

Belleville author *held April 2 / 94*

# Wins 2 major literary awards *P. 8*

*Authors, Canadian - Bel - Biog*  
By Nancy Gummow

The Intelligencer

A Belleville author, who penned a history book on hardy people who dug water canals last century, has won two prestigious American literary awards.

Dr. Peter Way, a graduate of Quinte Secondary School, won the 1994 Frederick Jackson Turner Prize for best book published last year in American history by a first time author.

Way's book *Common Labour: Workers and Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* won the prize. His article *Evil Humors and Ardent Spirits: The Rough Culture of Canal Construction Laborers* earned the 1994 Brinkley-Stephenson Prize for best article published in the *Journal of American History* in 1993.

He receives a certificate and cash award for each, plus an medal for the Turner Prize.

He started the book in 1986 and it took years of painstaking research going through business record accounts to put the pieces of their lives together. Some of the canal workers were immigrants who came to Canada looking for a better life. The author talks about Martin Donnelly, a god-fearing man who loses his wife and suddenly becomes sole parent to his children. Canal workers were paid very little. The conditions were poor, with most living in shanty towns, moving from one work site to another.

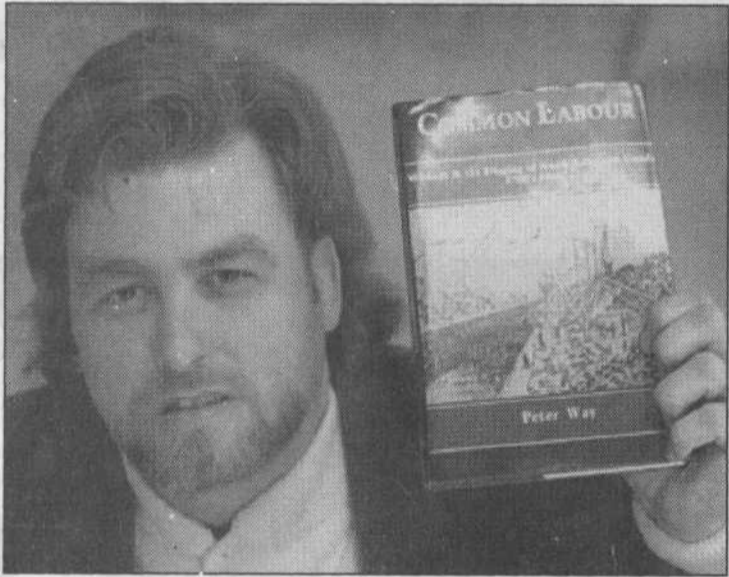
"Donnelly has come here, he's tried his hardest and can't understand why his children are still starving. He's very confused by the situation," he said.

In all 35,000 workers toiled making canals in Canada and the U.S. Although many of them were illiterate, they died leaving their stories untold. Donnelly's is one of the few, he said.

But the author is careful not to paint the workers as victims.

"If you deal with people like humans then you don't see them like victims. They did have a very hard life. But they had a social life and sports to make life easier," he said.

Way is a lecturer of American history at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England. His recent stop in Canada was for a job interview with a Toronto university.



Intelligencer photo by Nancy Gummow

Peter Way with *Common Labour*.