

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

National Park Service
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Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park



Four Locks: The People in the Neighborhood



From the lock keepers, boatmen, farmers, and merchants to the artists and politicians, the people of Four Locks wove their talents and character into their surroundings creating the tapestry of the Four Locks Community.

Four Locks Residents

“When you came to the Hassett house, it was a happy day. Miss Kate was a special person...a loving and caring person who enjoyed a cultured life.”

Mrs. Hilda Cushwa

Prominent families such as the Prathers and Hassetts laid the foundation of Four Locks. In 1790, James Prather purchased the 548 acres that was to become Four Locks. It was their land the C&O Canal Company purchased to build the canal. In 1905, Thomas and Margaret, “Miss Kate”, Hasset purchased part of this tract bringing a more cultured aspect to the

community. Miss Kate Hassett was a skilled artist and did knife carvings on large tree lichens. Her husband, Thomas, was a County Commissioner, director of the Washington County Museum, Director of the Potomac Edison Company, Vice President of the Clear Spring Bank, vestry of the St. Andrews Episcopal Church, and a purchasing agent for the Canal Company.

Boatmen

Not all boatmen spent their time on canal boats. Listed on the tax records as a boatman, Lewis Fernser was also a carpenter and repaired boats at the drydock at lock 47. He was paid \$254 for 127 days of work. Other

boatmen in the community include J. Irwin, Henry Shaws, Jacob Shaws, David Shaws, and John Mouse. They lived in houses within the community when they were not on the canal and their children attended the local school.



Lock Keepers

Lock keeper James Flynn and his family lived in a house located along the towpath by the Potomac River between locks 47 and 48. His three sons, Joseph, Aloysius, and John also tended the locks. It was common for a lock

keeper who operated more than one lock to enlist the help of his family or hire others. The Flynns had an outdoor brick oven and sold bread to the canallers for 10 cents a loaf. Their house was washed away in the 1936 flood.



The Community

All of these people —postmasters, school teachers, merchants, fathers, mothers, and children—were among the many people who created a community that supported and helped each other. Like most

of us, they had their defeats and triumphs. Even though these families no longer live at Four Locks, their stories of the community and their love for the canal are a lasting legacy.

