

Part II Chapter 31 Brian

“Just get that damned water flowing!” The new mayor of New York, Robert Morris, decided that by God he would see to it that New York would have fresh water flowing through the Croton Aqueduct during his first term or else. His decree was felt in the quickened pace of work demanded of the labor crews through the summer, fall and winter of 1841.



While work on the High Bridge across the Harlem River continued, workers like Tom and Mike were tunneling through the hilly terrain of Midtown and Upper Manhattan, angling cross-town to Amsterdam Avenue. Crews were working at various sites all along the route—Diggers had already prepared the channel down Amsterdam Avenue from W. 150th Street to 106th Street, and were now at work digging the channel along Columbus Avenue opening up the route to about W. 87th Street, where it turned towards the Receiving Reservoir which was already being constructed on 5th Avenue at 42nd Street.

Nobody liked the pace at which they were forced to work—at reduced wages of 75 cents a day—from sunrise to sunset. Tom and Mike’s foreman, who had been told to finish the job or see his own wages cut, didn’t like it either. He wanted to stop working at six himself, he told them, but had been told to keep at it as long as there was daylight. Throughout that summer of 1841, they kept working until nine.

Then the foreman claimed he couldn’t waste two experienced men on one wagon, so he took Mike off and put Brian O’Hara, a young lad who just got off the boat—on with Tom. Mike was sent to take over another wagon where someone had been injured.

Tom, while sorry to lose Mike’s company, couldn’t believe his good fortune in finding that Brian was from Gort in Galway, his and Bridget’s home. Brian spoke only Irish, so Tom had to translate what the foreman said in assigning him. From then on they could speak Irish, and almost the entire crew spoke Irish too. Tom took Brian under his wing. He treated Brian like a younger brother.

He had always felt like “Michael’s younger brother,” and had depended on others, even Bridget, and here was some one who looked up to and depended on him.

Brian brought something to the team. Right away Tom could tell he knew horses. He didn’t need to be shown how to harness or load or drive—. He preferred to sleep in the stable. That was what he was used to, he said, from having worked in the stables of a big house near Gort—Coole Park, he said.

He was concerned about Dolly. She must be old, 15 or 20 years, he guessed. When Tom told him the kinds of work she'd been doing year round, how she'd spent years pulling his loaded cart on the uneven and dangerous streets of Manhattan and then continued to work when pregnant, even through her foaling and nursing, and now she was pulling a heavy wagon over the rough ditches, hills and gulleys of the aqueduct route, he told Tom it was no wonder she looked so worn. It was a cruel thing he was doing to her. "I'm surprised you're still working her. She'd be out to pasture in Coole."

That immediately turned Tom to worrying about Dolly. He had suspected she was pushing herself to keep up with the hauling for his sake, but now he realized it was clearly beyond her. She should be retired. He tried to ease up on her and devised ways to shift most of the work to Jackson. Unfortunately, the foreman didn't care about any decline in Dolly and even added loads to the wagon, in his rush to get as much work done as possible during that final summer.

Finding some other life for Dolly became a preoccupation with Tom. "You're going to have a nice retirement, Dolly," he promised her. "I'll find a farmer somewhere." He even told Bridget he was looking for a new home for Dolly, "A nice pasture where she can graze all day."

And he told Bridget about Brian. Wouldn't she welcome someone from Galway? She would, indeed. She longed for news from home, but she had enough on her hands for the moment. Maybe he could find somewhere for Brian to stay, as he could see there was no room in their two tiny rooms for another, what with the seven of them.

By then it was summer and Lena was out of school and helping her mother with the girls, over whom she maintained a proprietary interest. They found out why when she told them of her special mission.

"I prayed for a sister and my prayer was answered," she had told Sr. Rose Marie after school in June.

"Why did you pray for a sister?" she had asked.

"I have too many brothers."

"How many do you have?"

"Two."

"That hardly seems like too many, do you think?"

