

*Navvies on the Canal.* The northern sections of the Wabash (Miami) and Erie Canal were mostly built by Irish and German immigrant laborers. This song tells the story of those “navvies” who worked the area from Toledo to Providence. (The name “navvies” was from the navigational canal builders in England, many of whom came to build the American canals.)

*Dance With the Tiller.* If the boat’s tiller stood low on the stern deck, the steersman could straddle it and steer with his or her legs. I heard it referred to as “dancing with the tiller.” It sounded like a good song title.

*Old Blue Nell* is based on a real person on the Erie Canal. The name is changed and the story moved, via the folk tradition, to the Miami and Erie Canal.

*The Boatman’s Tin Horn* was an important piece of equipment on every boat. Its sound was used to alert the lock master that their boat was coming and to alert riders of a low bridge. The horn was accompanied by the steersman yelling “Bridge,” or “Low Bridge.”

*Sally and Molly* is a song about our “good old pals.” At the time of this recording, they’d spent 18 seasons pulling our canal boat.

*Smell the Roses.* Locks were often gathering places where boatmen swapped stories and news with local folks, bought supplies and fresh produce, and maybe took a nip in the back room of the general store.

*My Ordinary Days* is from the perspective of a boatman longing for the spring thaw so he could go back to work. This song was co-written by my wife, Ruth.

*A Canal Boat Christmas* is based on a true story from Canal Dover on the Ohio Canal.

*Christmas at the Mill* is based at Isaac Ludwig’s mill. After 150 years, it’s still a working saw and grist mill at lock 44 North in Providence, Ohio.

*The Grand Rapids of the Maumee* and *Thanks to the River* are river songs. The Maumee River ran along the canal from Maumee City to Defiance and was the water source for that part of the canal.

If your ancestors came to the Midwest after 1825, it’s possible they came part of the way on a canal boat. There are still a few places where we can ride on a canal boat driven by mules. If you get the chance, take a ride on one and relive that part of our country’s (and maybe your family’s) history.

*Bonus Track:* My other albums include baseball songs and I really wanted to include one here. The three players in the song are former Detroit Tigers.