



Typical canal boating scene of several decades ago.

measures about 60 feet wide and 6 feet deep. The towpath is generally 12 feet wide.

**Locks.**—There were 74 lift locks between Georgetown and Cumberland, each having the capacity to lift or lower a boat approximately 8 feet. Twenty-three of these are located on the restored Georgetown Division. The locks measure 100 feet long, 15 feet wide, and about 16 feet deep. Inlet locks at various points along the canal and a tide lock, or outlet lock, at the mouth of Rock Creek in Georgetown, originally gave entrance to and exit from the canal and river.

The small iron paddle gates located near the bottom of the large wooden lock gates admit and release the water from the lock chamber. Boats moving down the canal were lowered from the upper to the lower level by entering a full lock through the upper gates. When the boat was within the lock, the upper gates were closed and the water released through the paddles in the lower gates. When the level of the water in the lock reached that of the lower level of the canal, the gates were opened and the boat passed out into the canal. This process was reversed for boats going up the canal. The boat entered through the lower gates, whereupon

the lock was filled by opening the paddles in the upper gates. When the water in the lock reached the height of the upper level, the gates were opened and the boat was drawn from the lock.

**Lock Houses.**—Many of the trim stone lock houses seen on the Georgetown Division were begun in 1828, soon after construction of the canal got under way. The lock tender was allowed the use of the lock house, a garden plot on the adjacent company land, and was paid a small salary to compensate him for his labors.

**Canal Boats.**—In the 1870's, during the heyday of the canal, as many as 540 boats were navigating the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. A typical boat measured 92 feet long and 14 feet 6 inches wide and carried 110 to 120 tons of cargo. Three to five mules were required for the boating "outfit"; two or three were in use whenever the boat was in motion. The relief team was carried "aboard boat," while the boat captain and his family, or the crew, lived in a small aft cabin.

### What To Do and See

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is ideally suited as an outdoor laboratory for the study of natural history subjects. At all seasons of the year the towpath serves for easy access, and park naturalists frequently conduct guided trips. These trips are listed in the annual OUTDOOR PROGRAM schedule booklet, which may be obtained by writing to the superintendent.

Among the birds to be seen in the various habitats flanking the canal are the pileated woodpecker, wood duck, black vulture, and warbler, especially in migration time.

The colorful spring wildflowers should be left for all to enjoy. You are expected to observe the rule of the trail and not pick the flowers.

The stone in the canal structures and the bedrock exposed by construction tell stories of earth history fascinating to the initiated.

Canoeing, boating, hiking, fishing, picnicking, and ice skating are among the recreational facilities. Special conducted tours, via an old-time mule-drawn barge, are available during the summer.

**Georgetown to Seven Locks.**—The short narrow levels of the canal in Georgetown, once the busy congested tidewater terminal, afford one of the most picturesque scenes along the canal, including the first four lift locks joined by small canal basins, old Wisconsin Avenue Bridge, and the north abutment of the Alexandria Aqueduct (Thirty-sixth Street). The feeder canal for the Georgetown level at Lock 5 was originally a part of the old Potomac Canal around Little Falls. The series of locks between No. 8 (Cabin John) and No. 14 (Carderock) is known as "Seven Locks."

**Widewater.**—The construction of the canal in this region differs from any other section of the Georgetown Division. By utilizing an inactive river channel, blocked from the main stream by the towpath embankments, the early canal engineers saved vast amounts of blasting and excavating. The extended width and increased depth of this flooded channel give Widewater the appearance of an unruffled mountain lake, while the high rugged rock formations through which it passes lend added beauty and interest to the scene. Widewater may be reached by a footbridge which crosses the canal near Old Angler's Inn.

**Great Falls.**—This is the most popular area on the restored section of the canal. To reach the towpath, you pass the Great Falls Tavern, built between 1828 and 1831. The main room of the tavern houses the C. & O. Canal Museum, which contains many exhibits graphically telling the story of the canal. The room next to the museum is furnished as a typical lock house, the space being originally divided

by a center wall. Directly east of the tavern is the trailside exhibit pertaining to the flora and fauna found along the canal. Continuing east along the towpath the hiker follows the six locks toward Widewater. West of the tavern you may hike or canoe along one of the most scenic levels of the canal. An excellent view of the Great Falls of the Potomac may be seen from Conn Island which is reached by bridges located below the tavern.

**Locks 21, 22, 23.**—This section of the Georgetown Division seems far removed from the hubbub of urban life. The long levels, quiet and not frequently visited, make this section of the canal well suited for nature walks and canoe trips.