“One brother is already too many. So I prayed to Our Blessed Mother for a sister and she sent me two!”

“What did Sister say?” her mother asked.

“She said that meant Our Lady meant **for me to take half the care of them.**”

“Which half are you caring for, Lizzie or Rosa?” her father asked.

“That’s not what Our Lady meant. She expects me to help Mama and take half the care of both.”

“Mama could use the help.” She could indeed. Lizzie was frail and colicky and cried and needed a lot of attention, while Rosa was chubby and smiled and Bridget wanted to smile back at her. There was not much time for Will, who was jealous of the twins and all the attention they were receiving from their mother. He intruded himself even more than usual, interrupting her when she was bathing or feeding them. He couldn’t bear to see that he was no longer the most important person in the family.

Bridget felt guilty about him. He was now at the age when she had started Lena on her letters. She didn’t have the time to sit down and hear his letters. He was still too young for school, and as there were no schools that she approved of—the public schools were reputed to make pupils read the Protestant Bible and to say terrible things about Catholics, she felt she had to ignore him or ask Lena to sit down and teach him, but as soon as Lena tried to corral him, he began protesting and escaped the moment she turned her back. Bridget could see that Lena felt Will was a lost cause and would rather dedicate herself to the twins.

Will’s initial foray on his own to the Bowery (although he hadn’t known where he was), far from discouraging and frightening him, as his parents hoped, only gave him a taste for more adventures. When he felt rejected at home, he petulantly set off to get revenge by “running away” again, as his father had told him he had done and should never do again. Above all he needed to escape from Lena, who would lock him in the privy if she caught him misbehaving. He now knew a bit more geography and was able to find his way home.

In late July, Tom brought Brian for a visit. As soon as Bridget met him, she took Tom aside and told him that Brian would not be allowed to stay in Mr. Reynolds room unless he bathed, as he smelled of the stables. “I doubt if he’s had a bath since he left Gort.”

Sunday morning after church Tom showed him around the port and city a bit—the first time he’d seen it, as he’d been press-ganged into the work force and had only seen the city as he was being carted off to the work camp. After supper

that evening, Bridget asked to hear what life in Ireland was like now and what had brought him. Some others lingered to listen to the Irish as he told his story.

He was the fourth of six children and the second son of a cottier, he said.

Bridget nodded agreement, "My da was a cottier too."

He had never been to school, had always worked on his father's small plot of land where the family had barely subsisted on the potato crop. "But the praties let us down."

"Sure, wasn't it same with us? The praties failed all over Galway the years before we left," she noted.

"When I was thirteen, in 1834, the praties failed again, so as I was strong and bright, my father offered me for sale at a hiring fair in Galway. The manager for the Gregory family estate near Gort bought me for seven years, to be a stable boy at their estate, Coole Park."

Lena whispered to Will, "You're headed for the hiring fair yourself!"

"Ye'll just be boarding there, Brian,' my ma told me, but I knew it was their way of getting rid of me. I thought I was her favorite. How could she? I asked her. She didn't want to part with me but when my da told her I'd be cared for, she couldn't object. She wanted me to have a chance, she said. She knew they couldn't provide for us all—"

"When Ma made me realize I could help earn money for them, I worked hard, and gave the Gregorys no cause to complain that I'd not done my work, so they needn't pay me. Others weren't so lucky. But the Gregorys were honorable--for Protestants--and lived up to their bargain and paid my family when my time was up. By then I was twenty, and knew I wasn't going to stay there, where there was not enough to feed us all, the praties were failing already, and a child could be sold. I managed to find my own passage from Galway."

"So it's bad there now?"

"Failure's widespread—about every other year, and in 1839 it was universal throughout the country, and this year again, for the weather looked the same—all that mist coming off the sea. What crops are harvested are taken by the landlord in rents and sold for his profit. Nothing left for the cottier's family. It's leave or starve."

