

# ALONG THE TOWPATH

A quarterly publication of the  
**Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Association**

An independent, non-profit, all-volunteer citizens association established in 1954 supporting the conservation of the natural and historical environment of the C&O Canal and the Potomac River Basin.

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## New Wayside Exhibits Honor African-American CCC Workers

By Nancy Benco and Bill Holdsworth

On November 17, C&O Canal Association volunteers installed three new wayside exhibits at Carderock Recreation Area. The exhibits commemorate the work of hundreds of young African-American men enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The men lived in a sprawling CCC camp at Carderock while helping to restore the first 22 miles of the then-abandoned C&O Canal. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had established the CCC in 1933 to create jobs during the Great Depression while helping to preserve the nation's public lands.

As CCC enrollees, the young men lived a military lifestyle. In the morning, they rose to the sound of a bugle and met for a flag-raising ceremony. During the day, they worked on the canal, repairing the towpath, clearing the prism, and restoring locks and lockhouses. In the evenings, they could take classes to learn new skills, join a sports team, help edit the camp newspaper, or join a drama club. They earned \$30 a month and had to send most of it home to their families.

Two wayside exhibits, entitled *Working Hard to Survive: CCC Creates Jobs for America's Unemployed*, are installed next to Parking Lots 1 and 2. The third, *Unexpected Benefits in the Civilian Conservation Corps*, is located next to the Carderock Pavilion.



Installation of the wayside exhibits represents the culmination of a project that took three years and involved a number of partners. The C&O Canal Trust engaged a historian to conduct the original research on the two CCC camps along the canal. The C&O Canal Association hired a design firm to produce the exhibits and oversaw the project; its VIP program volunteers installed the exhibits. Heritage Montgomery provided a grant to support the Association's efforts. All three organizations worked with the National Park Service interpretive staff to craft the information displayed on the exhibits.

*Upper image – (l-r) Jim Heins, Doug Zveare, David Schumaker, Nancy Benco and Jim Biasco with the new wayside.*

*Lower image – Checking the level of the wayside.*

*Images courtesy of Nancy Benco*

# President's Report

By Bill Holdsworth

After the most unusual year in the Association's history, we are faced with uncertainty as we enter 2021.

Association work continues, as best it can. Our annual meeting was replaced by a conference call. Our board of directors meet via Zoom video conferencing. Our volunteer work, such as level walking, the VIPs, and the stewardship of Swains Lock, were constrained by the cautionary rules required by the pandemic. We were forced to cancel almost all social activities.

December marks renewal season for Association members. You can find the renewal form in this newsletter. I hope this year of reduced activity doesn't deter you from renewing your membership. Whenever conditions return to normal, I suspect the C&O Canal will need our help.

I hope this newsletter finds you well. Please stay safe. I eagerly look forward to the day when we can gather on the towpath again.

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## 2021 World Canals Conference Update

By Bill Holdsworth

Less than nine months remain until the Association hosts the 2021 World Canals Conference. The committee's preparations have ramped up accordingly.

We made a presentation at Inland Waterways International's annual meeting in early October. As is common these days, the meeting took the form of a video conference. Our partner, Visit Hagerstown, put together a photo montage. Our presentation was well received by the international audience, which included many potential attendees.

Working with Visit Hagerstown, we have decided to commission a short, professionally produced video to help market the conference. A video will be a valuable tool while in-person meetings remain scarce. We will feature the video on the website and use it for on-line meetings such as the recent IWI gathering.

We have started our email marketing. By November 16 over 75 people had signed up at the WCC 2021 website [wcc2021.org](http://wcc2021.org) to receive updates about the conference. Tour arrangements are being finalized. The pre-conference tour will use a North Bethesda hotel. The

post-conference will be based in Cumberland. We have outlined the sightseeing tours for the accompanying persons.

Conference evening events are taking shape. The Western Maryland Sportsmen's Club will host the Monday evening reception. Springfield Barn will be the site of the Wednesday's banquet. We plan to pick a registration hotel soon. That hotel will likely host the Sunday evening reception.

We will need volunteer support to meet the challenge of staging memorable and enjoyable conference. We will be reaching out to Association members in the near future to ask them to commit to specific roles.

The pandemic remains the dark cloud on the horizon. Our crystal ball can't tell us what conditions will look like in August. Eight months ago, few would have predicted our current situation. As I write this column in mid-November, I see reasons for both optimism and concern. We will continue to monitor the situation and re-evaluate as we go along. Our primary concern is for the safety of participants.



# Donors to Association Funds

## *August 1 to October 31, 2020*

### **Nancy C. Long Aqueduct Fund – A**

– Supports restoration and preservation of the eleven aqueducts on the C&O Canal. The fund was established with a generous donation made by long-time C&O Canal advocate Nancy Long.

### **Davies Legal Fund – D**

– Supports the Association's involvement in activities such as opposition to the transfer of public land to any individual or enterprise for private use.

Christopher F. Allison – *R*

Neil & Joan Barkin – *R*

David Brickley – *W*

Robert & Suzanne Bucci – *R*

The Charles Delmar Foundation – *R*

Sylvia Diss – *R*

Jim & Jan Heins – *W*

Bill & Chris Holdsworth – *W*

Linda & Michael Marmer – *A*

### **Ken Rollins C&O Canal Fund – R**

– Supports current projects and programs in and for the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

### **Rachel Stewart Swains Lock Area Fund – S**

– Funds improvements to the area around Swains Lock as they are identified in conjunction with the National Park Service.

### **2021 World Canals Conference Fund – W**

– Supports the 2021 World Canals Conference at the C&O Canal.

Dwight & Sue Mason – *R*

Emil Moskovich – *R, W*

Grant & Joanne Reynolds – *A, R*

David L. Scally – *A*

Raphael & Katherine Semmes – *A, D, R, S, W*

Michelle Shinn – *R*

Barbara Yeaman – *R*

*In Memory of Randy Astarb*

Jane & Norman Liebow – *R*

## Monocacy Aqueduct Repair Update

The Monocacy aqueduct repair estimate has been received. Due to financial constraints related to the Association's support of the funding of the Cumberland ranger position over the next three years, the work will be done in three phases. At the December meeting approval of the Board was requested to proceed with Phase 1.

Phase 1 is replacement of the mule kick boards. The contractor will build and install 80 new pressure treated bases and approximately 550 feet of new pressure treated wood kick boards. Removal of existing boards, temporary protection of the site, clean-up, and debris removal will all be done by the contractor. The National Park Service has tentatively agreed to provide the material and have it delivered to the contractor. If that is not possible, the material cost will be assumed by the Association. Work is expected to be completed, weather permitting, during the 2020-21 winter season.

– Rita Bauman



*As reported in the September issue, Hancock was recently designated as a trail town. The above logo commemorates that status.*



# Notice of 2021 C&O Canal Association Annual Meeting

By Steve Dean

## **Announcement of Annual Meeting**

The annual meeting of the membership of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Association will be held on Saturday, March 20, 2021. At the time of publication of this newsletter it has not been determined if a physical meeting will be held, or if an on-line, or virtual, meeting will be necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Members will be notified via email, social media and on the Association website of the meeting arrangements. The meeting will be for the purpose of electing officers for 2021, electing a nominating committee for 2022, receiving reports of officers and committees, considering adoption of a proposal to amend the bylaws, and any other business that may properly come before it. All members of the Association in good standing are invited to attend. This notice constitutes the call for the meeting, pursuant to articles II.2, III.1, and IX of the bylaws.

## **Nominations for Officers and Directors**

Officers, except directors, are elected at each annual meeting to serve a term of one year. In addition, five directors are elected at each annual meeting to serve a term of three years. The nominating committee, chosen at the preceding annual meeting, will present a slate of candidates. Additional nominations may be made from the floor at the annual meeting. Members attending the 2020 annual meeting elected Barbara Sheridan (Chair), Diana Dean, Steve Dean, Tony Laing, Richard Radhe and Tim Snyder to form the 2021 nominating committee. The committee has nominated the following candidates for election in 2021.

### **Bill Holdsworth – President, *Rockville, Md.***

I am honored to be nominated for the presidency of the C&O Canal Association, an organization that plays a vital role in maintaining one of the nation's historic treasures. I previously served nine years on the board of directors, including six years as secretary. I act as webmaster for the Association website and coordinate the broadcast emails. I look forward to the challenge of serving the organization as the president for a sixth year. I am a retired federal employee.

### **Barbara Sheridan – First Vice President, *La Plata, Md.***

I have been a member of the C&O Canal Association for over 20 years and have served previously on the board as a director, as first vice president, and as president. I have chaired two thru-hikes (2004 and 2009) and was the membership chair for 15 years. I am also currently serving on the programs

committee. I was born in Washington, D. C. and have lived in the area all my life. My first awareness of the canal was an aerial view of it from a streetcar while on the way to Glen Echo Amusement Park as a child. The streetcars are long gone, as is the amusement park, but the canal lives on for all to enjoy! If elected as first vice president, I will work with the Association to help preserve and protect this valuable resource for future generations.

### **Anthony (Tony) Laing – Second Vice President, *Olney, Md.***

I have been a member of the C&O Canal Association for 15 years. During this time, I have enjoyed participating in the paddling trips that the group sponsors, including the Paw Paw Bends weekend trip, the Monocacy River trip, the Brunswick to Monocacy trip on the Potomac, and trips on the canal itself. I backpacked the canal from Cumberland to Harpers Ferry in 1980, and I cycled the entire length from Cumberland to Georgetown in 2009.

I have been on the Board of Directors for two terms and I am one of the two canoemasters who are responsible for the paddling trips.

I have a certain historical affinity to the canal as my great grandfather helped construct the canal in the 1830s. He and his two brothers got jobs digging the canal after they disembarked from a ship sailing from Hamburg, Germany to Baltimore. At one point they operated a boarding house in Oldtown before settling in Cumberland. I was born in Cumberland and now live in Olney, Maryland. I am retired from the U.S. Department of Education.

I would like to serve a second term as second vice president to give back for all of the fun and growth that the Association has given me.

### **Richard Radhe – Treasurer, *Columbia, Md.***

I have been a member of the C&O Canal Association for over 15 years. For most of those years I enjoyed the hikes, canoe trips, dinners and the efforts of many dedicated members. Seven years ago, I decided it was my time to contribute to the Association by accepting the treasurer position. It is an honor to work with former and current board members. It was exciting to implement inventory into QuickBooks to track the sales and distribution of Steve Dean's revised NPS 142 Handbooks and the updated Pocket Guides. I am an enrolled agent with a small tax practice which gives me the resources to prepare annual 990 nonprofit tax return, sales tax and personal property returns. I look forward to serving in 2021.



**Kerry Gruber – Secretary, Gaithersburg, Md.**

I've been an Association member since 2010 and joined the board of directors in 2015. I have also participated in hikes along the canal and several World Canals conferences. I was born in Baltimore and raised in North Chevy Chase, Maryland and Washington, D.C. My grandparents lived in the Burleith neighborhood of Washington, D.C. and painted scenes of the canal and Georgetown back in the 1930s. I retired from the federal government in 2012 as an education statistician. The beauty and history of the canal is something I enjoy sharing with others. It would be an honor to continue serving the Board as the secretary.

**Doug Zveare – Information Officer, Rosemont, Md.**

I am honored to be nominated to serve a third term as information officer for the C&O Canal Association. I have been an Association member and a level walker for over 19 years. During that time I have completed over 53 level walks, participated in Association meetings and activities as well as having bicycled and hiked the entire towpath several times. I am active in the VIP program helping to install picnic tables, benches and waysides in the Park. I participate in the Association's stewardship of the Swain's Lock picnic area and campground. If elected, I will work hard to further the Association's continuing mission.

**Trent Carbaugh – Director, Hagerstown, Md.**

I grew up on the Potomac River and C&O Canal and fished it with my grandfather and my father, as well as spending many happy hours when I was young walking the towpath and traveling by boat on the river with my parents and younger brother. I am looking for a meaningful way to give back for some of the joy and solace that the canal has given me over the years.