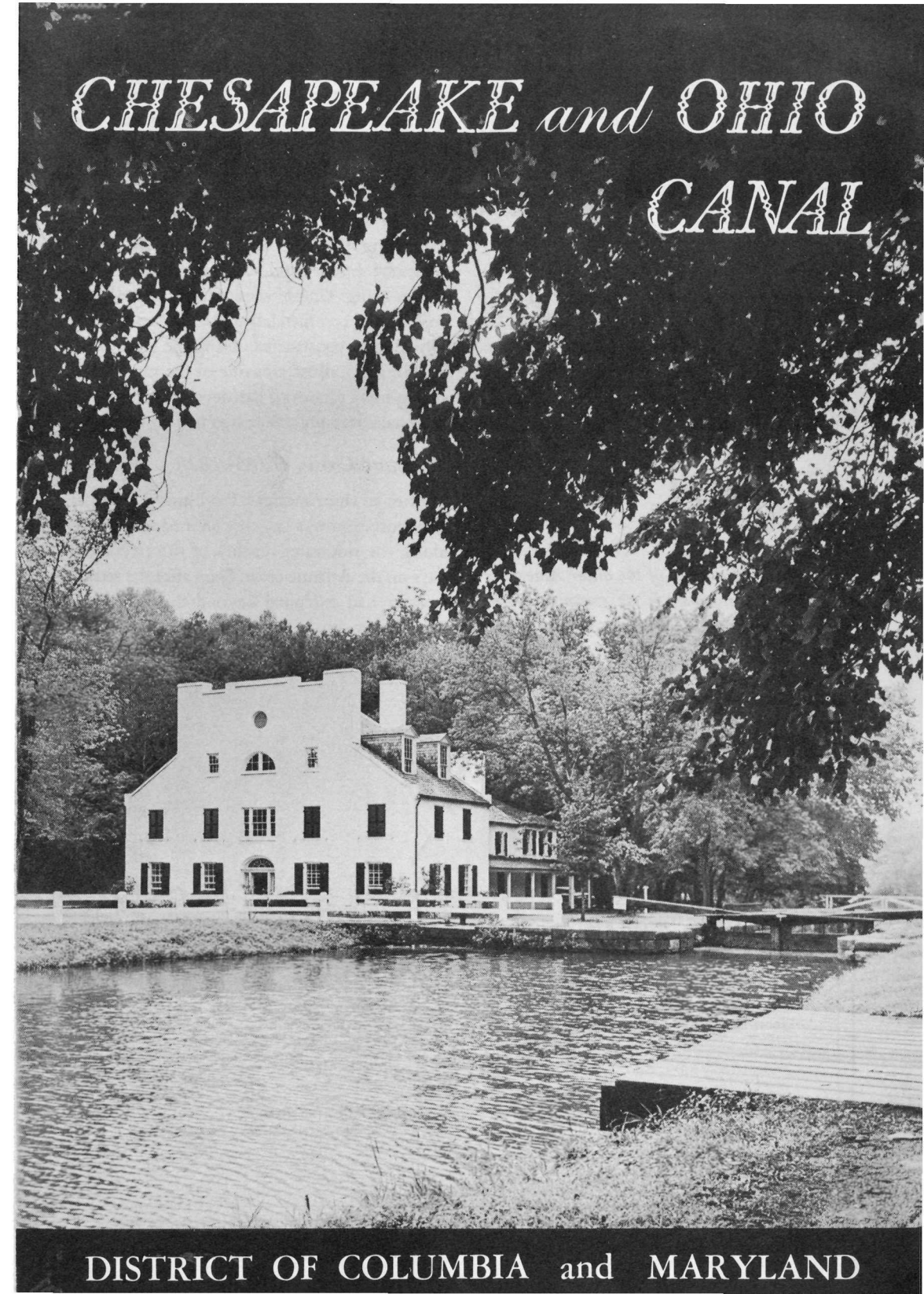
### Administration

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was purchased by the Federal Government in 1938. The canal occupies most of a narrow right-of-way, consisting of 5,253 acres, bought by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company between 1828 and 1850. Restoration of the Georgetown Division, extending 22.1 miles between Georgetown, D. C., and Seneca, Md., was undertaken by the National Park Service soon after the canal was acquired. The area is a part of the National Capital Parks which is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Communications should be directed to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks, Interior Building, Washington 25, D. C.

Cover: Great Falls Tavern



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR • DOUGLAS MCKAY, Secretary  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • Conrad L. Wirth, Director



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA and MARYLAND



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# Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

One of the least-altered of the older American canals, this waterway is an example of the ever-improving means of transportation that helped to bind the Nation together.

THE NATURAL PASSAGeway to the West afforded by the Potomac River Valley has played an important role in the growth and development of our Nation. Through it have passed the Indian trail, colonial wagon road, canal, railroad, telegraph and telephone, and the modern superhighway. By these constantly improving modes of communication the widely separated eastern and western regions of the fast-growing Union were firmly linked both socially and commercially. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, constructed during the great canal-building era, illustrates one of the most interesting early phases of the development of our national communication system.