Bridget looked at Tom. "Our families will be desperate to leave or starve. Now is the time to do something. Maybe we can ask Mike, now that he's got his stake."

Michael had been coming back regularly on Saturday nights. After stopping for “a wee drop” Saturday night he only rejoined Tom late Sunday evening for the return trip. Tom didn’t know where he went, but assumed it was to Frenchie’s place.

“About that stake you’ve got, Michael?”

“What about it?”

“If you’re looking for a good investment, you might think of our parents and brothers and sisters. The praties are failing generally, Brian says.”

Brian was asleep in the back of the cart, so Tom told Michael his story, emphasizing the urgency that had driven Brian. “Wouldn’t it be good time to send some of that stake money of yours home?”

“It’s all invested,” he said. “For a year. That’s what I’ve been coming down for--to look after my investment.”

“And what have you invested your stake in?”

“I was going to wait to tell you about it, but I can already see how it’s going and can offer you a chance to invest—maybe \$250? It’s a sure thing. By the time the aqueduct is finished next year I’ll have doubled our stake.”

“Up to your old tricks again, are ye?”

“Wait till you hear, and don’t be misjudgin’ me. What are we Irish press-gangs making a week, at 75 cents a day? \$4.50 a week! What does the average—not Irish--wage earner in this city earn? Between \$6 and \$15 a week! While we’re struggling to survive, others are getting rich. Frenchie, for example.”

“You’re going in on a saloon?”

“Listen. He rented the rooms above the saloon, where I used to lodge, to two ladies. They entertain customers who pay 50 cents, and Frenchie gets ten cents from each transaction--on top of the rental! Aren’t they all getting rich? So Frenchie decided that he’d like to open another house, but this would be fancier, a private establishment, not a public house. And this is where I came in.”

“Holy Mother of God, you’re not going in on a brothel with him?”

“Call it what you want—a parlor house we call it. Together we put a down payment of a thousand. It’s making us good money already. Four very high

quality women live there—a private house all fitted out to attract wealthy clients who pay \$5 for a quiet private visit in nice surroundings.”

“You know what Bridget would say? ‘Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what next?’”

He told Bridget only that Mike’s money was invested for a year, so Bridget sent from her savings ten dollars each to Tom’s parents and to her own, telling that she knew they must be having a hard time, for she’d heard from a Galway lad about the pratie’s failing again.

When Brian heard Will claim he was a chieftain, he remembered something he had meant to ask Tom. . “

“Have ye’ never been to Gort, Tom?”

Tom had never been anywhere but to Tuam and Galway and round to the cliffs of Moher.

“You were close enough then, less than 20 miles! Did ye’ know that Gort is big territory for the O’Shaughnessy clan? Gort Castle was theirs, wasn’t it?”



Ardmullwan Castle

“Was it?” Tom may have heard these tales, but hadn’t he been so intent upon his studies and O’Connell and his own success and making his way and courting Bridget that he’d never bothered to listen to the stories old grannies told.

“You may be a rich chieftain at that, Will. There’re several O’Shaughnessy castles round about Gort-- Ardamullwan Castle is but 5 miles south and Fiddaun Castle, another of the O’Shaughnessy strongholds is 5 miles southwest.”

After that, Brian was welcome to come home with Tom and Mike on the weekends, taking his bath, laying his bedroll on Mr. Reynolds floor, practicing his English on him and others in the house. He began saying he’d come to New York for his Saturday night bath and English lesson. He was treated like one of the family. He joined the celebration of Nell’s seventh birthday in August, and attended the christening of Peggy’s son Edward (named for his father) in September. Bridget and Tom were the godparents and Bridget presented the baby with its christening gown.

One Sunday night in late October when they returned to the work site, Tom went to the stable with Brian to undo the rig from Jack and check up on Dolly. They found her lying on the straw, unable to rise. She lay on her side, struggling to breathe. Tom knelt beside her and stroked her nose. Her eyes were gummy and her nose was running. The way she looked at him, as if apologizing for letting him down, brought tears to his eyes. "There, there, Dolly. You've never let me down. It's I who have asked too much of you."