I have been a level walker for a year and spend much of my free time on the river or in the park. I have experience in the historic restoration business as a historian for Maryland Department of Natural Resources, as an archaeological field technician, and have extensive experience climbing, hiking and paddling. Currently, I am the director of education and co-owner of Birds of a Feather School which uses fine arts and interpretive history to enrich the lives of autistic adults and those suffering with memory disorders. I am also a volunteer at Little Antietam Creek Inc., an archaeological teaching nonprofit in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania

**Philip deVos – Director, Monroe, Va.**

I became interested in the Erie Canal as a student up in Rochester in the mid-1970s, and after relocating to Virginia, joined the Virginia Canals and Navigation Society. My duties there have included editing *The Tiller* and service on the board.

I'd like to be involved with the World Canal Conference in 2021 and hope that it does come off in spite of the virus.

**Dick Ebersole – Director, Hagerstown, Md.**

My wife and I live in Hagerstown, but I grew up in Williamsport and I remember playing on the canal in my youth. I've been a member of the C&O Canal Association and a level walker since 2007. I've volunteered at the Williamsport Visitors Center for the last nine years, and have had the pleasure of aiding William Bauman in writing several canal family histories. I have a special interest in the section of canal from Dam 5 to Four Locks; my wife's great-grandfather was the lock tender at Dam 5 from 1898 until 1914, and many other family members lived in this section and worked for the canal company. If elected, I would like to focus some attention on the stabilization and restoration of the many historical structures that are in dire need of maintenance. I would like to thank the nominating committee for giving me the opportunity to serve the Association.

**Christine Holdsworth – Director, Rockville, Md.**

I have been a member of the C&O Canal Association for over 20 years and am proud of our efforts that help preserve and maintain the park. I currently serve on the special projects and archives committees. In the past, I volunteered at Lock House 75, was a level walker, helped with the Douglas Hike weekends, and participated in many other activities. The canal is a beautiful place to walk and I enjoy seeing the changes each season brings. If elected to another term I will continue to work with the Association to help preserve the C&O Canal National Historical Park and encourage others to explore the park and learn the history of the canal.

**Paul Petkus – Director, Laurel, Md.**

The C&O Canal is my favorite weekend destination in this area. I enjoy hiking, bike riding, and taking photographs along the towpath. I've been visiting it regularly since 2005. I have a background in information technology, but I also enjoy observing and learning about nature. The towpath is a great place for that. I've learned about the flora and fauna in the park through participation in nature walks organized by the C&O Canal Association. I've also learned by participation in nature surveys. Two of the surveys to which I contributed from outings in the park were for the Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas and the Maryland Biodiversity Project. Additionally, I've participated in butterfly surveys in Howard County. I've learned enough from the experts in those surveys to lead annual nature walks along the canal focusing on butterflies. I sought out a way to formally help the park after assisting three stranded bicycle riders during one outing. As a result, I started volunteering as a level walker in 2009. I've also participated in activities such as the removal of garlic mustard. I hope to use my background and experience to additionally help the park through board membership.

## Notice of Proposed Bylaws Amendments

Four proposed amendments to the Association's bylaws will be presented at the annual meeting. The bylaws may be amended at a meeting of the membership of the Association by a two-thirds vote, provided that the text of the amendment has been published in the call to the meeting. This notice constitutes the required publication. The Board of Directors recommends the adoption of each of these proposed amendments.

1. William Stewart, a member of the Board of Directors, has proposed a change to the method of setting dues rates with the following:

*MOTION: To amend Article I, section 1, by striking out the words "Dues shall be [xx] dollars per year" in each of the three classes of membership, and adding the following: "The amount of dues for each class of membership shall be determined by the Board of Directors no later than the Board's regular August meeting in the calendar year before the new amounts shall take effect."*

Currently, Article I specifies the dues rate for each class of membership (individual, family, and patron). Prior to the adoption of the current bylaws in 1999, dues rates were set by the Board of Directors. Inclusion of the dues rates in the bylaws requires an amendment adopted by the annual meeting to adjust them. (The current rates have been in effect since the mid-1990s, so membership has never been called upon to vote on a change.) Since the majority of memberships are renewed before the annual meeting, the full financial benefit of a dues increase under the current system would not be realized until the following year. If the authority to set the rates is returned to the Board, the income benefit to the Association's operating budget would be advanced by a year.

2. William Stewart has also proposed creating a new class of membership by adding the following after line C in Article I.1:

*MOTION: To amend Article I, section 1, by adding the following: "D. Commercial Sponsorship, for businesses and consisting of one or two named adults, together with their dependent children, who reside in the same household, and designated as the voting membership named by the sponsoring business for the term of membership. Such designation may be granted for a minimum of one year. Reasonable exceptions to this designation may be granted by the Membership Chair, at his or her sole discretion, upon written application of the sponsor."*

Mr. Stewart's proposal would create a new class of membership for commercial businesses. He states that this would

benefit the Association because it would generate income; the dues for this new class would be considerably higher, perhaps double the patron rate. He suggests that sponsors could be listed separately on the donors' page of *Along the Towpath*, and recognized in some way at Association events and in our social media postings. He explains the inclusion of the sponsor's representative's family as analogous to a family or patron membership. The "reasonable exceptions" would apply when the sponsor-designated family leaves the company or area and a replacement is named, but would avoid the possibility of frivolous designation switching within the period of membership.

3. The Board of Directors proposes an amendment authorizing virtual meetings in lieu of in-person annual or special membership meetings:

*MOTION: To amend Article III by inserting after Section 3: "The Board of Directors may order the Annual Meeting or special membership meetings to be held by one or more means of remote communication. Such meetings must be conducted in a format in which all participants can hear and speak to each other at the same time."*

Article III describes the time and purposes of the annual and special membership meetings of the Association. When the current bylaws were written, more than twenty years ago, no one had ever heard of conference calls and "Zoom" meetings. Thus, the 1999 bylaws made no provision for how to meet when everything is locked-down. The substitution of a conference call for the 2020 annual meeting, for the purpose of electing officers, directors, and a nominating committee, was successful, though not sanctioned by our bylaws. The proposed amendment will correct this deficiency.

4. The Board of Directors also proposes an amendment authorizing virtual board meetings:

*MOTION: To amend Article IV, Section 3, by adding the following: "Upon order of the President, the Board may hold virtual meetings so long as all Board members have been given notice and all persons participating in the meeting are able to hear and speak to one another. Such participation shall constitute presence at the meeting."*

The rationale for this proposed amendment is the same as for motion #3.

The complete bylaws can be found in the Association's website, [www.candocanal.org/bylaws](http://www.candocanal.org/bylaws).

# The Case for Raising Our Association Dues

by Will Stewart, Membership Chair

No one wants to have to pay more for things, including the Association. Consider this: the last time we raised our dues, in 1995, the value of a dollar was 33% higher than it is today. What that means is that what we could buy for \$1 in 1995 costs us \$1.50 today. If our dues had simply kept pace with inflation, our \$15 basic membership would cost \$22.50 today—but we still ask only \$15 for your support. First-class postage, one of our biggest expenses, has actually increased by 40% in that same period. Not only have our costs gone up, but, at the same time, our membership has also decreased, putting an added strain on our budget. Fortunately, past surpluses mean that we remain solvent, but we cannot rely on that source of income going forward.

How do we propose to address this situation? First, we seek to amend the by-laws to allow the board to set dues. Right now, the amount of our dues can only be increased by an amendment to the by-laws, a process that can take almost two years from proposal to implementation. If the Board can set the dues, we can respond more quickly to changes in the economy (up or down), reducing the time frame from two years to one. Second, we are looking at ways to reverse the decline in membership.

**What can you do to help?** First, we ask you to support the by-laws amendment that allows the board to set dues. Second, we encourage you to do what you can to bring new members

into the Association. Many of us give gift memberships to friends, neighbors, and family members who we know enjoy the C&O Canal National Historical Park. When I meet people on the towpath, I ask them if they know about the Association and invite them to join. Some have. I also mention my involvement with the Association in my social media. Third, until we can realize points one and two, consider renewing at the patron level the next time you renew, which would bring in some much needed extra income.

If people want to know why they should join, you can easily point to many examples of our impact on the park. We bought and installed new lock number signs. We restored and reprinted the C&O Canal Official National Park Handbook. We paint and maintain picnic tables. Association efforts resulted in the restoration of Big Slackwater and of the Monocacy and Catoctin Aqueducts. These are just two of the eleven aqueducts on the canal. Perhaps the most visible aqueduct, the one over Seneca Creek, is in need of restoration. We now have an aqueduct fund. Other aqueducts also need attention. These are just some of the ways we help maintain the park for everyone's enjoyment.

If you are reading this, you already support our work; we thank you very much! I hope you will consider trying some of my suggestions to help us help the park.

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## C&OCA Welcomes New Members

*Christopher Bailey, Silver Spring, Md.*

*Scott Byrne, Dover, N.J.*

*Wendy & Rick Duke, Rockville, Md.*

*Greg Mallet-Prevost, Boonsboro, Md.*

*Thomas Mears, Spotsylvania, Va.*

*David & Joyce Micol, Adamstown, Md.*

*Joel Miller, Kensington, Md.*

*Lisa Myers, Arlington, Va.*

*Margaret Neuse, Washington, D.C.*

*Robert W. & Cham T. Swope, Rockville, Md.*

*Ronald Wise, Arlington, Va.*

*Susan Zweighaft & Dick Reed, Falls Church, Va.*

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*Did you know that the Association typically spends about \$600 each year sending out renewal reminder notices?*

*Please help us save money. Check the "Membership Expires" date just above your name on the mailing address for this issue of Along the Towpath. If it says, "Membership Expires Dec-2020" then your membership is due.*

*Please use the renewal form enclosed. Alternatively, you can get one by going to <https://candocanal.org/membership/>, where you can download the 2021 renewal form pdf. If you prefer, you can click on the "renew for 2021" button and renew online. Thank you so much for your continued support of our organization!*

*If you ever have any membership questions, please contact Will Stewart, Membership Chair, at [membership@candocanal.org](mailto:membership@candocanal.org).*



# Accompanied by the Past

By Karen Gray

*History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life, and brings us tidings of antiquity.* **Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), *Pro Publio Sestio***

## 1889: After the Flood

“The canal was a total wreck.”<sup>1</sup> So writes Walter S. Sanderlin in his classic history of the C&O Canal. It is an opinion that he would have encountered in company records, reports, and newspaper articles for more than a year after the great flood that had peaked on June 1, 1889. Although widely regarded as a matter of fact today, the statement is more relevant to the canal company’s finances than the state of the canal. But that is a story for a subsequent column. Here we will look at the canal company’s financial condition and what was done in the second half of 1889 in response to the extensive (but by nowhere near total) damage the canal had suffered.

In 1888 there had been a significant political and legal effort to lease the C&O Canal to the Western Maryland Railroad that was rejected by the Maryland legislature in January

1889. Then, on January 9 at a meeting of the directors and stockholders, C&O Canal Company President Stephen Gambrill submitted a major report stating that for the first time since 1883, the canal had earned enough to pay its expenses (not, of course, including any payments on its huge debts).<sup>2</sup>

However, President Gambrill also reported that “The inability of the canal for some years heretofore to pay its current expenses greatly affected its credit, and consequently many suits were brought against the company.” While the company was able to pay off the resultant findings against it, the remaining funds for operating expenses created a “hard and vexatious” situation for the canal’s employees. Nevertheless, the canal was said to be “in comparatively good condition.”

Another critical admission in the report was that the last four coupons for the interest on the 1878 bonds that mortgaged the assets of the canal, had not been paid. Under the act authorizing the bond issuance, the bond holders could foreclose on the mortgage. However, Gambrill stated that the majority of the 1878 bonds at that time were held by the



*The 1889 flood, viewed from Harpers Ferry. The C&O Canal is under water on the left side of the image. — Photo courtesy of the National Park Service, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park*

B&O RR interests and he did not anticipate that they would take such action “in the near future.” There was no assurance, however, that other bondholders would not do so or that the B&O wouldn’t do so at some future date.