## Potomac Canal, 1785-1828

Prior to the American Revolution, internal transportation was largely confined to the East along the tidewater reaches of the rivers and bays on the Atlantic coast. Soon after the settled frontier had extended beyond the Allegheny Mountains consideration was begun of a plan

to provide easy means of communication between the East and West by a navigable waterway. As early as 1754, George Washington, then still in his twenties, began to contemplate and foster a system of river and canal navigation along the Potomac Valley. It was largely through his long and untiring efforts that the Potomac Company was organized in 1785 to carry out this plan. As the first president of the company, Washington was actively engaged in the project. He frequently visited the working parties assigned to clearing the obstructions from the river channel and building short, skirting canals around the treacherous river falls. Although Washington resigned this office when he became President of the United States, his interest in the affairs of the Potomac Company never waned.

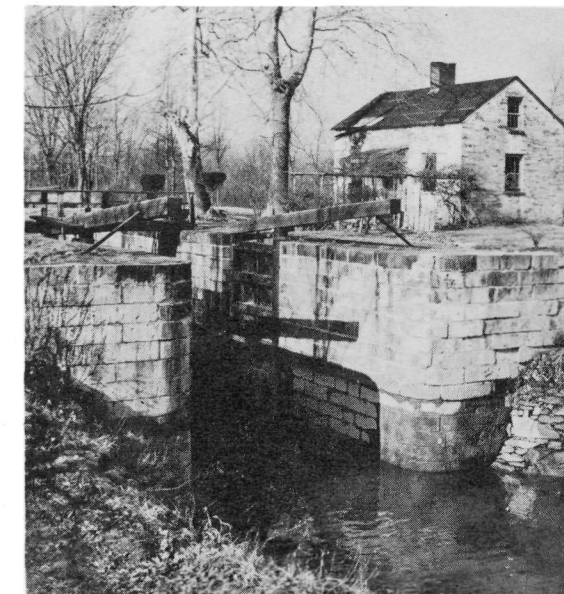
In 1802, the Potomac Company canals were substantially completed. Small raftlike boats, propelled by hand with the aid of the river currents, then began to bring furs, lumber, flour, and farm produce to Georgetown. Upon reach-

ing the impassable Great Falls of the Potomac, the boats entered the company's outstanding skirting canal. Here, on the Virginia banks of the river, a canal 1,200 yards long, 25 feet wide, and 6 feet deep conveyed boats through 5 lift locks over an elevation of more than 76 feet. Four other short canals, with a total length of slightly more than 3 miles, were built by the company at Seneca and Houses Falls, on the Virginia side of the river, and Little and Shenandoah Falls, on the Maryland side. Although the canals and locks of the Potomac Company were considered a great engineering accomplishment, the improvements to the river channel were inadequate.

## Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, 1828-1924

Influenced largely by the success of the Erie Canal, the popularity of the continuous canal began to increase rapidly in the second decade of the nineteenth century. There followed in

the 1820's and 1830's a great canal-building era when the construction of more than 4,000 miles of canals was begun or planned. The failure of the Potomac Company to provide a dependable water route to the West and the feverish canal building of the era contributed greatly to the successful organization of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company in 1828. Anxious to enjoy a large share of the trade with the rapidly growing West, promoters in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia planned a canal of some 360 miles in length connecting Georgetown, on the Potomac River, with Pittsburgh, on the Ohio River. On July 4, 1828, John Quincy Adams, then President of the United States, formally began this tremendous undertaking by lifting the first shovelful of earth near Little Falls. In 1831, water was admitted into the first completed division: that section which is now restored between Georgetown and Seneca. Soon afterwards, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company began to encounter financial and legal difficulties. The



Canal at Lock 13.

increased cost and long delays in construction caused by these troubles forced the stockholders to give up the contemplated route beyond Cumberland, where the canal was to cross the Alleghenies and extend to Pittsburgh.

Navigation of the canal was begun as the divisions were completed: first from Georgetown to Seneca (1831); then to Harper's Ferry (1833); to near Hancock, Md., (1839); and finally to Cumberland (1850). Canal boats carrying coal, flour, grains, and lumber were seen on the canal until 1924 when diversion of traffic to the more modern transportation agencies caused its abandonment.

## Canal Dimensions, Structures, and Boats

**Distances and Elevations.**—The length of the canal is 184.5 miles. The total rise, or incline, between Georgetown and Cumberland is approximately 605 feet.

**Dimensions of the Canal.**—The Georgetown level (between Georgetown and Little Falls) is approximately 80 feet wide and 7 feet deep. Above Little Falls (Lock 5) the canal

