

The Delaware & Raritan Canal, pictured here, which terminated in New Brunswick, NJ, created many job opportunities in the area, drawing many immigrants seeking work in the nineteenth century.



The Delaware and Raritan Canal outlet locks in New Brunswick circa 1968. The canal was dug primarily by hand by Irish immigrant workers, between 1830 and 1834. Scores of workers endured treacherous conditions, and many died as a result, especially during the 1832 cholera epidemic. Canal workers who died on the job were often buried along towpaths, such as near New Brunswick at 10 Mile Run.





Photos courtesy of Eric Schkrutz/ New Brunswick  
Free Public Library Archives

These objects belonged to the workers who built the Delaware and Raritan Canal. Most canal workers received approximately \$1 per day in wages for dangerous work (the equivalent of <\$30 per day in 2019).

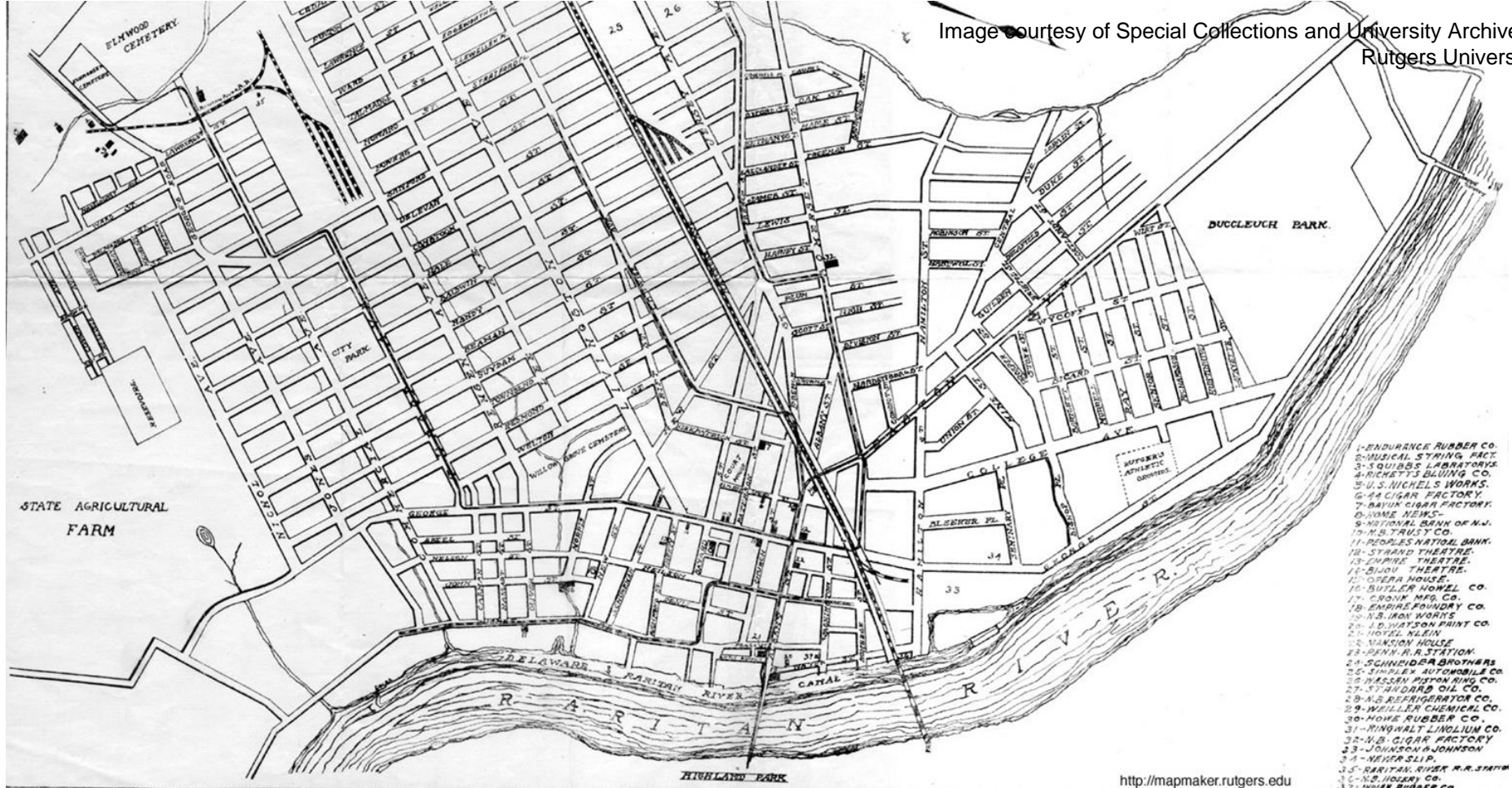


Nineteenth and early twentieth century New Brunswick was a major manufacturing center, with thousands of city residents, especially Hungarian immigrants, employed in the city's dozens of factories.