In late March a break occurred in the canal in the vicinity of Lock 39 that was 30 ft. long and 20 ft. deep and restricted navigation for some distance on either side of it for about 10 days. Then, in early April, a rockslide below the Paw Paw Tunnel closed the canal there. Rocks weighing up to a ton or more and that filled the canal above the waterline for a distance of 60 ft., restricting navigation again for a lengthy period of time. Throughout the spring, shipping on the canal was significantly below that of the previous year.

Then, on May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>, the great storm hit—in the Hagerstown area it was heralded by a destructive wind-storm or tornado that destroyed buildings and killed at least two people in its path. The scenes described in the newspaper were not significantly less horrific than those of the devastation at Johnstown, Pa. due to a sudden and massive flood that was a result of the collapse of a former Pennsylvania Canal dam high in the mountains northeast of the town, releasing the lake behind it.

Within two or three days the papers were describing the C&O Canal with terms such as “ruined,” “virtually gone,” or its condition as “unrepairable.” Even U.S. Senator and former canal company President Arthur Pue Gorman stated:

The flood no doubt means the abandonment of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. I don’t think it is possible for the directors of the canal company to raise one-hundredth part of the money that would be required to restore the works. Owing to the manner in which the Maryland constitution is framed, their hands are practically tied, and it will necessarily be some time before its future can be settled.

As to the extent of the damage, it will be impossible to state for several days. But from present indications it is safe to say that it will be much greater than in 1877. The loss of the canal traffic will be seriously felt by Georgetown, and, in fact, the whole District. It was a great highway for the products of western Maryland, and its abandonment will throw a large number of men out of employment.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Georgetown’s Disaster**

The canal crisis exacerbated the problems of towns up and down the Potomac and its tributaries. However, none more than Georgetown, which experienced severe damage from the flood, especially to waterfront wharves, stores, and businesses.

For example, the three lime burning companies announced that they would shut down, and Alexander Godey stated:

I cannot stay in business now. My closing will throw about forty men out of employment. I shall go into the business again, though, but I will get away from the floods. I own a valuable piece of property in West Virginia, up above Harper’s Ferry, right on the line of the Baltimore and Ohio road.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, with the loss of the canal, the port of Georgetown lost one of the major cargoes shipped from it. While 150,000 tons of Cumberland coal were used locally in the Federal District at that time, by far the largest amount of coal was carried away in schooners or colliers, headed for the Atlantic ports to the north of the bay, as well as distant points elsewhere in the world.



*Georgetown waterfront, with tug boat – Photo courtesy of the National Park Service, C&O Canal National Historical Park*

The shipping relationships that were affected are sometimes surprising, as we see in an article on the impact of the damage and the canal’s shutdown on the ice–coal trade:

Sailing vessels bring to this city every year quantities of ice, anthracite coal, plaster, cement and paving material, the aggregate tonnage of which exceed 500,000 tons. An example can be made on the ice traffic. To bring one ton of the frigid-ity from Kennebec [Maine] costs 60 cents. The vessel-owners are satisfied to charge such rates that the single trip will pay the expenses out and home again. The profit from this city has heretofore been made on the cargo taken on the back trip [i.e., that delivered to the port by the canal], for which the tonnage charge is \$1.15, exclusive of port charges. If there is nothing here to make a cargo of, and there cannot be, now that the



canal is wrecked, vessel-owners will charge \$1.75 for the single trip. This means an increase cost to Washington of \$500,000 only on such freights as comes by sailing-vessels.”<sup>5</sup>

As one citizen is quoted saying: “The destruction of the canal cuts off one means of transportation that in turn checks river transportation and puts us right in the hands of the B&O” and, as a consequence, suffering a significant increase in transportation costs.<sup>6</sup> (It is important to keep in mind that the B&O at this time did not serve Georgetown.)

### The Mills Crisis

Among the major losers were the Georgetown mills. They relied on the canal for the water to power their machinery and the ships that came up the Potomac to Georgetown that brought grains, etc. from elsewhere, supplementing what came down the canal. Almost immediately the mill owners began to push for the repair of the Georgetown level from Inlet #1 to at least make it possible for their mills to work.

Not until June 15<sup>th</sup>, however, did the millers take action. On that Saturday evening a conference took place with Canal Company President Gambrill present. At that meeting, the millers proposed collecting funds to repair the Georgetown level, which Gambrill said would cost *at least* \$15,000. The proposal to the canal company was that, if they, the millers, raised enough to repair the level, the canal company would not subsequently charge them water rents until they had recovered their investment.

At that time, the water rents amounted to about \$8,000 a year and the millers’ relief from paying them for a couple years or more after they got their mills working again was highly desirable. The following Monday morning Gambrill stated that the more likely cost for repairing the level was \$30,000, but the canal company and millers ended up agreeing to the arrangement—with the canal company assigned to direct the actual repair work by contractors paid with funds the millers raised.

The restoration of the Georgetown level to get the mills working was confronted with multiple difficulties. One of the last tasks was the removal of some 40 boats in the canal, some still carrying coal that needed to be unloaded before the boat could be floated or broken up for salvage. Nevertheless, by October 3<sup>rd</sup>, water was once again flowing to the mills in Georgetown and, while the arrangement was likely mutually beneficial when the millers began to pay water rents again, the agreement proved to be an additional complication in the legal actions the next year.

### The Bond Proposition

The Georgetown level agreement did nothing to alter the damage here and there along the rest of the canal, and little happened until a large public meeting was held on June 19<sup>th</sup>. In attendance were canal company and Maryland state

officials, and delegations of men from along the length of the canal—mostly influential businessmen, and many with some wealth. Among those present were men such as: Cumberland boat builder Frederick Mertens; Williamsport’s businessman and owner of several canal boats, Victor Cushwa; and Dr. Edward Wooton of Edwards Ferry.

The focus of the meeting was how to find the funding to restore the canal, the cost of which President Gambrill estimated at \$200,000 to make it navigable, although with much left to be done after achieving that level of repair. He thought work could begin as soon as they

had \$50,000. After a fruitless morning with no agreements on a way forward, the decision was made to form a committee with two men from each county through which the canal passed who would meet during the lunch hour and return with a proposal. The committee proposed:

The president and directors of the canal company would issue the bonds of the company for \$300,000, to be secured by a mortgage; that the approval of the board of public works of this issue



1889 flood damage at Lock 33 – Photo courtesy of the National Park Service, C&O Canal National Historical Park



be obtained, and also the recommendation of the board of public works to the next general assembly to place these bonds on the same footing as the bonds issued under the act of 1878, so far as the same may lawfully be done, and that these bonds shall be used as collateral security for raising the money necessary to restore the canal to navigation.<sup>7</sup>

An alternate proposal was ultimately withdrawn. It would have given the officers of the canal company 30 days to accomplish something in terms of arrangements for the canal, but if they failed “the stockholders were requested to give their consent to turning the control of the canal over to a syndicate of capitalists who would repair and run it.”<sup>8</sup> Everyone realized such a proposal would have further damaged any value the bonds might have.

Col. James G. Barrett, a director of the canal company who had been appointed to chair the meeting, assured those present that the approved proposal met with the unanimous approval of the canal company management. At the same time, Mr. John B. Poe of Baltimore expressed his certainty that the Maryland Board of Public Works (which represented Maryland’s majority holding of canal stock, giving the state control of the management of the company) was certain to be sympathetic to the proposal.

Of course, the major issue was what could secure the bonds for purchasers. Col. Barrett said he hoped the Maryland legislature would indeed “put them on a footing with the bonds of 1878, which constitute a lien on the corpus of the canal,” but the legislature would not be meeting for months. Although the Maryland Attorney General took the position that the repair bonds could be issued, by the end of July the canal company executives had found no buyers interested in the bonds. Clearly the canal company not only had no money, but it also had no credit.

On July 27, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that President Gambrill:

... has announced his intention of calling the directors together and laying the true situation of the canal’s affairs before them officially. If they can suggest no remedy, as seems probable, they will report their helpless condition to a general meeting of the stockholders. The next step, unless measures for relief can be found, will be the appointment of a receiver.<sup>9</sup>

## Initiative and Compassion

By June 24th, Frederick Mertens had, at his own expense, put work crews at the task of repairing the canal between Okonoko, opposite the mouth of the Little Cacapon River at Mile 159.6, and Cumberland. That work quickly made it sufficiently navigable that his boats could again use it for bringing lumber from his lands in that region. Ultimately it was noted that there was not a great deal of damage on the upper end of the canal, and indeed, here and there all the way down the canal, there were sections that were little affected as well as ones with extremely serious and costly destruction.

The closure of the canal and its uncertain future was a disaster for many of the boatmen. Erroneously implying that the canal company hired and paid the boatmen, one lengthy newspaper article included a section on the condition of some 300 boatmen (by its estimate) and some boating women and children, predicting dire poverty and hardship as winter comes. It declared that:

A railroad may supersede the canal, but THESE PEOPLE MUST BE ASSISTED AT ONCE. They will starve before the right-of-way could be transferred.<sup>10</sup>

One report referred to Messrs. Moore and Mitchell, who collected funds in Georgetown to enable the boatmen who were stranded there to get away to where they could find work. (Georgetown, of course, was filled with its own newly unemployed.) Subsequent newspaper coverage detailed multiple efforts to assist those facing poverty due to the closure of the canal including, interestingly, canaller-benefiting baseball games.

### Notes:

1. Sanderlin, Walter D., *The Great National Project*, p. 257.
2. The report was printed in the Jan. 11, 1889 issue of the *Baltimore Sun*, as Supplement 1. This and other information in this column can be found in William Bauman’s transcriptions of newspaper articles related to the C&O in his “*Canal Trade 1889*” pdf file. Bauman’s “*Canal Trade*” files are available at: [candocanal.org/newspaper/](http://candocanal.org/newspaper/)
3. *Alexandria Gazette*, Mon. June 3, 1889, p. 3.
4. *Washington Evening Star*, Wed. June 5, 1889, p. 4
5. *Ibid.*, Fri. June 7, 1889, p. 5
6. *Ibid.* p. 2.
7. *Ibid.*, Wed., June 19, 1889, p. 5.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Baltimore Sun*, Mon., July 22, 1889, supplement p. 2
10. *Washington Evening Star*, Thu. June 6, 1889, p. 5.



# On the Level

By Steve Dean

*The COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, and at the present time it appears it will be a factor in our lives for a long while. Our level walkers have not been deterred, and as noted in this report have covered 30 of the levels during August through October. All of the active level walkers have been trained on safe procedures for volunteer activity in the current situation and follow these procedures in performance of their duties. It is important that anyone contacting people on the park or handling trash follow these procedures.*

*As noted in the September issue, level walkers have been reactivating progressively since July. If you are one of the reactivated level walkers – thank you for your support! It is needed now more than ever. I've made best efforts to contact everyone, but if I missed you for some reason please reach out to me at [levelwalker@candocanal.org](mailto:levelwalker@candocanal.org). If I have contacted you and you haven't had a chance to respond, please let me know if you intend to resume activity, if you want to take a break because of the pandemic or for any other reason, or if you intend to resign completely. If I*

*don't hear from you, or if you fail to complete the training and volunteer service agreement, I have no option but to consider that you are no longer interested in level walking and remove you from the level walker list.*

*The reactivation of the Level Walker program has been somewhat of a reboot of the program. As part of that process, it has become very clear where shortfalls exist in the coverage of levels on the park. At the present time, there are 12 levels that are under served. This is generally because level walkers have retired or otherwise discontinued their service. The levels are spread out over the entire length of the canal.*

*If you are an existing level walker and either want an additional level or a change from your existing level, please contact me. If you are not a level walker but are interested in a new challenge, also contact me. You can try the level out on a one-time basis and make a decision whether you want to adopt it permanently or not. Thanks for considering this request.*

**Level 3 Lock 5 to Cabin John Creek: Alyson Miller reports Aug. 6, and Oct. 6, 21 & 28:** The towpath was generally in very good condition, except for a very rough patch between Lock 7 and the Cabin John Creek foot bridge. There are some large and rough stones starting to appear here which makes for an uncomfortable bike ride. The areas around Locks 5 and 6 are mowed regularly, and the weeds and overgrowth around the Lock 7 hardware was cleared out. There was so much water in the lock house basement stairwell that a large frog was swimming in it. I noticed several places where trees had been cut and cleared from the towpath. There is often heavy usage in this area since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Parking lots are often full and people park in the grass along the parking lots. The parking lots often have the worse trash. I often see small bags of trash other people have collected.

