about a revival of an old genealogy scam at the following website: genseekers.com. Behind the impressive password protection they have setup are links to free genealogy sites only!

The site has no actual benefit!

In order to get the "5-day free trial" that the site offers, you have to give them your credit card or bank account number. You will then need to cancel within 5 days if you don't like their service. Guess what? The cancellation e-mail address bounces!

*Do not
give out
your account
number or send \$.*

*~
The site has no
benefit or content of
its own!*

Please contact Jacqueline Munch at:

► jlmunch@earthlink.net, or
© 815-838-3795, or

✉ Send mail to me at our society's address.



Genealogy's timeless tidbits

I found the following on a genealogy web site and thought we could all share a laugh or two during the bleak mid-winter.

Dear Abby: I have always wanted to have my family history traced, but I can't afford to spend a lot of money to do it. Any suggestions? Sam in California

Dear Sam: Yes. Run for public office.

The following are quotes from copies of correspondence received by the Family History Department of the LDS Church:

We are sending you 5 children in a separate envelope.

My grandfather died at the age of 3.

Will you please send me the name of my first wife? I have forgotten her name

We lost our grandmother, will you please send us a copy?

The wife of #22 could not be found. Somebody suggested that she might have been stillborn - what do you think?

Will you send me a list of all the Dripps in your library?

Further research will be necessary to eliminate one of the parents.

I would like to find out if I have any living relatives or dead relatives or ancestors in my family.



Membership News

by Bonnie Packley

Welcome



New Members

Art & Olga Schumann
of Lockport

David Henley
of Frankfort.

New Committee Members

Archive Committee

So far, Virginia Ward Bailey, Mabel Hrpcha, Bill Molony, Louise Morris, Dorothy Nordstrom, Oma Rajala, Tom Reardon, and Gary Ward have expressed an interest in this committee.

Members will be contacted when our genealogists and historians, Georgene Bankroff, Erwin Klopstein, Jacquie Munch, and Ruth Waldvogel are ready for a training session.

Membership Committee

Currently serving on our Hospitality Team are Carol Giardina and Olga Schumann.

Members of this committee greet and make members and guests feel welcome at our monthly meetings.

Needed

Birthday Club & Card Committee

Volunteers are needed to plan the activities of the committee.

The Birthday Clubs are: 90-99 Club and Century Club.

Call Bonnie at 838.9388.

NEEDED

No meetings to attend!

Just keep an eye out for any mention of:

1. LAGHS as an organization.

This helps to fulfill our mission to record the history of our organization.

2. LAGHS members: feature articles and obituaries.

This helps fulfill our mission to preserve family histories.

3. Relevant local historical current events.

This helps to fulfill our mission to preserve local history.

Here's what to do:

1. Save the Entire Page! So we have the full citation.

2. Mail it to LAGHS c/o Historian, or bring the item to a meeting.

What We Preserve

We don't want to save absolutely everything there is, but we don't want to miss anything either. Remember our Slogan:

*"Preserving the Past
is our Present to the Future"*

Tell a Friend

~

Tell a friend about our Society.
Invite them to join us at a meeting.

They'll tell two friends,
and they'll tell two friends.

And so on, and so on.

Needed

Community Outreach Committee

Very Important Work That is Nothing But Fun!

~

We need HELP to staff the tables that we set up at community events.

~

It's fun!

~

We meet people and talk to them about genealogy and history.

~

Our objective is to make people aware of our organization and our efforts to preserve local genealogy and history.

~

CALL ME BONNIE AT (815) 838.9388
TO SIGN UP FOR THE FOLLOWING EVENTS:

Lockport Business & Community Expo 2003

Saturday, April 12: 11am to 5m

Old Canal Days

Saturday and Sunday, June 21 & 22

Civil War Days-Dellwood Park

Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 5 & 6 & 7

Christmas Crossroads

Saturday and Sunday, November 22 & 23

Lockport Area Genealogical & Historical Society

c/o Bonnie Packley
1016 Maitland Drive
Lockport, IL 60441

Vintage Reproduction

Postcards

~Dellwood Park~

~Downtown Lockport~

\$39.95 (each set of 12)

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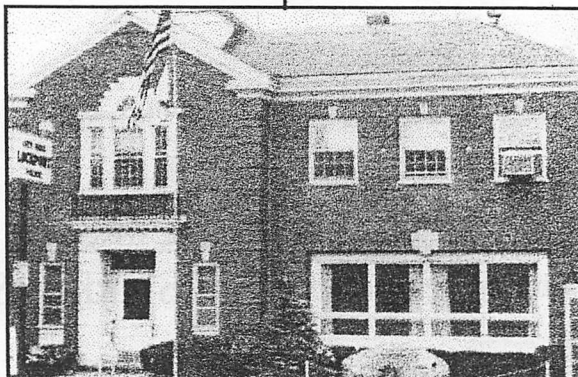
The Irish Build the Canal

Membership Meeting

Saturday, March 22, 2003 ~ 8:30 a.m. Sharp!

**Tour the New
Community
Development Center**

~
with Gordon McCluskey
and special guests



Meet at Old City Hall
located at 921 S. State
on the west side of State Street
between 9th & 10th.

~
Share & Tell:
Police & Fire Departments

Meeting Agenda: Vote on Bylaws Revision

Refreshments will be provided.