Tom's experience with illness was limited, so he looked to Brian for help. Brian felt her nose, leaned down to listen to her chest, then said, "She's got a fever. Hear that wheezing? She's got congestion in her lungs." Tom put his ear to her chest and heard her heart beating but heard a rattle in her lungs.

"She's got the influenza."

"Will she recover?"

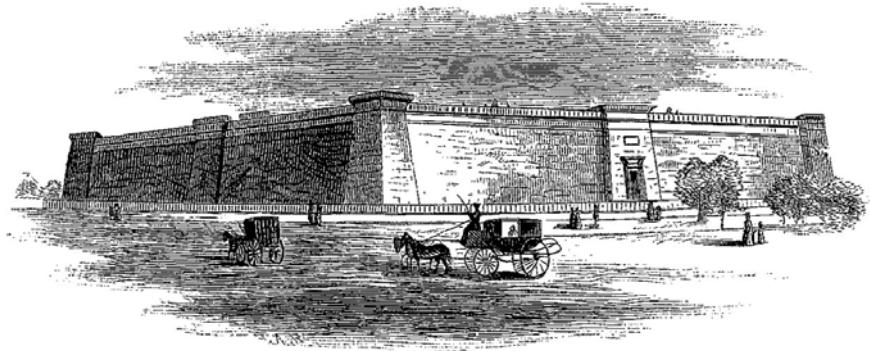
"Let's pray, but it's contagious. She should be isolated, and we need to clean this stable and move the other horses out before it spreads." They took the other horses outdoors while they cleared out and burned the straw, scrubbed down the floors, put new straw in, and got only a few hours sleep in the stable before first light meant time to rise. The next morning, with only one horse able to work, Tom took the cart and told Brian to stay with Dolly. He wanted to stay himself, but he knew Jackson might not take to being driven only by Brian.

Each day Tom could barely wait until 9 p.m. when they could lay off and return to the stable. Dolly remained there for a week, being tended by Brian. He showed up in the morning for roll call, so the foreman didn't miss him. Brian stayed with her over the weekend, while Tom went home, dreading that when he returned, he would find Dolly dead.

By the end of the second week, her fever was gone, but she had lost weight and could barely stand. "She's not going to work again," Tom swore. He told the foreman that one of his horses had nearly died, that Brian had saved her and others by his quick thinking. He suggested that Brian be transferred to be a stable hand. "He knows all about horses."

Tom worked only with the cart now that Dolly was left at the stable, where, under Brian, she did light cart hauling of straw and manure. Tom's task was hauling away the dirt to a site where it could be used in landscaping after the tunnel had been built, then returning with a load of bricks. His and Jack's day was simple—loading and unloading (dumping in the case of the dirt). Jack was good for this work—steady and strong, as long as he had his regular bag during loading and unloading.

After a long winter during which Tom and Mike and Brian struggled to keep up the breakneck pace, the great day finally came. Fresh water was released from the dam and reservoir at the Croton River at 5



THE DISTRIBUTING RESERVOIR IN THE FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

a.m. and began flowing through the Aqueduct tunnel. It arrived 22 hours later at the Harlem River, crossing it in the temporary siphon, until the High Bridget would be completed, and from there flowed down until it arrived in the Distributing Reservoir on Fifth Avenue on June 23, to great rejoicing.

Dedication Day, October 14, 1842

The dedication ceremony was held in City Hall Park on October 14, 1842. Parades, flags, bands, were present at the great celebration. Songs were written in honor of the day. Presidential dignitaries were on the podium with the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen and the Board of Assistant Aldermen. A commemorative sheet had been struck on linen and distributed as a souvenir.