**Level 4 Cabin John Creek to Lock 14: Alyson Miller reports Sept. 8, 14, 15, 16 & 20, and Oct. 6, 19 & 28:** The Lock 8 house looked great, but the grounds were overgrown with weeds and the grass needed cutting. Weeds, vines and shrubs have almost completely obscured the prism wall. This area was in need use a good clean up. In general, the section from Locks 10 through 14 was well maintained and relatively trash-free, given the number of visitors in this section. There

is always some trash in the parking lot, however. I reported to the National Park Service on Sept 16 that a sofa was dumped in the Lock 8 parking lot. It was removed within a few days.

**Level 9 Lock 22 to Seneca Aqueduct: Sylvia Diss reports Sept. 6:** The towpath was clean and dry. The steps at Seneca are in poor condition and should be repaired or replaced. The area is seeing increased use during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the level walker is concerned that there are not enough picnic tables at the Violettes Lock area.

**Level 12 Sycamore Landing to Edwards Ferry: Pat Hopson, with Carol Ivory, Margaret Neuse, Ron Wise and Frank Wodarczyk reports Oct. 24:** There was less trash than usual at both parking areas and, as usual, very little along the towpath itself. There were a lot of people around, including bikers, walkers and runners. The Edwards Ferry parking area was overfull. The grassy area near the Edwards Ferry lockhouse was cleared; this improvement was welcome because it had taken out some of the ever-spreading multiflora rose. There was a huge pile of dirt/gravel in the parking lot at Sycamore Landing; We assumed that this was material to be used in re-grading a portion of the towpath; there was also a sign for a paving company at the turnoff from River Road to Sycamore Landing. The towpath was in good shape all along this level.

*Level 13 Edwards Ferry to Harrison Island: Liz Wagner reports Sept. 15:* It was a perfect day for a walk along the level. There was very little trash. The resurfaced towpath was in good condition but beginning to show some wear between Mileposts 32 and 33. The grass on the side of the towpath had been mowed sometime in the late summer. There were no areas with erosion, rutting or puddling. I noted a Northern water snake basking on a tree stump beside the prism. Numerous birds were out, including cardinals, Eastern bluebirds, downy woodpeckers and a great blue heron. There were lots of sunflowers along the length of the level. **Ron Tipton and Rita Molyneaux report Oct. 21:** It was a beautiful fall day with great foliage along the canal, especially with the old growth hardwoods. There was very little garbage, though quite a bit of bagged dog waste. There were quite a few bikers but no hikers. A good bit of Japanese stilt grass is on the level.

*Level 15 Whites Ferry to Lock 26: Jon Wolz reports Aug. 17, Sept. 30 and Oct. 27:* In August, severe shoulder erosion was reported for several yards on the canal side of the towpath near Milepost 38. The Whites Ferry store/restaurant was open, and the ferry was operating. Some small trees were noted along the base of the granary ruins that need to be removed. In September both sides of the towpath had been recently mowed and looked good. Leaves had begun falling on the towpath. The new towpath surface was showing erosion in some locations from normal rain. There was a downed tree at Lock 26 that was reported to the NPS. All of the culverts were overgrown at the outflows. The prism was watered above all of the culverts. In October, someone had placed jack-o-lanterns at Lock 26. The areas around some of the culvert outflows had been trimmed. Trash was light on the towpath, with sycamore and paw paw leaves covering the towpath. I kept my eyes out for any snakes that may be camouflaged among the leaves on the towpath. The Marble Quarry hiker-biker camp was clean, but the grill remains broken. Wildlife sightings included a bald eagle, a red fox and numerous turtles. In all reports it was noted that towpath users were not wearing masks when approaching other people.

*Level 16 Lock 26 to Monocacy Aqueduct: Jon Wolz reports Aug. 25, Sept. 23 and Oct. 26:* In August it was noted that the areas of the aqueduct and Locks 26 and 27 needed mowing; the areas were later mowed. A tree that had fallen earlier across the prism, leaving the towpath damaged, near milepost 41 was noted in all reports. A warning sign or barrier would be helpful to alert towpath users of this hazard. The large maple tree at Lock 26 continues to lose branches. Culvert 65 was in good condition, though some materials remain from the 2017 repairs. Culvert 66 is overgrown, with orange water from the power plant area noted on the berm side. The area over Culvert 69 was mowed and weed-whacked. There was graffiti noted on the berm face and barrel in October. River

otters were observed in the Little Monocacy near the culvert. In August, I worked with Jim Heins and other VIPs to install and anchor three picnic tables at the Monocacy Aqueduct; in September one had already been uprooted and remove, and by October a second one was. While not on park property, the entrance road to the Monocacy area is in very poor condition, with significant potholes that only allow one vehicle to pass in places. **Mike Cinciosi reports Sept. 5:** The towpath was almost trash-free – I only picked up a dozen or so small pieces of trash. The Monocacy parking lot was overflowing. It has about 27 parking spaces, but had 45 cars, as there were cars parked along the side of the road approaching the parking lot. I saw more people than I've ever seen on this level before. There was no logjam at the aqueduct – just a few small logs in the center, and all arches were open to boats. I've recently taken up bird watching and bird photography as a hobby and heard or saw the following: a great blue heron, common grackles, Carolina chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, Eastern wood pewees, a downy woodpecker, a Carolina wren, a blue gray gnat catcher and a pine warbler.

*Level 17 Monocacy Aqueduct to Nolands Ferry: Earl Porter reports Aug. 18, Sept. 15 and Oct. 20:* The towpath was in good condition during all three walks. Trash was at a consistent moderate to high level during the monthly visits. The road into the Monocacy Aqueduct parking area is in increasingly worse condition. Visitation noted was at a high level on each date. Arch blockages of the aqueduct varied, but it was not completely blocked. Bench installers were on-site in August, and some benches were uprooted and moved by the October walk.

*Level 19 Point of Rocks to Catocin Aqueduct: June Miller and Cathy Guzauskas report Sept. 17:* We saw the most bikers we have ever seen on the canal on a weekday. The towpath has been resurfaced on this section and it looks great! There was more graffiti added to the Point of Rocks pivot bridge since our last level walk in March. The towpath was clean. **Don Peterson reports Sept. 20:** The towpath was very busy; with the most bikers I've seen in over three years of level walking. **James Spangenberg reports Sept. 25:** The towpath was in excellent condition. There was significantly less watering of the prism – most of the water was from Mileposts 49 with some gaps. There was very little trash in the prism as compared to the large amount of trash that has been seen in previous years. Based on my experience, this section of the towpath has never looked better, even though there is more traffic.

*Level 20 Catocin Aqueduct to Lock 30: Doug Zveare reports Sept. 8:* Most trash was found around the Brunswick boat ramp, with a few bottles along the towpath. A large downed tree was in the canal prism between Brunswick Family Campground and town of Brunswick, but it fell completely in the prism and across the berm. The culverts were too overgrown



to visit. Culvert 82, where the breach occurred in May 2018, is passable via the detour path and temporary bridge over Catoctin Creek. No problems were noted at the Catoctin Aqueduct. Overall, Level 20 is in good shape. The towpath was resurfaced and is greatly enjoyed by speeding bicyclists.

*Levels 21 through 24 Lock 30 to Dargan Bend: Tom Crouch reports Aug. 2 (21), Aug. 5 (21 – 24), Aug. 13 (21-23), Aug. 18 (21-23), Aug. 25 (21-24), Sept. 8 (21-24), Sept. 14 (21-24), Sept. 28 (21-24), Oct. 7 (21-24), Oct. 14 (21-23), Oct. 21 (21-24), and Oct. 27 (21-24):* Trash conditions are often extensive in this area and frequent clean-ups are needed. Weverton has the most significant issue, but the area around the reopened Harpers Ferry bridge has become a high trash area. The earliest walk, on a Sunday in August, found a discouraging amount of trash on Level 21. Families were observed on the towpath carrying “trash to be” in coolers and cases of beer. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, I was pleased to encounter a Boy Scout troop performing a clean-up in the Weverton area as a public service project. I noted that someone apparently had a large and messy Halloween party at Lock 36 on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

*Level 22 Lock 31 to Lock 33: Karlen Keto reports Sept. 21:* The last day of summer was a perfect day to enjoy the C&O Canal. I did not see much trash along the towpath. I encountered two older men taking a break on the porch of the lock house. They started from D.C. in the morning to and were deciding where to spend the night before heading back to D.C. They are volunteers for the Washington & Old Dominion trail and thanked me for volunteering. We shared our thoughts about how the COVID-19 affected our enjoyable volunteer duties.

*Level 23 Lock 33 to Dam 3: Arthur Tsien reports Aug. 7 and Oct. 9:* The resurfaced towpath generally looks good. There was some new rutting on the inclined portion at Lock 33. On both walks recent mowing was noted. On both dates it was noted that the Maryland Heights parking area was blocked off by concrete barriers. Moderate visitation was noted on both dates.

*Level 30 Snyders Landing to Lock 40: Charles Connolly reports Aug. 15:* The towpath and structures were in good condition with no changes from the July level walk. The weather changed during the course of the day, with fairly heavy rain on the last couple of miles of the trip.

*Level 31 Lock 40 to Marsh Run Culvert: Jennifer Bean reports Oct. 15:* The towpath surface was in good shape, with just a couple minor muddy spots. Mowing had been done recently at Taylors Landing and Lock 40. There were no downed trees. The culverts, waste weir and Lock 40 looked fine. The boating safety sign at the Taylor's Landing Parking lot was knocked down. Asters and goldenrod were blooming.

*Level 33 Dam 4 to McMahons Mill: Dick Stoner reports Sept. 8:* The river was very calm and smooth, and two fishermen reported good conditions. Little trash was noted, but what was found was around the boat ramp. Mowing was needed north of Milepost 87. High weeds and tree saplings there prevent riding double, and if not trimmed, will become bad for both bikers and hiker. The worst section is just above Milepost 87 where a large oak tree requires single file for passing. As reported before, above Milepost 87 I observed Johnson grass, which is a potentially harmful weed. Improvements have been made to the approach to the Dam 4 boat ramp parking area. The interpretive wayside panels are all in place but could use a cleaning.

*Level 34 McMahons Mill to Opequon Junction HBO: Trent Carbaugh reports Aug. 30 and Oct. 30:* Towpath had some puddles and was generally wetter than normal in August. There was much storm damage to large trees along the level, all of which has been taken care of by the NPS. Mother Nature seems to have rebelled to all of the trash at the “ole swimmin hole” by knocking over the tree with the rope swing. Of course, someone put up another with a really interesting ladder made of nails in the next tree over. Persons unknown have installed two climbing routes on the section of natural cliff just west of the second causeway. These routes were put up as “sport climbing routes” which involve drilling holes into the stone and installing a bolt to hold up a hanger. The climbing rope is then clipped to the hangers to provide fall protection. The problem here is the lack of space to accomplish a proper belay at the base of the cliff as well as lack of reliable belay anchors along the towpath. The gist of it is you can have falling climbers, belayers, bicyclists, and walkers crammed into a section of towpath only about four feet wide. There are other safer ways to climb in an area like this. This is an accident waiting to happen. I did talk to the law enforcement ranger I ran into who was going to go and check it out. Japanese stilt grass was everywhere on and on the edges of the towpath. I had to cut quite a bit of multiflora rose branches off of the towpath. In October there was mud from the recent rains and lots of leaves; this was troublesome when the leaves were over the mud, quite slippery.

