

Duffy's Cut: Investigating Immigration, Industrialization, and Illness in 19th Century America. "A Perfect Storm"

Program

Immigration and Nativism

Participants will first investigate the issues of immigration and nativism through a focused study of the forty-seven Irish-Catholic immigrant laborers who arrived in the port of Philadelphia on the ship the *John Stamp* in 1832. Like their Scotch-Irish counterparts, these men faced economic and religious discrimination in Ireland. Institute participants will conduct genealogical research into the lives of the men and women on the John Stamp as well as genealogical research on the ten other Irish immigrant laborers who had already been doing railroad construction under Irish contractor Philip Duffy in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Participants will also examine the nativist response to immigrants in cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, as well as the resulting changes that occurred in the ethnic and religious composition of America at the time. Studying immigration and nativism is significant because the academic literature is lacking in many examinations of these issues in the 1830s.

Surprisingly, the literature spends much of its efforts examining nativism post-1850. The proposed Institute would assist in filling the gap for participants who provide instruction regarding this historical period.

Railroad and Industrial Expansion

Railroad and Industrial Expansion The story of Duffy's Cut provides a window into the world of early 19th century industrialization in America. Participants will explore the impact of railroad and industrial expansion on both the immigrants and the natives. The men of the *John Stamp* arrived in an environment eager to exploit their labor in the burgeoning American Industrial Revolution. They earned 25 cents a day working in railroad construction doing the kind of man-consuming labor for which Southern slave owners were unwilling to hire out slaves. Historians

like Donald McNamara have documented the use of Irish immigrants for canal and levee building in New Orleans and the high mortality rates associated with such malarial environments. A similar pattern is seen at Duffy's Cut with the epidemic of concern being cholera instead of malaria.

Participants will explore Phillip Duffy's long railroad career through historical documents and discern the kinds of labor options available to ambitious immigrants of the 1830's. Mile 59 – Duffy's Cut – was notable in several regards. It was the deadliest mile (or indeed as the Irish-American musicians the Dropkick Murphy's called it, "The Hardest Mile"); it was the most expensive and experimental of the entire 82 mile line in terms of the types of tracks used; and its fill is the only part of the rail line to be named for a contractor. In visiting the site, participants will be able to see the remains of the 1832 railroad cut and fill, the shanty area where the men worked and died, and the mass grave.

Participants will examine the development of the Philadelphia and Columbia (P&C) railroad and the 1830s fill which supported the tracks and carried the trains westward. The 2004-2012 archaeological excavation of the railroad fill at Duffy's Cut uncovered many significant artifacts, including rare track pieces and stone spikes, a number of personal effects of the work crew, skeletal remains, and several bullets found in the skulls and near the graves. Participants will examine these and other artifacts recovered from the site, as well as the dig site itself. The archeological component of Duffy's Cut continues as it is an active archeological dig site that is scheduled to be completed by August 2015. Other artifacts may yet be found as this last dig may in fact be the most significant in terms of artifacts both material and skeletal.

Epidemic Disease and Public Health

Epidemic Disease and Public Health Participants will also study how early nineteenth century American populations dealt with a widespread public health crisis and how nativism and ethnic prejudices affected the treatment of the Irish migrant laborers. The death rate for cholera at the time rarely exceeded about 50% of its victims, depending on their general health at the time of onset (Tauxe). The public, however, generally regarded the first symptoms as a death sentence. The workers at Duffy's Cut who contracted cholera were exposed to quarantine by local

vigilantes, whose members lived adjacent to the work site. Bullet holes found in the skeletal remains demonstrate that the victims died as a result of violence. The local response to the outbreak of a contagious illness among the immigrant workers was conditioned by pervasive fears of what historian Alan Kraut has called, "The Immigrant Menace". Participants will visit the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology where the skeletal remains are housed. Visiting lecturers involved in the excavation and examination of the remains will discuss how they used forensic science and archeological techniques to conclude that these men were murdered.

Historical records reveal that cholera quickly spread from Duffy's Cut crew members to another Irish immigrant railroad crew at mile 48 of the P&C near Downingtown. That crew died and was buried at a site near the railroad. Cholera also struck down the Irish immigrant canal workers at Spring City, northwest of Duffy's Cut. Participants will be able to visit the cemeteries in Downingtown and Spring City, PA, where the men are buried.

The Pennsylvania state historical marker for the Duffy's Cut mass grave underscores the three themes central to the Institute. Erected in 2004, the historical marker includes the following statement:

Prejudice against Irish Catholics contributed to the denial of care to the workers. Their illness and death typified the hazards faced by many 19th century immigrant industrial workers (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission).