

Fox Valley Turning Points
Locks, Canals and Dams
Activity #3: A Canal Worker's Life

Study the photo of Irish and German work crews building a canal on the Fox River for a few minutes.

1) Use the chart below to list the people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

People	Objects	Activities

2) Name two things about the photograph that you think are important.

3) List two things that this photograph tells you about life in the United States when it was written.

4) What types of tools appear to have been used to build the canal?

5) Look at the man standing on top of the canal wall and wearing a top hat. Why do you suppose he is dressed in a suit, tie, and top hat? What might have been his role in the project?

6) Does building the canal look like a job you would have liked to have? Why or why not?

7) The caption for the photo tells us that the workers were Irish and German. For what reasons might this job have been done mostly by new immigrants? (In order to answer this question, consider why established settlers might not want to or be able to work on the canals.)

8) Imagine that you are a canal builder and write a diary entry about your day on the job. Include details about the work: did it require a lot of strength? Was it messy? What might it have been like working next to someone who was from another country and did not speak your language? Or, what would it have been like to have this job as a new immigrant who did not speak English?

9) Can you make a prediction about the effect building and operating the canal had on communities along the river? Explain your answer. (Keep in mind that boats using the canal brought in people and goods and also carried people and goods to other communities.)