*Level 37 Falling Waters to Lock 44: Jim Tomlin reports Oct. 6:* There was very little trash along the towpath. The most trash was at the Cumberland Valley HBO campsite. All culverts on this level have recently been mowed. I started and finished at Lock 44, where a C&O Canal NHP maintenance person was finishing up the woodwork on the new bridges over Lock 44 and bypass flume. There was an unusually low amount of trash, except at the hiker-biker camp site. The culverts had been mowed very recently, as well as the sides of the towpath near Lock 44. There was some new graffiti at Cumberland Valley Hiker Biker site, which I will return to

paint over. Several 4 to 6-inch limbs were on the towpath – I cut all of these and moved them farther away from the path. It was an absolutely perfect day to be out on the canal.

*Level 39 High Rock Quarry to Nettle Railroad Bridge: Stefanie Boss reports Sept. 14 and Oct. 20:* In September there was a big branch on the towpath at Milepost 100, which I called into NPS Maintenance. By the time I got back to that area the crew had shown up and were taking care of it. It was a gorgeous day for a ride on the canal; everyone was very friendly and commented on the beautiful weather. Two walkers wearing masks. In October there was very little trash, and mowing was in progress while I was there.

*Level 41 Dam 5 to Four Locks: Mike Anderson reports Aug. 1:* The towpath was in excellent shape, with no ruts or puddling. There was graffiti on the west wall of the Lock 46 house. There are some deep ruts on the entrance to the Dam 5 parking area; the holes are deep enough for the undercarriage of cars to drag.

*Level 44 Fort Frederick to Ernstville: Jim Biasco reports Aug. 12:* It was a hot and very humid day, which may be why I saw very little wildlife. The towpath was clean and dry. There were two long distance through-bikers on the towpath, one fisherman on Big Pool and two kayakers on Big Pool.

*Level 45 Ernstville to Licking Creek Aqueduct: Dennis Kubicki reports Sept. 15:* I found little trash, but I did handle trash in accordance with the updated NPS Job Hazard Analysis and COVID-19-related safety guidance. Throughout the level the crushed stone surface is smooth and dry, reflecting the lack of recent rainfall and the 2017 resurfacing. I noticed, however, that vegetation (mostly weeds) continues to proliferate in the middle of the path. The towpath under the Western Maryland (WM) Railway trestle has been degraded by the channeling of rainwater from the superstructure above. Just as I was about to end my level walk, a rather large pig appeared from the access roadway at Ernstville. A few moments later a long-haired man with a stick came forward and chased the pig off the towpath. As both pig and man were moving quickly, I didn't have a chance to inquire from either about the nature of their activity. But I assume that the pig had escaped its captivity in a search for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as any true American.

*Level 49 Round Top Cement Mill to Lock 53: Paul Petkus reports Sept. 19 and Oct. 17:* It was sunny and cool on both dates; perfect weather for visits to the towpath. I encountered 45 people on the towpath in September and about half that in October. Given the popularity of the park during the pandemic, it was not surprising that during the September visit I saw more people than any other visit dating back to my first level walk in 2009. In contrast, I only saw six people on an outing one year prior to this one. No changes were noted

in any of the structures. Compared to what I saw on July 4<sup>th</sup>, there doesn't appear to have been much of a change in the size of a washout on the towpath at Mile 128.9, but it was marked with large branches and orange paint. I was able to get a good look at Culvert 188 in October, and it is unchanged from earlier observations. Wingstem was widely distributed throughout the level. Typical of this time of year, Goldenrod and Aster were seen on both walks, as well as numerous other plants in bloom. It's time for bird migration, but I believe the species I saw in September were year-round residents. I ended up seeing numerous butterfly species on both walks.

*Level 54 Lock 59 to Lock 60: Dennis Kubicki reports Sept. 16:* The areas around Locks 58, 59, 60, and the Devils Alley and Stickpile Hill hiker/biker campsites were clean. From Little Orleans to about Milepost 144 the towpath was in generally good condition. The surface was even with only the occasional rut or pothole. But from that mile marker until Lock 60 I observed a significant level of degradation. In many locations there was deep rutting and pits. In quite a few locations there was standing water of varying extent. This is an ongoing condition. No new degradation was noted at Culvert 207 since my last report. Earth has fallen from the canal embankment on the river side creating about a 75% obstruction of the culvert opening. The distance between the gravel on the path and the washed-away area is about 3 feet. It is unclear how unstable (to foot or bike travelers) this piece of turf is.

*Level 55 Lock 60 to Culvert 208: Paul Petkus reports Aug. 8 and Oct. 10:* Park visitation was higher than normal in this area, especially around Bond's Landing. Most visitors weren't wearing masks or maintaining social distance. The towpath was mostly dry on both walks. The conditions of Lock 60 and Culvert 208 were unchanged from earlier walks. The August walk was on a good afternoon for butterfly observation. I saw twelve species on the level. In October, reptiles and amphibians took center stage during the outing. Duckweed coated turtles sunned on any exposed object in the prism. They tended to drop into the water upon detecting my presence, but there were so many present that I was able to get plenty of photos of them. A water snake was content to be coiled on a log on the berm side of the prism. The finding of the outing was a spotted salamander in the dried stream bed downstream of the culvert.

*Level 56 Culvert 208 to Lock 61: John Wiggins and Kathleen Moriarty report Oct. 24:* Beautiful fall foliage was showing all along the river and canal. There was not much trash. Overall, not much was changed since our last walk. Potholes and puddles around Milepost 153 are getting somewhat worse. It was another good bird day on this walk – ravens, crows, cedar waxwings, woodpeckers, but most notably a great blue heron and a kingfisher where the prism is watered.

Continued on page 16

# Across the Berm – Edwin Bearss

Edwin Bearss died on September 15. He was formerly the chief historian of the National Park Service and a leading authority on the Civil War. He wrote many NPS reports and studies about the canal and two journal articles about the canal during the Civil War. Karen Gray and Tim Snyder both share their recollections of Mr. Bearss.

*Karen Gray recalls* – During my 20 years programming and overseeing adult study tours in the mid-Atlantic region for the Smithsonian Institution's Associate program, Ed Bearss was one of our major study leaders on tours that included the regional battle fields, the routes of troop movements and of John Wilkes Booth's escape. Ed was an amazing tour leader and definitely a chapter of the "Bearss Brigade" (as his fans were known) existed among Associate members. Often he'd have to do multiple dates of popular tours, some of which he did year after year. Yet no matter how often he did a popular tour, he never lost his enthusiasm or garnered complaints on tour evaluations.

Two stories about Ed stand out in my mind. On one occasion the tour bus broke down at the last battlefield stop of the day. I was called and arranged for a backup bus and authorized the tour assistant to order pizza, etc. to be delivered to the group at the battleground. Ed took advantage of the additional time while waiting for their supper and the replacement bus, to lead them out on the battlefield again for a longer, fuller tour. They arrived back at the Smithsonian much later than planned, but the tour evaluations were full of praise and delight with not a single complaint.

On the other occasion the tour assistant reported to me that Ed had directed the driver of the large tour bus to travel on the Harpers Ferry and Sandy Hook Road alongside the

canal from Lock 34 to where it meets the Keep Tryst Rd. It's a dangerous road in an automobile or pickup truck and decidedly not safe for large buses—or any vehicle meeting one along there. I had to have a serious talk with Ed about the importance of my approving his tour routes and sites. Ed could not have been more cooperative and agreeable and subsequently always discussed questionable routes and sites with me. We worked as partners for the best possible tour and he respected and used my areas of expertise just as I did his.

*Tim Snyder recalls* – During his tenure with the NPS, Bearss authored a number of studies that concerned the C&O Canal, including historic structures reports on the Tonoloway Aqueduct and on the bridges that spanned the canal. He also published two articles in the journal *West Virginia History*, both about the canal during the Civil War period.

Bearss was the author or coauthor of more than a dozen books that concerned U.S. Civil War history. He was featured in a number of television documentaries, including the Ken Burns series, *The Civil War*. A popular tour guide and speaker, he continued to lead tours and give talks about the Civil War well into his 90s. A gifted orator, Bearss eschewed notes and spoke from his extensive memory. He used his voice not only to convey information but to seize his listeners' attention and build suspense. In the course of his discourse he would frequently let his voice rise to a crescendo, followed by a well-timed dramatic pause that would leave listeners anxious to hear more.

To the Civil War community, and to his friends and colleagues, Ed Bearss' stature and reputation had grown to near legendary proportions and he will be greatly missed.

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**On the Level** (Continued from page 15)

*Levels 59 and 60 Paw Paw Tunnel Parking Area to Town Creek Aqueduct: Trent Carbaugh reports Aug. 16:* Level 59 looked very good, with very little mud and some small limbs down. Level 60 had slight mud from storms the previous day and a few puddles. I cut up one small tree that was partially fallen on the towpath. There was light trash on both levels. The culverts were grown up with weeds. I noted three long distance bicyclists and a horde of fisherpersons and swimmers at Town Creek. Both levels have the same invasive plant species problems; Japanese stilt grass, tree of heaven, and multiflora rose.

*Level 61 Town Creek Aqueduct to Lock 68: Trent Carbaugh reports Aug. 1:* The level was surprisingly free of trash, almost a little scary; perhaps my long-held dream of a trash eating "canalagator" has finally manifested itself. There were a

few small puddles, Grass on the towpath was a bit high, but not bad and the margins on the towpath had been trimmed recently enough that there were very few thorn branches that needed to be trimmed. The gutters on the lock house are full of moss and other green stuff and should probably be cleaned out as the appears to be some water damage to the ceiling of the porch.

*Level 64 Kellys Road Culvert to Spring Gap Recreational Area: Nasra Sakran reports Oct. 28:* There was very little trash. Of course, the towpath was simply covered with fallen leaves, so we can only guess what was underneath! There was some garlic mustard showing. A very large whitetail deer bounded away when I approached it. It appeared that the canal prism was more filled in since my last level walk a year ago; mostly with a variety of tall grasses and fallen trees.



# Volunteers in Parks

By Jim Heins

## By Now the Votes Have Been Counted

It was unanimous. This was a bad year for volunteers in our great park. However, it was not a total loss from the perspective of the Association's VIP program.

As reported earlier, we had managed to do some clean-up to the Swains Lock area, and to move and anchor down a few picnic tables at the Monocacy Aqueduct. Since then we have been able to complete a few more projects.

We rebuilt a ramp leading to the VIP shed located in the maintenance yard at Great Falls, replacing all of the surface pressure-treated 2x6s and adding metal non-slip strips for better footing.

The Association bench bunch installed six benches: four in the Palisades District, one in Hancock and one at Lock 56.

There are 10 members of the bench bunch but to minimize exposure of the crew to others, we worked with the same team of four for this project. They included Jim Biasco, Craig Roberts, Doug Zveare and myself. The three primary workers here demonstrate part of the value system of our great group by depicting the 17th C. Shinto maxim, *Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil*. What a wonderful bunch to work with.

The Swains Lock Stewardship group did a final cleanup for this year the end of the first week of November. A fairly large group energetically gave the area a final sprucing up.

We also had some representation at the final scrubbing party on the *Mercer* before putting it to bed for its winter hibernation.

Our last project for this year was the installation of the three waysides at Carderock that the Association developed, purchased and have now will put in the ground for all to see. To get a better understanding of the scope of this project, please see Nancy Benco's article on page 1 of this issue.



Above – Auguring under the watchful eye of Jim Heins.

Below – The wayside crew (l-r) David Schumaker, Jim Heins, Jim Biasco, Craig Roberts and Doug Zveare. Wayside crew photos by Nancy Benco.

Above – Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

Below – The bench crew (l-r) Craig Roberts, Jim Biasco and Doug Zveare. Bench bunch photos by Jim Heins.



# The Ghost Town of Four Locks

By Trent Carbaugh

When we go walking along the canal today many of us are there to get out and enjoy nature. We watch the birds, enjoy the trees and exercise, but it is easy to forget that the place was once a commercial transportation corridor. In its day it was a modern wonder built by creative engineers, skilled craftsmen and a lot of cheap labor. It was operated, like most 19<sup>th</sup> century industries, on a combination of hard work, long hours, sweat, whiskey, and tobacco. All these folks had to live somewhere and needed supplies, post offices and schools for their children.