Image courtesy of American Hungarian Foundation/  
Rutgers University Special Collections and  
University Archives



C. 1925: New Brunswick's many factories were staffed primarily by immigrant workers, such as the Hungarian American women pictured here, who rolled thousands of cigars in the city in the early twentieth century.



<http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu>

C. 1910: New Brunswick's landscape was dominated by factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of which were staffed by the immigrant workers who populated the city.



The sanitary condition of glass factories is "very good" or "fair," as a general rule, if we believe the reports from the workmen, "Far better than that of our tenement houses, which are really bad, and a reform in this respect is very much needed." "The factories should have high roofs and plenty of shutters." "Not healthy to do too much night work." "Good, except in hot weather, when we should not be allowed to work." Salem—"Our sanitary condition could be improved." Millville—"More care in building factories; looking to their sanitary condition." "Glass blowing is healthy, notwithstanding what is said to the contrary." "Not healthy." Flat-tener—"Business generally considered healthy." Gatherer—"Healthy but hard work." Shearer—"Sanitary condition good, only we have night work, which is unhealthy." Blacksmith—"Good." Mould Maker—"Healthy." Engineer—"Very healthy." Stopper Grinder—"Our work, which is in water, is unhealthy." Cutter—"Trade unhealthy." Packer—"My work is unhealthy."

Seasonal temperatures have always proved a challenge to workers' health and safety, as this New Jersey worker's testimony from 1881 suggests, but significantly rising temperatures pose new challenges for laborers in the early 21st century. The previous centuries of exploitation of immigrants for cheap and often unregulated labor, coupled with insufficient legislation to protect workers, laid the groundwork for the trials faced by New Brunswick's residents today.



The most vulnerable workers in New Brunswick (as well as much of the rest of New Jersey) at present are low-wage workers, day laborers, and temp workers, the majority of whom are members of the Latinx and immigrant community in the city. Federal occupational health and safety (OSHA) standards do not explicitly require employers to regulate temperature in workplaces, relying instead upon the “general duty” clause to create a safe working environment. As a result, workers labor in dangerously hot and extremely cold workplaces; temp workers and other vulnerable employees, who often work without contracts or other documentation, are often the least protected. New Labor, an immigrant workers rights organization, advocates for policy change at the state and local level to fill this federal legislative gap. They also practice direct advocacy by offering worker rights training sessions for day laborers, temp workers, and other immigrant laborers wherever possible, including parking lots and sites where many day laborers go to find work.



