

The Ghosts of Duffy's Cut: The Irish Who Died Building America's Most Dangerous Stretch of Railroad

William E. Watson, J. Francis Watson, John H. Ahtes, Earl H. Schandelmeier III



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In 1832, 57 Irish Catholic workers were brought to the United States to lay one of the most difficult miles of American railway, Duffy's Cut of the Pennsylvania Railroad. These men were chosen because, in the eyes of the railroad company that hired them, they were expendable. Deaths were common during the building of the railway but this stretch was worse than most. When cholera swept the camp basic medical attention and community support was denied to them. In the end all 57 men?the entire work crew?died and were buried in a mass unmarked grave. Their families in Ireland were never notified about what happened to them. The company did its best to cover up the incident, which was certainly one of the worst labor tragedies in U.S. history. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly industrializing America, this book tells the story of these men, the sacrifices they made, and the mistreatment that claimed their lives.

The saga of Duffy's Cut focuses particularly on the Irish laborers who built the railroads. Who were these men? Who hired them? Why did they come? Perhaps most important, why did they die? Based on archaeological digs at the site and meticulous historical research, the authors argue that the annihilation of the work crew came about because of the extreme conditions of their employment, the prejudice of the surrounding community, and the vigilante violence that kept them isolated. In shedding light on this tragic chapter in American labor history, *The Ghosts of Duffy's Cut* also illuminates a dark side of America's rise to greatness.

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