When you get off the beaten towpath, so to speak, you can find some interesting things.

Ghost towns, or abandoned settlements, if you prefer, evoke images of crumbling western settlements in remote places among aspen groves and mountains. The miners, gamblers, cowboys, and all the other folks that made up these communities show up in the small traces of themselves they left behind. But the reality is: ghost towns are everywhere.

In the area of the C&O Canal there are the remains of free towns (discrete settlements built by emancipated slaves after the Civil War) just across the Potomac from the C&O in Virginia. The industrial town of Weverton, Maryland was washed away by a flooding

Potomac River. These are just two examples of other small towns, villages, and mill sites that rose up from economic necessity and disappeared when conditions changed. Most of these places are nothing more than hints of foundations or the occasional freestanding chimney. Many of these places are completely lost or only vaguely documented. A dot on an old map or a fading memory remembered as a place name is often all that survives.

Fortunately some of these places are a little better known, and the lost town of Four Locks is one of them.

There are plenty of good works about the building of Four Locks, much better than I could ever write. Please see the sources at the end of the article for some of these should you want to know more. This is more of a tale of looking in the odd, out of the way places and the things that may be found there.

Some little snippets of history will help to understand this place though. Four Locks (Milepost 108) is located close to Clear Spring off of Md. Route 56 at the end of Four Locks Road. The Potomac River makes a tight, four mile bend in this area and it was expedient to cut across the “neck” to create a half mile shortcut.



*We shall start a short photographic tour heading west on Four Locks Road, to the Berm Road and then over to the river side of the canal.  
All photos by Trent Carbaugh*



*View from lock 49 looking east. Construction of Lock 47 began in February 1836 and by May 1839 all four locks were completed.*



*Construction on Lock House 49 was started in 1837 and completed in 1839. The lock house is larger than many lock houses as it was intended to support all four locks. The lock house is now part of the Canal Quarters Program managed by the C&O Canal Trust.*



The land in Prather's Neck is made up of undeveloped National Park Service land, Prather's Neck Wildlife Management Area (Maryland Department of Natural Resources), and private land. The wildlife management area is open, with a few (very) unimproved walking paths, for birding, hiking and other activities, although I would recommend avoiding the area during hunting season. A walk in Prather's Neck is good way to see what the wild Potomac shoreline looked like before the canal was built. It can be quite rough in this place, with limestone outcrops and with much of the southwestern section being cliffs dropping eighty or ninety feet to the river's edge.

Four Locks gets its name from the fact that four steps of 8.25 feet were needed to raise the level of the canal above

the subterranean limestone ridge underneath the path of the canal shortcut. It was deemed cheaper to build four lift locks rather than cut through the underlying stone to produce a deeper canal prism. The view looking downhill from Lock 50, the uppermost of the four locks, is quite spectacular.

As the area around Four Locks was growing into a sizable village that supported the canal, as well as local farms and associated endeavors, more local transportation was needed. In 1844 the government of Washington County built a road from Williamsport to Four Locks and then on to Hancock to help with local economic growth. This road also connected to a ferry, later known as New Kirk Ferry, which was out on Prather's Neck proper and provided access to Virginia (later West Virginia) across the river. The road did have the effect



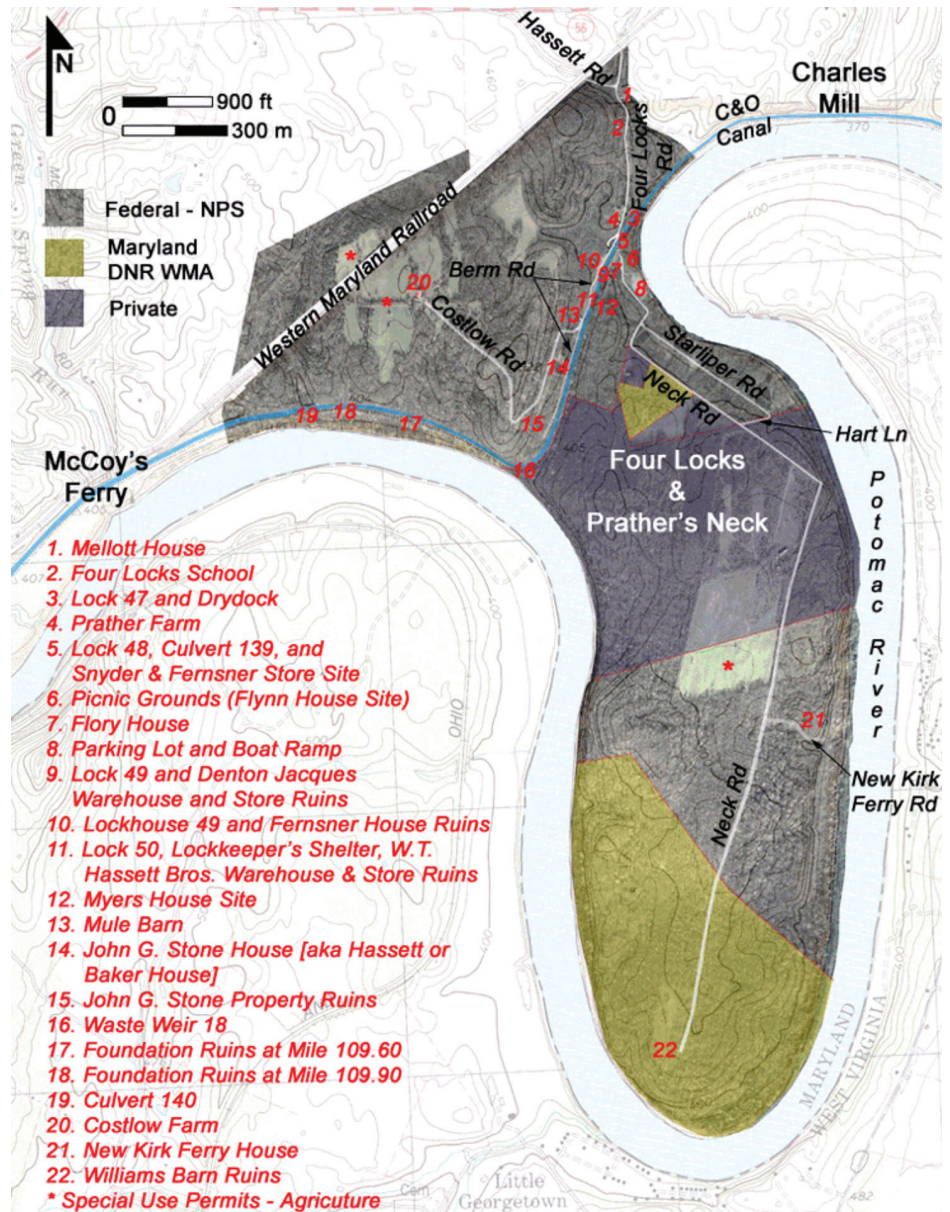
*Foundation remains of the Fernsner House located just to the east of Lock House 49.*



*Two houses were located in the spot now occupied by the Four Locks parking area and boat ramp.*



*The Four Locks Schoolhouse, on Four Locks Road, was built sometime around 1859. The school was known both as Four Locks School and as Cedar Grove School. In 1877 it appears on the Washington County Atlas as School #8.*



*Overview map from National Park Service Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Four Locks, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, 2008. This booklet is an outstanding resource if you are interested in more than a casual look at Four Locks.*



intended; the Village of Four Locks got its own post office in 1858. Sometime around 1859 a schoolhouse was built. Warehouses, a dry dock for canal boat repair, and log houses were springing up for local canal workers and boat crews wintering over, along with facilities to board mules over the winters.

The town of Four Locks, along with the canal, survived repeated damaging floods, the Civil War, the 1889 flood and subsequent Canal Company bankruptcy, and rising competition from the railroads. Like most of the canal, the town proper didn't survive long after the disastrous flood of 1924, but many of the houses were occupied into relatively recent times.

Four Locks is not just the remains of an industrial area; as nature has returned to this place with a vengeance. On a walk west from Four Locks to Big Pool, via McCoy's Ferry, you have a chance to see most of the wildlife that lives along the canal. I have seen everything from bald eagles to a black bear in this area. The trees are magnificent as are the limestone outcroppings that abound in this place. It is well worth a visit to this section of the C&O at any time of year.

The study of our past is a matter of perspective. This perspective includes different disciplines. In a perfect world historians, archaeologists anthropologists, and sociologists all

work together to give us an accurate, well thought-out picture of the past. For various reasons this process often fails. Ongoing research, new archaeological discoveries, re-examination of existing information changes the interpretation of the past as well as changing the ways in how we see it. This also has

an effect on how we accept those changes in an evolving modern societal context.

In the grand scheme of things, in that flowing and interlocking tale of people and events we call history, we often focus, almost to exclusion it seems, on the large events. The reality, though, is that history is most often made up of small events, often forgotten or relegated to minor occurrences of seemingly little importance. Often overlooked, these small events taken

together add up to important parts of the fabric of history. The above mentioned scholarly and scientific disciplines are the study of humanity. A place like Four Locks is a magnificent cross section of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century culture. This place was subject to social conflict, natural disasters, war, feats of transportation engineering, and small town folks just helping each other out, which to my thinking is the most important part and an example for us today. But, we should never overlook the fact that attitudes and behavioral norms were very different in the past and things should always be looked at in the context of their times.

*In 1838 Irish laborers at Prather's Neck decided to "liberate" some gunpowder from the Canal Company stores and threatened to destroy their own work unless they were paid the back wages they were owed. The local militia was called up, saw the harshness of the situation, and promptly decided not put down the uprising and sided with the laborers. Residents of the growing village of Four Locks even supplied the Irish families with provisions on credit. Eventually two companies of militia from Hagerstown and Smithsburg peacefully "un-liberated" the gunpowder while describing the workers and their families as being "in suffering and deplorable condition."*



The impressive stone house of the Prather Farm is surrounded by the remains of a bank barn and an unidentified foundation along with some still standing sheds.



Improvisation and use of the environment are often overlooked in examining the lives of our predecessors. I really like this wall; a natural outcropping was neatly added to the fieldstone to create a higher wall.



When visiting Four Locks you don't really need to work your way into the weeds and thorns. Much of what you see in the accompanying photographs is easily visible from the roads or from the towpath. If you should choose to go off trail, my usual warnings apply. These places can be dangerous; open wells, sinkholes, and pits for cellars are all over this area. Don't fall into one, and try not to travel alone. When around abandoned buildings do not enter or get too close to them; most are very unstable. This protects the building and you from damage. Always err on the side of caution when in such places.

## References:

Thomas F. Hahn, *Towpath Guide to the C&O Canal (revised edition)*, Harpers Ferry Historical Association, 2015

Perry C. Wheelock, *Farming Along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, 1828-1971: A Study of Agricultural Sites in the C&O Canal National Historic Park*, 2007, National Park Service

*Geology of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park and Potomac River Corridor, District of Columbia, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia*, Professional Paper 1691, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 2008

Jack Sanderson, *History of "Four Locks"*

*Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Four Locks, Chesapeake and Ohio National Historic Park*, National Park Service, 2008

*Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Official National Park Handbook, Handbook 142*, C&O Canal Association, 2015



Neck Road going into Prathers Neck to the remains of the New Kirk Ferry and the Williams Farm.



Heading west on Four Locks Road you come to a barn that was built to house mules over the winter.



A mostly standing small barn or shed looks like it may at one point housed pigs and definitely chickens.



The John G. Stone house, built sometime shortly after 1860. Also known as the Hassett or Baker house.



Unattributed log house, possibly originally another John Stone-owned house. This house can be seen from the towpath.



Random remains of a metal roof peak repaired with a recycled Royal Crown Soda sign. It is easy to forget that many things were often reused multiple times.



The overgrown and barely discernible Berm Road that travels west from Four Locks Road.



A sunken road bed that travels uphill from the Berm Road to Costlow Road.