"Croton Water Celebration 1842." Sheet music cover for the "Croton Ode," sung at City Hall Park during the civic festivities on October 14, 1842, marking completion of the Croton Aqueduct. Artist unknown.

Tom and Mike and Brian and other Irishmen who had worked on the aqueduct formed part of the audience, hoping to hear some mention of their contribution.

After congratulatory remarks by President John Tyler, former presidents John Quincy Adams and Martin Van Buren, and New York State Governor William H. Seward, Mayor Robert Morris told the audience about the uniqueness of the aqueduct in American history, reminding all of the fires and epidemics that had repeatedly devastated New York City, including the terrible cholera epidemic of 1832, within recent memory. Those diseases owed in part to the inadequate water supply and contaminated wells, he said. The Aqueduct had been built in response to these emergencies.

He introduced Major David B. Douglass the project's first chief engineer. Cheers exploded. Douglass, he told them, had planned the route and structures and

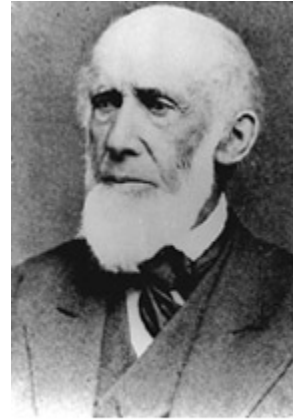
established the project's hydraulic principles. To him was due much of the credit. More applause followed. He was succeeded in 1836 by John B. Jervis, the engineer who achieved the final design of the Aqueduct and its major structures and led the complex construction effort. Jervis stood up and bowed to more cheers. Work had finally begun in 1837.

The Mayor invited Mr. Jervis to describe the Aqueduct itself, which he did, with the engineer's love of detail. For most of its length, he said, "the Aqueduct was a horseshoe-shaped brick tunnel 8.5 feet high by 7.5 feet wide, set on a stone foundation and protected with an



earthen cover and stone facing at embankment walls. Designed on principles dating from Roman times, the gravity-fed tube, dropped gently 13 inches per mile. Its builders had to maintain this steady gradient through a varied terrain, sometimes cutting

through hillsides, sometimes passing over level ground, sometimes tunneling through rock, across valleys and streams, carrying the water evenly along stone and earth embankments and in several places--at Sing Sing Kill, the Nepperhan River, and the Harlem River - across arched bridges. Through all this the tunnel was partly buried and partly above ground."



John B Jervis, engineer

The only ones in the crowd who seemed rapt at this description were the men who had actually worked on it and could visualize all the hillsides and valleys and streams and the slow steady inching downward of the giant tunnel. Others grew restless for an end of the officials' speeches. They had heard enough of the accolades politicians heaped upon each other for getting this giant multi-year project completed and within budget. Tom and Mike looked at each other, remembering the cut in pay that they had taken so the officials could make this boast.

"And someone had to get the work done," the Mayor went on. "Who else could have done it but the men from Tammany Hall?" The Mayor cemented his ties with Tammany that day, to show his gratitude to them for making him look so good.

Tom and Mike looked at each other in surprise. "So they're the ones who press-ganged the Irish immigrants like Brian coming in on the Liverpool packets every week," Mike said to Tom. "And now they're getting all the credit."

