



HISTORIC CROMMELIN HOUSE
c. 1630

In the spring of 1831, two colonels of the US Army Engineers, touring the newly completed section of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal from Georgetown to Seneca, disembarked at Lock 20 at Great Falls to stay at the Crommelin House. They described it as "an excellent hotel, a necessary and great accommodation for those who visit this interesting work" (the Canal). The historic Crommelin House, or Great Falls Tavern as it is more popularly known, was the only hotel built by the Canal Company along the 165 miles of Canal. The architecture of the building strikes the visitor as European with its handsome high facade, double chimneys and welcoming doorway. Possibly the style was to compliment the Crommelins of Amsterdam, Holland for whom the building was named. In 1831 the Trustees of the Canal Company "resolved, that the house and grounds at Great Falls be known as Crommelin". From 1831 to 1924, it passed from innkeeper to innkeeper, its prosperity rising and falling with the trade on the Canal.

Following the year 1853, the grounds surrounding the hotel were "invaded" by the US Army Engineers who built the dam, a pump house and conduit pipes to carry drinking water to Washington City. These, with newer auxiliary pipes, are still in use.

The Civil War caused many temporary interruptions but the flow of goods continued up and down the Canal. It was at this time that a California soldier "discovered" gold in a nearby creek. Later, gold mining was carried on in the hills behind the hotel.

In the 1870's and 1880's there was a great upsurge in Canal traffic. These were the "golden years" or the hey-day of the Canal. In a busy 24-hour period, as many as 50 to 100 barges locked through the Georgetown or Cumberland. Mail boats, packet boats, local passenger boats and work barges added to the bustling activity. During these years, the Crommelin House innkeeper rented every available space for travellers. A favorite honeymoon spot, the top floor was called the "honeymoon suite" and the main public room on the ground floor was called the "ballroom", a fancy name perhaps for the fiddling and swinging that went on there. Here, also, were held many club outings, picnics and chicken dinners. After the turn of the century the old hotel slowly declined, finally becoming a refreshment stand. Whether in prosperity or decline, the Crommelin House and the Great Falls area have held a special fascination for the thousands who visit here.

In January 1971, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal became a National Historical Park. With the continued interest of those who made this dream a reality, the park and the Crommelin House are undergoing a happy revival. Today, visitors are welcomed to the Canal museum and the Hospitality and information Room located on the ground floor of this historic building.

Hospitality Room: was the original stone lockhouse built 1829. Built by the Canal Company, and first housed resident engineers supervising canal construction, then the lockkeeper.

Museum wing: added 1830 by Canal Co. for an inn. Public room first floor, second floor rooms for overnight travellers. Built of brick, mortared and scored to resemble stone.

Audio-visual room: built 1830-1831 to furnish quarters for the innkeeper. Originally there was a kitchen in the basement, first floor was parlor, second floor had sleeping quarters.

In 1830-31 the roof of the original lockhouse was raised to conform to the proportions of the larger additions.

The inn was originally named Crommelin House by the Canal Co. board of trustees in honor of an Amsterdam (Holland) family which had contributed financially to the building of the Canal, but became generally known as the Great Falls Tavern.

It was to be the only inn built by the Canal Company and is unique as a canal hotel.

There was a honeymoon suite on the 3rd floor of the north wing. Dances were held in the public room where the museum is now.

The Canal became a National Historical Park in January, 1971.

The garden and picket fence were put in two years ago. They were a project of the Friends of Great Falls Tavern, Inc. The project was aided by a matching grant from the National Geographic Society, and by the work of local garden clubs.

PCMT 1978