Crossing back over to the towpath side just by the parking lot you will see the well preserved Denton Jacques warehouse.

Additional photos on page 23



# Nature Notes

By Marjorie Richman

## Only in Winter

After the excitement of spring, and the lazy good times of summer, plants begin to get ready in the fall for the hard times to come in winter. We think of winter as being a time of dormancy, when plants hunker down and wait for better weather. That's true for most, but there are exceptions. Some flowers only bloom in winter, others are pretty spectacular in their dormant state, and with still others signs of the last growing season persist through the winter waiting for the return of spring. After all, it's a good survival strategy to get an early start on the growing season while there is little competition for sunshine and nutrients. True the weather might be a bit unpleasant, but it might be worth it.

Among the flowers that bloom in winter in our area are snowdrops, *Galanthis nivalis*. Snowdrops are pure white flowers that grow in clumps. They can be seen sometimes as early as February, regardless of how low the temperature might be or whether there is snow on the ground. Snowdrops were brought to our country by English settlers. In England there is a long history and folklore related to snowdrops. The flowers are considered a symbol of purity because of their color as well as a welcome, long awaited sign that the worst of winter is over.

The genus name, *galanthus*, is derived from two Greek words that together mean "milk flower." *Nivalis* is derived

from a Latin word that means "resembling snow." In other words, a milk white flower of the snow. It's a lovely name for a beautiful flower.

Another plant that blooms in winter is skunk cabbage. They are not as pretty as snowdrops, but they can do something snowdrops can't: skunk cabbage can make its own heat. Skunk cabbage is a member of a small community of plants that are able to regulate their own temperature through a process called thermogenesis.

How exactly thermogenetic plants accomplish this is not well understood, but the best explanation has to do with the process of breaking down starch into sugar. Over time the skunk cabbage stores large amounts of starch in its roots. As the flower grows and emerges above ground, it absorbs oxygen that breaks down the starch and produces sugar. This process generates heat that can exceed the temperature of the air by as much as 30 degrees. When the weather improves, the generation of heat stops.

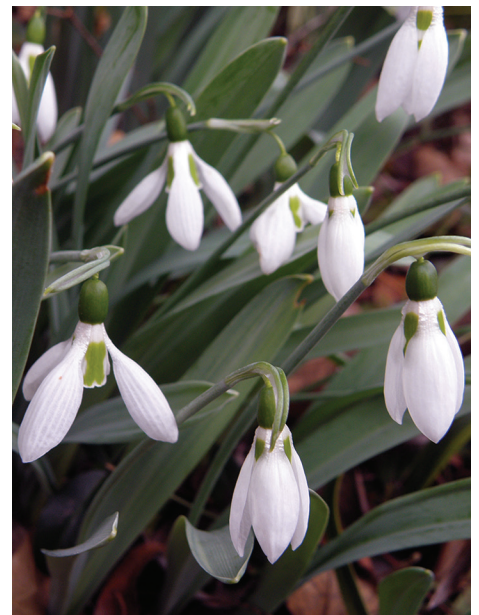
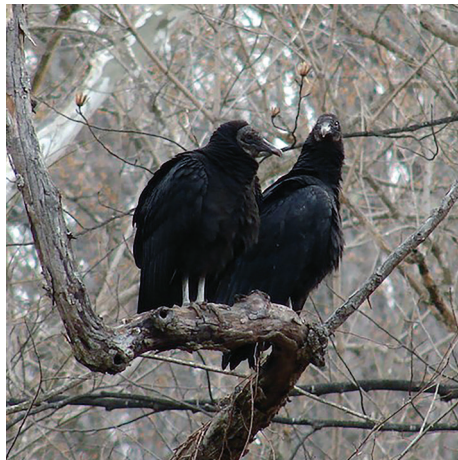
Skunk cabbages announce their presence in two ways: by their odor and by the ring of melted snow or ice surrounding the flower. As the flower emerges it releases enough heat to melt frozen ground. As for the odor, we might not like it but it is perfume to certain types of pollinators, such as flies and other insects that find carrion tasty. Seeking warmth, pollinators settle on the skunk cabbage flowers. As they fly from flower to flower, pollen is spread among the plants. The warmth and the odor attract the first insects of spring, giving



Above – beech tree bud

Below (l-r) – sycamore tree seeds, vultures and snowdrops

All photos by Marjorie Richman





**Nature Notes** (Continued from previous page)

the skunk cabbage an early start in the competition for pollinators. Skunk cabbage can be found in wet, marshy areas as early as February.

Did you ever wonder about the round, brown objects that are common along the towpath from late fall through the winter? They are the seed heads of sycamore trees, trees that are abundant along the Potomac River. These persist during the winter, either on tree branches or on the ground. Over time the seed heads desiccate and release seeds. Sycamore trees are easily recognized by their bark. The lower bark is the typical brown color, but higher up on the tree the bark turns white. The color difference occurs because sycamore trees have very rigid bark. This prevents a tree from being able to accommodate new growth in a flexible manner. As a result, the bark flakes off as the tree grows, revealing the distinctive white color on the upper branches.

The beech tree is another common tree in our area. Its winter bud is very distinctive, especially since it is one of the few buds that may appear in the winter and continue through the season. The slender form is hard to miss. Inside the bud is a curled up leaf waiting for better weather to unfurl and bloom.

Finally, there is one more aspect to winter, the barren trees give us views of wildlife that we might not see at other times of the year. It's a particularly good time to see birds.

There are two reliable places to look for eagles along the towpath: one at Conn Island near Great Falls and another between Point of Rocks and Nolands Ferry. Both have nests that have been used for several years. Nest building (or repairing) begins sometime in November. By late January through early February eagles in our area complete the mating cycle and lay eggs. From the time the eggs are laid to the time they hatch, the adults take turns sitting on the nest. The incubation period is about 35 days. February and March are good months to see one eagle in the nest and perhaps the other sitting on the branch of a nearby tree. You may also see the adults flying back and forth with food for hungry chicks.

Not so spectacular as eagles, but equally impressive in size, are the vultures that are commonly seen along the towpath. These birds seem to be completely accustomed to people. In winter I've seen them walking along the towpath, resting against a tree after a meal or just sitting in a tree. With few people walking along the towpath, you never know what you will see.

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**Four Locks** (Continued from page 21)



*To the west of the Denton Jacques warehouse, after fighting through the thorns and weeds, you can find the foundation remains of the Flory House and garage built into the river-facing hill.*



*Starliper Road, where one of two modern communities were planned just south of the Four Locks parking area. This was a never-realized land development project.*



*A surface artifact, a shovel, by the Flory house remains. You have to wonder what this shovel did; who used it? How do you explain why it was abandoned. A mystery we will never solve.*



*The insidious multi-flora rose, bane of all wanderers along the C&O Canal.*



*Locks 49 and 50.*



*The canal prism above Lock 50.*



# The Transformation of a Paw Paw Eater

By Dave Long

It would probably be a safe bet to say that many, if not most, of the ardent fans of the C & O Canal are familiar, at least in passing, with the paw paw tree (*Asimina triloba*). Groves or patches of these trees are common throughout the Potomac River basin and are woven in and out of the fabric of Appalachian folklore and culture. These groupings of tall and slender trees, almost bamboo-like except stouter and with large, oblong leaves, are easily spotted along nearly the entire length of the tow path.

As a member of the Canal Classroom Corps in the Cumberland to Paw Paw Tunnel area, I have participated in numerous grade school field trips where we have talked with the students about this largest fruit indigenous to the United States, and often ended by singing that troublesome song about “Way down yonder in the paw paw patch.” I say troublesome because once you hear that song being belted out enthusiastically by 35 fourth graders it stays on an endless loop in your mind for the rest of the day. (Those of you who are familiar with the song are probably singing it in your head right now.)

When I formerly worked with the Trails & Rails program one of my topics of discussion was the paw paw. I showed pictures to the Capitol Limited passengers, related some local stories, and often heard from at least one passenger who was familiar with the song.

Inevitably one of the kids on field trips or someone on the train would ask if I ate the fruit, and my answer was

always the same “Yes I have, several times, but I don’t care for them, to me they taste like an over-ripe pear.”

Well, thankfully things change and I now find myself to be a huge fan of the paw paw fruit and all it took was a little expanded knowledge.

In July of 2020 I visited a small bookstore on Main Street in Frostburg, Md. to replenish my Covid-depleted supply of reading material. (Yes I am old-fashioned and like reading material that does not require a battery.) One of the books I purchased was titled *Paw Paw – In Search of America’s Forgotten Fruit*, written by Andrew Moore, thinking I might pick up some tidbits to pass along to the school kids if we ever reach a point where people are not afraid to venture outside in groups again.

The book provided a personal revelation. It is an in-depth study of the tree, its place in American natural history and human culture, as well as the efforts to produce viable domestic cultivars for commercial production.

For me though the revelation was the descriptions of what constitutes a ripe paw paw, and the in-depth discussions about how a ripe paw paw should taste. Simply put I quickly decided that all of the paw paws I had eaten in my life, those picked by myself and others, *had not been ripe*. Was it possible that is the reason I had always found them to be disagreeable? As it turns out it was.

My wife Kristie and I put this newfound knowledge to the test on a September bike ride in the Orleans/Woodmont



Paw Paws and sycamores – standards along the towpath – Photo by Dave Long

area, with very favorable results. So just in case some of you have developed a similar poor opinion of our famous hillbilly banana, I would pass along some guidelines that I was able to glean from Andrew Moore's very good book that could change your mind.

First, it seems that many paw paw aficionados only consider the fruit to be ripe if the skin is brown, and the fruit is actually on the ground. Hence that wonderfully repetitive line "Pickin' up paw paws put 'em in your pocket." It is said that you can actually smell the fruit at this stage, and it is at its peak of richness, almost fermented. (Be aware that Mr. Moore indicates that the brown skin, if eaten, can cause stomach complaints, and that the seeds should never be eaten as they contain toxins of some sort.)

Kristie and I investigated numerous groves along the Potomac that day and did not find any "brown and down" paw paws, although signs in the area indicated that some wild critters may already have. So, we resorted to the second method of harvest from the book, which is to simply give the tree a gentle shake, and see what falls off.

Most paw paw trees are slender, again almost bamboo-like in their straightness, so it is easy to put your hand on the trunk and give the tree a little rattle. Gentle is the key word here because the paw paw itself can get rather large, so a vigorous shake can cause even unripe fruit to be dislodged and fall to the ground, and the fruit will not ripen if separated from the tree while it is still unripe.

I was quickly able to tell when I had finally found a truly ripe paw paw. One tree I shook dropped two of the hillbilly bananas on the ground, both hit with a satisfying "thwack," kind of like the sound a large egg makes when it accidentally rolls off the kitchen counter onto the floor. Looking over I saw the lime green paw paw on the ground, the skin had ruptured in a few places allowing the bright yellow inner fruit to squish out of the cracks in the skin.

Breaking open the skin we discovered why the paw paw is often referred to as a Custard Apple.

Creamy, smooth and seed filled, the inside of a ripe paw paw is a delight to the pallet. To be sure it is a mess to eat, especially by hand along the towpath. The fruit is sticky to the lips, fingers and the cheeks if you dive into it face first. Kristie's first pronouncement was that it tasted like a mango. I have never eaten a mango, but seldom disagree with my wife and took her word for it. Trying a smaller fruit later I swore it tasted like a banana, or at least banana candy. Turns out we are both probably right as one of the many other nicknames for this river fruit is Banango.

To sum up though, it seems to be important that the paw paw feel soft when gently squeezed. Probably it takes some practice to get good at that, and most of the fruit is way too high in the tree to reach, so we just settled on the "shake the tree and duck your head" method. Regardless of method, hard and green skinned fruit should be avoided, that was my mistake for years.

Andrew Moore's paw paw book talks about a variety of uses for the fruit, including ice cream, beer, gelato, dried and ground into flour, etc., and I have found it to be exceptional if you bring a few home and chill them overnight in the fridge. But perhaps the absolute best way to enjoy them is out there in the natural habitat, just like the raccoons, 'possums and other wild creatures do.

