

## *The Abner Cloud House*

The house needed rescuing. The oldest original building along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, it had housed generations of millers who supplied flour first for the city of Georgetown on the Potomac, and later for its rapidly growing neighbor, the capital at Washington, D.C. But it had at last fallen victim to the ravages of time and neglect, not to mention hurricanes and vandals. That was 1976. Today, thanks to a happy mixture of Bicentennial spirit and a mutually beneficial arrangement between the National Park Service and a citizens organization, the Abner Cloud House serves as a public resource for research and education.

The rescue operation for the house, which is part of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, began with Chapter III of the Colonial Dames of America. This organization—whose members are descendants of colonial ancestors and work to preserve the traditions of our colonial past and to create popular interest in its history—were looking for an historic house in the District of Columbia to restore as their contribution to the nation's Bicentennial celebration. Their search, aided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, led them to the Abner Cloud property, whose story dates back to the eighteenth century.

It was on October 3, 1795, that Jesse Baily deeded part of a property he owned along the Little Falls Skirting Canal to his brother-in-law, Abner Cloud—perhaps as a wedding gift. The

house with its adjoining mill that Cloud built on this property was well situated for trade next to the growing city of Georgetown and on the banks of the Little Falls Canal—one of the river navigation projects of George Washington's Potomack Company. Later the C & O Canal, begun in 1828, would follow the bed of this canal past the Cloud mill.

With the assistance of local stone masons, and probably using stone from local quarries, Cloud began construction of his house in 1798, completing it in 1801. While it was being built, he and his wife Suzanne probably lived in whatever rooms had been completed until the entire house was finished.

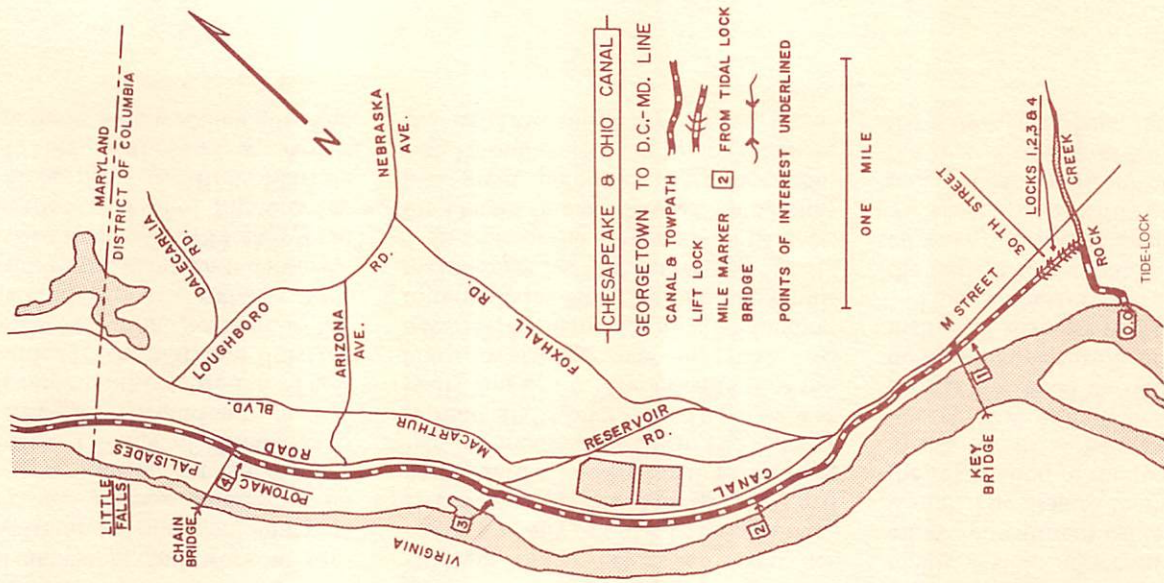
Subsequent occupants of the house also were millers, one of whom, James B. Frizzell, achieved notoriety by his involvement in an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap President Lincoln. Another miller developed what became a locally popular brand of flour—Evermay—at the site. The mill remained active until 1870. By the time the Park Service acquired the site in 1957, it was in ruins and Abner Cloud's house was badly run down. The condition of the house worsened over the next two decades, for there was no NPS funding to remedy the situation until the Colonial Dames became interested.

In spite of the long years of neglect, the Dames found that the Cloud house had great potential for restoration. Solidly built with walls three feet thick, the exterior simplicity of the three-

story structure belies the richness of detail and architectural interest within. A large stone fireplace dominates the ground-floor room that was once the kitchen; carefully crafted wooden mantels and niches ornament the fireplaces on the upper floors, which are reached by a handsomely detailed staircase rising from the ground floor to the attic; and large windows command views of the canal towpath and the Potomac River beyond.

Convinced that Abner Cloud's house exactly suited their purposes, the Dames were able to obtain funding from Congress for the restoration, in cooperation with the Park Service, of the exterior of the house as well as the establishment on the ground floor of an information center—long needed—for the national historical park. Located on Canal Road near Fletcher's Boat House, a Washington landmark, the house is highly visible and convenient to the many recreational users of the C & O Canal. The Dames themselves funded the restoration of the two upper floors to use for their meetings, receptions, library, and exhibit area. The entire project has been carried out with the help and supervision of Park Service historical advisors and technicians.

This joint restoration effort points up the benefit to the public when private citizens and public agencies combine their resources. In this case, not only a much-needed park information center but also a lasting historical legacy to the nation have been the results. ■



The Abner Cloud House  
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Located in the C & O Canal National Historical Park  
 Colonial Dames of America — Headquarters of Chapter III  
 Canal Road and Reservoir Road