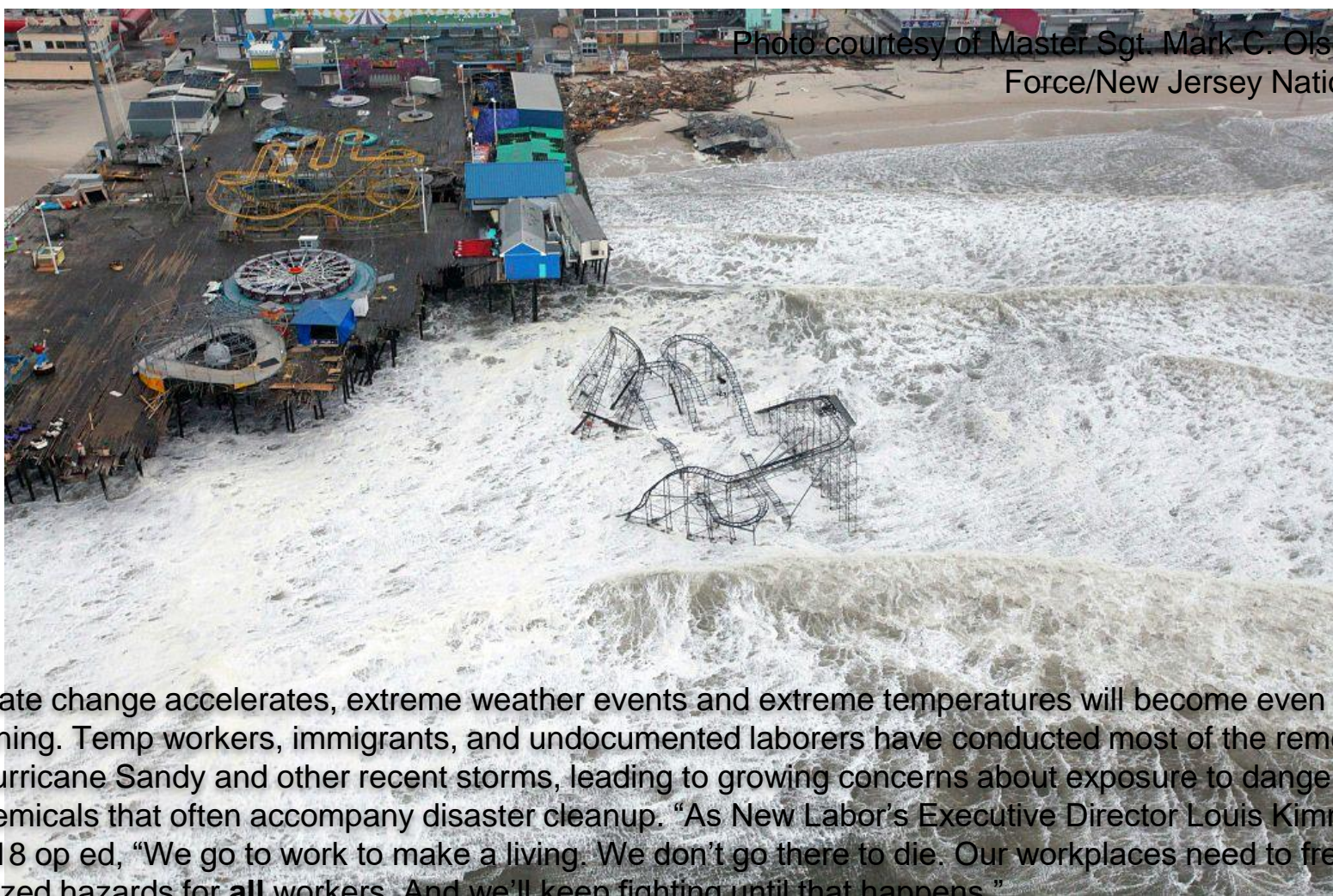


Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/U.S. Air Force/New Jersey National Guard

As climate change accelerates, extreme weather events and extreme temperatures will become even more threatening. Temp workers, immigrants, and undocumented laborers have conducted most of the remediation after Hurricane Sandy and other recent storms, leading to growing concerns about exposure to dangerous toxins and chemicals that often accompany disaster cleanup. “As New Labor’s Executive Director Louis Kimmel wrote in a 2018 op ed, “We go to work to make a living. We don’t go there to die. Our workplaces need to free of recognized hazards for **all** workers. And we’ll keep fighting until that happens.”





2018: New Labor supporters carry a “Climate Justice is Worker Justice” sign at a Workers Memorial Day March in New Brunswick, hosted jointly with the New Jersey Work Environment Council and Jersey Renews. In a press release about the march, Dan Fatton, director of New Jersey Work Environment Council , wrote: “Many in the Garden State have already seen firsthand the impact of climate change in the form of Superstorm Sandy and a wave of extreme temperatures over the past few years. Climate change is going to continue to have a major impact on a number of professions and workers will suffer. As the temperature increases, workers are more likely to suffer from heat stroke, exhaustion, and even death. The increased temperatures also magnify air pollution, causing or exacerbating respiratory illnesses, heart diseases, and allergies in urban and well-trafficked areas. Workers who spend time outdoors will see an increased risk of diseases like Zika and Lyme’s as the longer summers create larger habitats for disease vectors like ticks and mosquitos. On this Workers’ Memorial Day, attendees are marching together and demanding our leaders enact strong climate policies that will protect workers.”





2018: Latinx workers in New Brunswick have spearheaded efforts to update aging infrastructure in the city's schools, many of which lack air conditioning, in response to students and teachers experiencing dangerous indoor temperatures during summer heat waves.