Paw paws occur widely in river bottom ecosystems throughout our region so you might find them about anywhere it is wet. My understanding of Park Service policy on fruits and nuts and such is that limited harvesting for personal use is permitted, so enjoy a few and leave plenty for the next visitors.

Now I will have to change my presentation to the school kids. Next time I am asked if I have eaten a paw paw I will say "Yes I have, they are very good, but only when they are ripe."

Just in case my references to the paw paw song have baffled some of you I will leave you with the words as I know them. I have no idea of the song's author or origin, just that it is a part of American folk history.

*Where, oh, where, oh where is Susie?*

*Where, oh, where, oh where is Susie?*

*Where, oh, where, oh where is Susie?*

*Way down yonder in the paw paw patch.*

*Pickin' up paw paw's put 'em in your pocket.*

*Pickin' up paw paw's put 'em in your pocket.*

*Pickin up paw paw's put 'em in your pocket.*

*Way down yonder in the paw paw patch.*

*Come on kids lets go find her.*

*Come on kids lets go find her.*

*Come on kids lets go find her.*

*Way down yonder in the paw paw patch.*

Hope you enjoy that for the rest of your day.



# Calendar of Events - 2021

Non-C&OCA event
C&OCA business
C&OCA hike and dinner or other key event
C&OCA hike
Jan. 9, Sat. <b>Continuing Hike Series</b> , 10:30 a.m., Walk downstream from the Dickerson Conservation Park parking lot to Milepost 38 and then leave the towpath to investigate Latrobe's marble quarry on the berm side just a short distance from the towpath up on the hillside. Contact Jon Wolz (240-888-5367 or hikemaster@candocanal.org). Round trip 3.6 miles.
Feb. 6, Sat. <b>Continuing Hike Series</b> , 10:30 a.m., Walk downstream from the Dickerson Conservation Park parking lot to the waste weir at mile 39.17. Then leave the towpath crossing the Canal prism, walking on a path up a hillside and then across a field to White's Ford Fort and campsite. The 10th Vermont Regiment was stationed here during the Civil War. Contact Jon Wolz (240-888-5367 or hikemaster@candocanal.org). Round trip 3.5 miles.
Feb. 7, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., on-line via Zoom or at Williamsport Town Hall, 2 North Conococheague St.
Mar. 6, Sat. <b>Continuing Hike Series</b> , 10:30 a.m., Walk from the Trail Head parking lot at the Monocacy Natural Resource Management Area to the Johnson Quarry. The stone from this quarry was used to build the Monocacy Aqueduct. Contact Jon Wolz (240-888-5367 or hikemaster@candocanal.org). Round trip 4 miles.
Mar. 20, Sat. <b>Annual Meeting</b> 1 p.m., on-line via Zoom or at location TBD depending on COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Apr. 11, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., on-line via Zoom or at Glen Echo Town Hall, 6106 Harvard Ave.
Apr. 24, Sat. (Tentative) <b>Douglas Hike and Dinner</b> , with program to follow. Location TBD. Complete details will be in the March <i>Along the Towpath</i> . Contact Steve Dean at programs@candocanal.org.
June 6, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., at Williamsport Town Hall, 2 North Conococheague St.
Aug. 1, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., at Glen Echo Town Hall, 6106 Harvard Ave.
Aug. 30 - Sept. 2, Mon.-Thu. <b>World Canals Conference</b> , Hagerstown, Md. Follow this newsletter for updates on the conference. <a href="http://www.wcc2021.org">www.wcc2021.org</a>
Oct. 3, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., at Williamsport Town Hall, 2 North Conococheague St.
Oct. 23, Sat. <b>Annual Heritage Hike and Dinner</b> , with program to follow. Location TBD. Complete details will be in the September <i>Along the Towpath</i> . Contact Steve Dean at programs@candocanal.org.
Dec. 4, Sat. <b>Frostbite Hike</b> : 10:30 a.m. Great Falls. Contact Bill Holdsworth at 301-762-9376 or <a href="mailto:website@candocanal.org">website@candocanal.org</a> .
Dec. 5, Sun. <b>Board Meeting</b> , 1 p.m., at Glen Echo Town Hall, 6106 Harvard Ave.

*The 2020 Thru-Ride took place as planned in October. We'll have a report on that event in the March issue.*

## About the 2021 Calendar –

*We still plan to host our usual schedule of events to the maximum extent possible, but at the present time there is still much uncertainty about our ability to congregate. Our program, nature and paddle chairs are all monitoring the situation and considering plans for events. Note that we do have some continuing hikes planned, hosted by Jon Wolz. We will have an update on the calendar in the March issue, including the annual Douglas Hike and Dinner. The annual meeting and board meetings are also impacted; they will be either on-line or in person as conditions allow. There is not a reservation form for the annual meeting in this issue; as noted below, monitor the website or Facebook, email the program chair at [programs@candocanal.org](mailto:programs@candocanal.org) or call 301-983-0825 for the meeting status. We appreciate your patience during these difficult times.*

## Important Information –

- Liability waivers are required for many Association activities. You will be asked to sign a waiver before participating in certain events.
- Hikes require proper footwear.
- Paddling, hiking and biking participants are responsible for their own equipment and food.
- Reservations are required for many events.
- All events are subject to cancellation in the event of inclement weather or COVID-19 conditions. Before attending, visit [www.candocanal.org](http://www.candocanal.org), Facebook [@candocanal.org](https://www.facebook.com/candocanal.org) or contact the event coordinator. The Association will also send out update emails with event status.

# C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK Telephone Numbers and Personnel

## C&O Canal National Historical Park Headquarters

1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100, Hagerstown, MD 21740

Superintendent	301-714-2202	Tina Cappetta
Deputy Superintendent	301-714-2200	John Noel
Superintendent's Assistant	301-714-2201	Mackensie Henn
Chief Ranger	301-714-2222	Ed Wenschhof
Chief of Business Mgmt.	301-714-2204	Ben Helwig
Chief of Resource Mgmt.	301-714-2225	Jeri DeYoung
Chief of Maintenance (Acting)	301-714-2211	Jim Yelton
Chief of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers	301-714-2238	Christiana Hanson
Partnerships Coordinator	301-714-2218	Anthony Bates
Volunteer Coordinator	301-491-7309	Emily Durán Hewitt
Cultural Resources Manager/Historian	301-491-2236	Justin Ebersole
Volunteer Historian	301-714-2220	Karen Gray
Safety Office	301-745-5804	John Adams
IT Specialist	301-745-5817	John Lampard

**Palisades District** – Mile 0 (Tidelock) to Mile 42.19 (Monocacy River)  
11710 MacArthur Blvd, Potomac, Md.

Interpretive Supervisor	301-767-3702	Pete Peterson
District Ranger Law Enforcement	301-491-6279	Joshua Cunningham
Supervisory Visitor Use Assistant	301-767-3703	Vacant
Georgetown Partnerships Coordinator	240-291-8466	Millie Jimenez

**Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center** 301-767-3714  
11710 MacArthur Blvd, Potomac, Md.

**Western Maryland District** – Mile 42.19 (Monocacy River) to Mile 184.5  
(Canal Terminus, Cumberland, Md.)

District Ranger Law Enforcement	301-722-0543	Todd Stanton
Cumberland Subdistrict	301-722-0543	
Hancock Subdistrict	301-678-5463	
Ferry Hill Subdistrict	301-714-2206	

**Williamsport Visitor Center** 301-582-0813  
205 West Potomac St., Williamsport, Md.

Supervisory Park Ranger	240-625-2931	Joshua Nolen
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**Hancock Visitor Center** 301-745-5877  
439 East Main St., Hancock Md.

Supervisory Park Ranger		Stephanie Siemek
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**Cumberland Visitor Center** 301-722-8226  
Western Maryland Station, Cumberland, Md.

Supervisory Park Ranger		Stephanie Siemek
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## OTHER USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

Great Falls Boat Operation	301-767-3714
Boathouse at Fletcher's Cove (concessionaire)	202-244-0461
Carderock and Marsden Reservations	301-767-3731
Canal Quarters Program	301-714-2233
Williamsport Boat Operations	301-582-0813

**24-HOUR EMERGENCY**  
(TOLL FREE): 1-866-677-6677  
HAZARDS CHOH\_Hazards@nps.gov



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## C&O CANAL ASSOCIATION

Membership in C&OCA is open to all persons with an interest in the C&O Canal, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, and the Potomac River Basin. Annual membership dues are: \$15 individual, \$20 family, and \$25 patron, assessed on a calendar-year basis, and include subscription to the newsletter. Dues should be mailed in to the C&O Canal Association. C&OCA is a non-profit organization as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and all contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. A copy of our current financial statement is available upon request by writing to C&OCA at the address above or calling 301-983-0825. Documents and information submitted to the State of Maryland under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available from the Office of the Secretary of State for the cost of copying and postage.

C&OCA maintains a home page at [www.candocanal.org](http://www.candocanal.org). The webmaster is [webmaster@candocanal.org](mailto:webmaster@candocanal.org). C&OCA also maintains a telephone number for recorded information and inquiries: 301-983-0825.

## Association Officers

**President:** Bill Holdsworth, [president@candocanal.org](mailto:president@candocanal.org)

**First Vice President:** Vacant

**Second Vice President:** Anthony Laing

**Secretary:** Kerry Gruber, [secretary@candocanal.org](mailto:secretary@candocanal.org)

**Treasurer:** Richard Radhe, [treasurer@candocanal.org](mailto:treasurer@candocanal.org)

**Information Officer:** Doug Zveare, [inquiries@candocanal.org](mailto:inquiries@candocanal.org)

**Board of Directors:** (terms expire in 2023): Jill Craig, Karen Gray, Jim Hutzler, Jonnie Lefebure, Bert Lustig. (terms expire in 2022): Tom Aitken, Tom Crouch, Tim Snyder, William R. Stewart, Pat White. (terms expire in 2021): Trent Carbaugh, Philip deVos, Dick Ebersole, Christine Holdsworth, Paul Petkus.

**Committees** (contact at C&OCA address/tel. no. above): Archives, Christine Holdsworth; Auditing, Jon Wolz; By-laws, Dave Johnson; Editorial Review, Steve Dean; Environmental, Rod Mackler; Festivals, Rita Bauman; Finance, Richard Radhe; Legal Advisory, Vacant; Level Walkers, Steve Dean; Membership, William R. Stewart; Nature, Paul Petkus; Nominating, Barbara Sheridan; Programs, Steve Dean; Sales, Jill Craig; Special Projects, Vacant; Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP), Jim Heins; World Canals Conference 2021, Bill Holdsworth.

CHESAPEAKE & OHIO CANAL ASSOCIATION INC.

P.O. Box 366

Glen Echo, MD 20812-0366

Along The Towpath

Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Association

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At an impressive 36 feet, Culvert 182 has the widest span of any culvert on the C&O Canal and is sometimes called "the culvert that wanted to be an aqueduct." It is on the upper end of Hancock and carries the towpath, prism and Berm Road over the Little Tonoloway Creek. It benefited from a National Park Service stabilization project in the early 2010s. Photo by Steve Dean

Check us out on social media!

C&O Canal Association



Founded in 1954



@candocanal.org



@CandOCanalAssoc



candocanallassoc

In This Issue

Carderock Waysides . . . . .	1
President's Report . . . . .	2
2021 World Canals Conference Update . . . . .	2
Donors to Association Funds . . . . .	3
Monocacy Project Update . . . . .	3
Annual Meeting . . . . .	4
Proposed Bylaws Amendments . . . . .	6
Case for Dues Increase . . . . .	7
New Members . . . . .	7
Accompanied by the Past . . . . .	8
On the Level . . . . .	12
Across the Berm . . . . .	16
Volunteers In Parks . . . . .	17
The Ghost Town of Four Locks . . . . .	18
Nature Notes . . . . .	22
Transformation of a Paw Paw Eater . . . . .	24
Calendar and Events . . . . .	26
Contacts . . . . .	27