

The Museum of Newport Irish History

Michael F. Crowley Lectures

4th Program of the 2020-2021 Series ~ Our 19th Annual

How Hard Would It Be to Dig a Ditch Anyway? - How the Irish Saved The Blackstone Canal

Guest Speaker: Chuck Arning, Public Historian

Tuesday, March 16, 2021 ~ 6:00 p.m.

“Virtual” Presentation via Zoom

Rhode Islanders were excited about building the Blackstone Canal and saw it as a major employment opportunity. After all, how hard could it be to dig a ditch? The increase in elevation from Providence to Worcester was 452 feet, and the topography of the Blackstone Valley required the canal to traverse marshes, wetlands, creeks and brooks along its path. Canal construction proved more difficult than originally thought and the over-eager Rhode Islanders in 1824 struggled to build it. The project was in dire straits so a call went out to the battled-tested Erie Canal builders, who happened to be Irish.

We will examine just why the Irish came, as “navvies” and “strollers,” to build the early canals of America. We will focus on how the Irish saved the Blackstone Canal, an important economic engine that stretched from the exploding seaport of Providence, R.I. to the rural landscape of Central Mass., terminating in the Village of Worcester, and what happened after the Canal project was completed.

CHUCK ARNING retired from the National Park Service (NPS) after 24-1/2 years of service as an Interpretive Ranger in the Blackstone River Valley. He currently works as a consultant for the Worcester Historical Museum and assists other museums and historic sites in accomplishing their missions. As the A/V Specialist for the Blackstone Valley, he produced over 85 videos and TV episodes on the outdoor recreation, history, preservation efforts, and the people of the Blackstone River Valley. Arning produced, wrote, hosted and was a contributing editor of the award-winning series “Along the Blackstone” for the NPS. Ranger Arning was awarded the NPS’s 1997 National Freeman Tilden Award for excellence in interpretation. In 2002 he was awarded the Freedom Star Award for his work on the Underground Railroad by the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. He was awarded the 2014 Leadership in Preservation Award by the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the 2017 Massachusetts History Conference “Bay State Legacy Award.” Ranger Arning was project manager for the widely acclaimed book, *Landscape of Industry: An Industrial History of the Blackstone Valley*” (University Press of N.E., 2009). He is currently researching the Irish orphans and their emigration to Canada during the Famine, Black U.S. troops in WWI, and family history.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Visit www.NewportIrishHistory.org, click “Lectures,” then click the link to Reserve under the Mar. 16 listing. You will receive an e-confirmation. Important: The day before the presentation, you will receive another email containing a link to the virtual event, which begins at 6pm on Mar. 16. If you do *not* see this email, check your SPAM. You can download and install Zoom on your computer or mobile device. We recommend you plan to log in early. **No fee** will be charged to participate, but we’d ask that members who have not yet paid their renewal fee for the current membership year (4/01/20-3/31/21) renew on the “Membership” page of our website.

Non-computer/-mobile device Users: This lecture, including speaker’s slides and Q&A, will be videotaped and a link to view will be available on the ‘Lectures’ page of our website after the event. Please consider enjoying the lecture with a family member or friend who can provide computer access. We look forward to resuming in-person lectures when safe to do so.

QUESTIONS? Please contact Ann at (401) 841-5493 or (917) 270-3372 or email her at tpm1@earthlink.net.