

The "Canal Clipper"

The "Canal Clipper" is a barge constructed in 1976 reflecting the lines of the old wooden barges. The hull is a combination of wire mesh and a special type of cement. Unlike barges of 100 years ago, the "Clipper" is designed to carry people and not coal. Other additions not found on the old barges are restroom facilities.

Using the "Canal Clipper" as a backdrop, the staff of the C&O Canal National Historical Park presents vignettes of canal life and activities.

On each trip we perform typical tasks including leading mules, guiding the barge into and out of the lock, working a lock and locking through. We accomplish these tasks in much the same manner as barge workers did during the days of the working canal. We bring you some of the joys, the trials and the experiences of a canaller's life.

Through the traditional use of the mules, locks, the barge and the canal, we hope to share with each of you our love for the canal and our appreciation of the men, women and children who built, maintained and worked on this great waterway.

"Canal Clipper" in 1976

Length 26.5 meters (87 feet)
Beam 3.7 meters (12 feet)
Empty Weight 27.2 metric tons (30 tons)
Cargo Capacity 60-65 people
Construction Materials –
Wood and Ferro-cement
Power Source 2 mules
Average Cruising Speed 3.2 kph (2 mph)

Life on a C&O Barge



National Park Service
C&O Canal National Historical Park

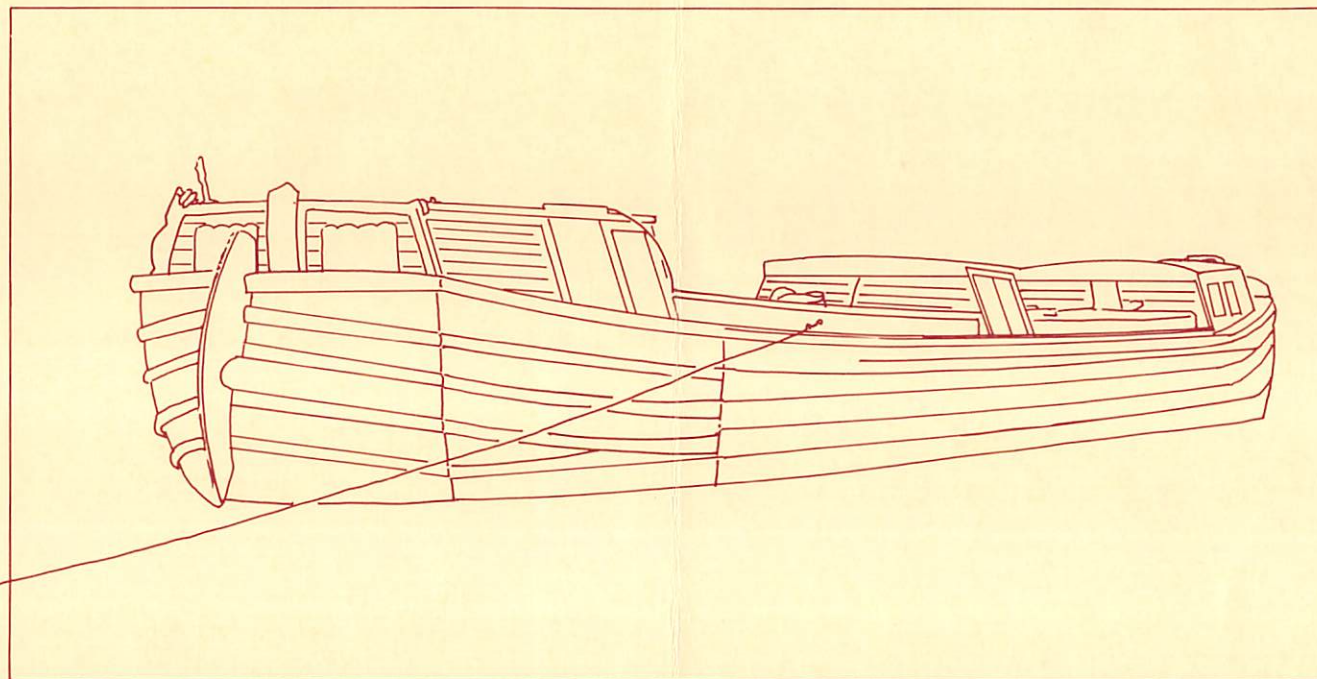
For over 90 years, until 1924, many hundreds of families spent every March through December piloting their wooden barges from Cumberland, Maryland to Georgetown in the District of Columbia. A lot of the romance of boating was lost in the daily routine of moving up and down the old canal.

If you were a man you probably worked on barges all your life. Maybe you started working for your father or perhaps your grandfather. Your whole life revolved around the canal. After many years of guiding mules, handling lines, carefully guiding barges into and out of 74 lift locks, you probably inherited your father's barge and became a barge captain yourself . . . at the ripe age of 25.

As a woman married to a barge captain, you were often expected to follow your husband aboard his barge every March. You cooked, washed and took care of other household chores. In addition, you were expected to put in a full day's work helping pilot the barge. Many of your children were born right here in your cabin . . . some of them died in the same place.

Children, forget about playing games; you had work to do! Before you were 6 years old you did play some, but you were often tied to the deck of the barge to keep you from falling overboard. Having reached the age of 6 or 7, you had to help your parents run the barge. You probably started by helping your older brother or sister lead the mules. As you got older, you became a full time deck hand working an 18 hour shift. School? There just wasn't time. Your parents had to pay their debts, and they needed your help. . . . School? Maybe next year.

Living aboard the barge was far from spacious or comfortable. At the stern of the craft stood a small cabin, usually measuring about 2.7 by 3.7 meters (9 x 12 feet). This was home for families sometimes numbering 9 or more. The 2 room cabin contained all the necessities for survival—



a coal burning stove, 2 to 3 bunks, a table, a small cupboard and enough floor space to sleep those who couldn't fit into the bunks. If they were lucky, the family might have a small house to live in during the winter months; otherwise, they stayed aboard the barge year round.

Families found working on the canal a very hard life. Days were long; work continued through all types of weather. Sickness and death were quite high among the children. Living accommodations were harsh.

While reading or listening to the reminiscences of these people, one soon forgets the harshness and the pain, and begins to feel the special love they had for the canal and their life. As one anonymous author once wrote with great affection, "Only the most inaudible ripple of the

boat in the water, the distant click of mules' feet, the purring of the river, the hum of insects, and the occasional chirp of a bird broke the stillness. The days drifted by as a dream and as I look back it was a very tranquil dream. . . ."

Barge Facts

Barges of the 1880's

Length	28.3 meters (93 feet)
Beam	4.3 meters (14 feet)
Empty Weight	109.7 metric tons (121 tons)
Cargo Capacity	108.8-113.4 metric tons (120-125 tons)

Construction Materials —

Oak and Georgia Pine

Power Source	2-5 mules
Average Cruising Speed	3.2 kph (2 mph)