**COMPLETION of the CROTON AQUEDUCT
CELEBRATED**
New York, October 1842

HISTORY

In the year 1793 Dr. Joseph Brown proposed to supply the City of New-York with water by bringing the river Bronx to Harlem in an open Canal raising it to the required height by steam, & conducting it to the City in a 6 inch pipe. Propositions have been made since by Wm. Weston & others with reference to the same source. The CROTON was first recommended in the year 1832 by Col. Dewitt Clinton. In 1833 the Legislature authorized surveys. In 1834 a permanent board of Water Commissioners was organized. In 1835 Feby 16th the report of Stephen Allen, Wm. W. Fox, Seal, Alley, Cha's Dusenberry, & Benjamin M. Brown Water Comrs was made recommending the work as constructed. Surveys by D. B. Douglass, & John Marvine, in 1833 & 1834. March 4th 1835 plan adopted by the Common Council. April 13th the Citizens decided by a distinct vote that the work should be constructed. May 7th 1842. THE AQUEDUCT commences at the CROTON River, five miles from the Hudson, in Westchester County. The DAM is 250 ft long 7 wide at bottom & 7 at top, height 10 ft built of stone & cement. It sets the River back 5 miles, covering 400 acres, & holds five hundred millions of gallons. From the dam the Aqueduct proceeds sometimes tunneling through solid rock, crossing valleys by embankments, & brooks by culverts, until it reaches Harlem River, a distance of 33 miles. It is built of stone, brick & cement, arched over & under, 6 ft 9 in wide at bottom, 7 ft 5 in at top of side walls, & 11 ft 5 in high. It will discharge in 24 hours, sixty millions of gallons, descent 13 1/2 in. per mile, crossing the Harlem R. on a MAGNIFICENT BRIDGE OF STONE, 1450 ft long, with 14 piers, 8 & 60 ft span, & 7 of 50 ft span, from high tide to soft of arch 100 ft, to top of bridge 114 ft, cost about nine hundred thousand dollars. Water is for the present conducted across in an iron pipe laid as an inverted syphon, THE MANHATTAN VALLEY, at Harlem is passing 105 ft below the grade line, 2 1/2 miles from termination of Aqueduct of masonry, it passes CLENDENING VALLEY, with arches over streets & side walks about 10 ft high. The RECEIVING RESERVOIR is at 86th street, 38 miles from the DAM, it covers thirty five acres, & contains 150 millions of gallons. The water is conveyed to the DISTRIBUTING RESERVOIR on Murray's Hill 40th St. in iron pipes. It is 4 miles from the dam, covers four acres, built of stone & cement, height 13 ft above the street, resembling a spacious castle, or Fort. It holds 20 millions of gallons. From this reservoir iron pipes are laid under ground through the CITY. Water will rise in any part 14 ft above tide nearly as high as the clock of the City Hall. Over 100 miles of pipes are already laid. The whole cost will be about TWELVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS.

ENGINEER CORPS

John B. Jervis, Chief. H. Allen, principal assist. F. French, Resident Engineer. First division, H. T. Anthony, second, Wm. Jervis 3rd, P. Hastie, 4th.

COMMON COUNCIL, 1842.

MAYOR. Robt. H. Morris. **ALDERMEN.** C. Babs, C. S. Woodhull, President, J. A. Underwood, R. Martin, R. Jones, C. Crolius, Jr. C. W. Smith, S. Godney, M. G. Leonard, E. F. Purdy, A. Hatfield, R. F. Curran, H. W. Bonnell, J. Stewart, H. E. Davies, F. D. West, F. R. Lee. **ASSISTANT ALDERMEN.** H. C. Westcott, G. F. Neshitt, W. Dodge, D. T. Williams, Wm. Adams, Pres. R. H. Atwell, J. Nash, C. P. Beovic, W. D. Waterman, D. Ward, C. J. Dodge, G. W. Allerton, P. Esquiroil, J. B. Scoles, W. V. Brady, W. Mead, J. Rettigrew.

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Tom was moved by the pageantry and grandeur of the occasion, but not Mike. Not even memories of alleged glorious castles in Gort could cheer Mike up, and he turned around and left the great event in disgust.

He was further upset when, after the November elections that fall, in retaliation for a Democratic sweep of the elections (with the help of Irish Catholic gangs at the polling places), a Protestant mob attacked the residence of Bishop Hughes, smashing doors and windows. Only the police and the militia, and a group of Irish women who formed a human chain around St. Patrick's Cathedral to keep "sinners off" kept them from doing further damage. The damage had been done, as far as Mike was concerned. He was through with New York.

