

Captain

Lens 1.1: Song, "The Raging Canal"

"Although virtually unknown today, this song was one of the most famous and popular canal songs of the nineteenth century. It inspired the parody by Mark Twain, *The Aged Pilot Man*. Stephen Foster included the song title in his *Song of All Songs*."

" Come listen to my story ye landsmen one and all,
I'll sing to you the dangers of that raging canal.
For I am one of many who expects a wat'ry grave
For I've been at the mercy of the wind of the wave.

I left Albany harbor 'bout break of day,
And if I rightly remember 'twas the second day of May;
We trusted to our driver, altho' he was but small,
For he knew all the windings of that raging canal.

It seemed as if the Devil had his work in hand that night,
For all our oil was gone and our lamps they gave no light;
The clouds began to gather and the rain began to fall,
And I wished myself off of that raging canal.

The Captain told the driver to hurry with all speed,
And his orders were obeyed, for he soon cracked up his lead;
With the fastest kind of driving, we allowed by twelve o'clock,
We'd be in old Schenectady right bang against the dock.

But sad was the fate of our poor devoted bark,
For the rain kept on pouring and the night it grew dark.
The horses gave a stumble and the driver gave a squall,
And they tumbled head over heels into the raging canal.

The Captain came on deck, with a voice so clear and sound,
Saying, "Cut the horses loose, my boys, or else we'll all be drowned.
The driver swam to shore, altho' he was but small,
While the horses sank to rise no more in the raging canal.

The cook she wrung her hands and she came upon the deck,
Saying, "Alas when will become of us, our boat it is a wreck?"
The steersman knocked her over, for he was a man of sense,
And the bowsman jumped ashore and he lashed her to a fence.

The Captain came on deck with a spy glass in his hand,
But the night it was so dark, he could not discover land,
He said to us with a faltering voice, while tears began to fall,

Prepare to meet your death this night on the raging canal.

The sky was rent asunder and the lightning it did flash,
The thunder rattled up above, just like eternal smash.
The clouds were all upshot and the rigging it did fall,
And we scudded under the bare poles on that raging canal.

We took the old cook's petticoat, for want of better dress,
And rigged it out upon the pole as a signal of distress.
We pledged ourselves hand to hand aboard the boat to bide,
And not to quit the deck while a plank hung to her side.

At last that horrid night cut dirt from the sky,
The storm it did abate and a boat came passing by.
It soon espied our signal as each on his knees did fall,
Thankful we escaped a grave on the raging canal.

We each of us took a nip and signed the pledge anew,
And wonderful as danger ceased, how up our courage grew.
The craft in sight bore down on us and quickly was 'long side,
And we all jumped aboard and for Buffalo did ride.

Now, if I live a thousand years, the horror of that night,
Will ever in my memory be, a spot most burning bright.
For nothing in this whole wide world will ever raise my gall,
Except the thoughts of my voyage on the raging canal.

Source:

Hullfish, William. *The Canaller's Songbook*. (Brockport, New York: Bravoproductions, 1998): 28-29.

Lens 1.2: Diary of Captain Theodore D. Bartley, 1861, Bartley owned three Lake Champlain canal boats, and kept fastidious notes in his daily journal, where he documented his journeys on the canals of the Northeast from 1861-1889.

Tonawanda Erie Canal, September 17 1861

[In Margin: "Buffalo"]

Tues 17 Morning about 3:30 started for Buffalo- had rain most of the morning after daylight. Got to Black Rock about breakfast time – then the towing went pretty easy till we got in with a wall between- this towed hard on account of our current. Got to Buffalo between 10 & 11. Telegraphed to Cinda [Felton] & got two letters from the office first thing. Saw the *Big Hubbard* and *Cader* & one or two other boats I was acquainted with- weather wet and raining most of the time all day.

Wens 18 Weather cloudy early but a clear beautiful day and quite warm today – we are offered 18cts for wheat to New York. I have heard nothing from my telegraph message. Have run around town some but not much except to post & telegraph office & depot. Large quantities of grain on hand here now and a good many more arrivals everyday.

Sund 22 Somewhat cloudy in the morning but clear and very pleasant but tolerable cold- started from Tonawanda about half past 4 [and] got through Lockport about 6 P.M. Tied up about nine- when towing little below Lockport we heard of a man being drowned. He was rowing when a canal boat ran against him & capsized the boat. It seems but very little like Sunday towing- just the same as any other day- eve bright moonlight.

Erie Canal Sep 25 1861

Sund 29 Quite cold in the morning & tolerable cool day on account of wind. Just at night wind went down and the weather was quite warm – clear most of the day. Left Canton about 4 AM & started. Got to Syracuse about noon. Had to wait quite a spell at the locks. Found a crowd of about a dozen waiting above to go down at Syracuse. We lock up going east & four miles to the westward we lock down going the same way. We don't have another lock till we get to Utica. Then we lock down again and all the rest of the way. This level is 55 or 56 miles long-the last before this 4 miles.

Mond 30 Weather pretty fair all day- towed to Durhamville 30 miles west of Utica. Towed 19 miles today. Towed pretty heavy against the current. Quite warm today- this afternoon I got off and went hunting along the towpath. Saw nothing but some crows but could not get a shot at them – eve cloudy but warm.

Source:

Bartley, Theodore B. *Life on a Canal Boat: The Journals of Theodore D. Bartley 1861-1889*, edited by Russell P. Bellico. (Fleischmanns, New York: Purple Mountain Press, 2004): 42-43.

Lens 1.3: Diary of English novelist Captain Frederick Marryat, 1839

En route from Utica by way of Saratoga, proceeded to Oswego via canal packet boat:

“ The captain of her was, in his own opinion, no small affair; he puffed and swelled until he looked larger than his boat. This personage, as soon as we were underweigh, sat down in his narrow cabin, before a small table; sent for his writing-desk, which was about the size of a street organ, and, like himself no small affair; ordered a bell to be rung in our ears to summon the passengers; and then, taking down the names of four or five people, received the enormous sum of ten dollars passage-money. He then locked his desk with a key large enough for a street-door, ordered his steward to remove it, and went on deck to walk just three feet and return. After all, there is nothing like being a captain.”

Source:

Captain Frederick Marryat. *Diary in America, with remarks on its institutions.* (New-York: Wm. H. Colyer, 1839): 39.

Cited In:

Wyld, Lionel D. *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1962): 36.