

THE HISTORY OF “FOUR LOCKS”

By Jack Sanderson

The history of the “Four Locks” section of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal began with the preparation of a plan for the construction of the canal above Dam #5, prepared by Alfred Cruger, Assistant Engineer, during the winter of 1833-34. In his plan, Cruger located Locks 47, 48, and 49 at the downstream end of a cut that was to be made through Prather’s Neck. He proposed that Lock 50 be located immediately below the point where Licking Creek crossed the canal right-of-way.

On June 16, 1835, Charles Fisk, the resident engineer, reviewed Cruger’s study and its proposals. As a result of this review, important changes were made in the plans for the structures at Prather’s Neck.

Lock 46, which Cruger had located at the Neck, was moved downstream approximately one mile and a third to within six hundred feet of Lock 45. The reason for Fisk’s relocating the lock was stated in the following words: “Lock 46, is now located within 600 feet of Lock 45. Mr. Cruger placed it about one mile and a third higher up at Prather’s Neck. Between the present and the former positions of this lock, (it will be relocated), are the heavy bluffs, in the vicinity of Charles Mill. The reasons for moving this lock down are that it would be impossible upon the lower level to make the canal in consequence of the top of Dam #5 being within two feet of the bottom of that level. It might have been secure were there no culverts, if the precaution had been taken prior to the rising of the water by the Dam to have prepared the foundation of the bank by grubbing, etc. As this was not done, and also as there are at least two culverts necessary, that would be liable to be blown up in very high water, in consequence of the guard banks needed to keep the river out, there can be no doubt as to the propriety of raising the level. By doing so we have a canal with banks entirely above the highest water, secure against breaches and with the culverts passing under it securely.”¹

In dealing with Locks 47, 48, and 49, Fisk reported that he had sited these within a few feet of positions selected by Cruger at the lower or downstream section of the cut at Prather’s Neck. However, a change in the alignment of the canal was made. Cruger had provided that the canal should avoid a stone barn on the Prather Farm. Fisk changed the line so that it ran through the barn site. He based his decision on the fact that, while Cruger’s line would save the barn, the yard would be almost completely destroyed. In addition, the avoiding of the barn would interfere with the direction of the canal at a point where it would be desirable “in consequence of the four locks that are here crowded together to have as direct a line as possible.”

Throughout the almost ten year construction period from 1833-42, there was widespread labor unrest especially during the later 1830’s, a period of economic crisis and social unrest generally throughout the country. A second hindrance was the increasing cost of construction arising out of the inflation of the decade, the high cost of labor, and engineering difficulties arising out of the nature of canal building.

¹ Fisk to Commissioner Bender, June 16, 1835, records C&O Canal Co., National Archives.

In the Four Locks area, specifically, the appointment of Charles Fisk as Chief Engineer for the canal proved unfortunate. Mr. Fisk was a perfectionist in his ideas regarding canal construction and his insistence on certain building techniques and use of certain types of building materials added huge sums to construction costs. The canal could not afford these costs at this stage of its growth and during this period of our nation's development.

The difficulty in obtaining good quality building stone in the area west of Dam #5 was also an important factor in hampering construction of locks and important buildings needed for the effective operation of the canal. Makeshift measures, such as reducing the number of locks and using chemically treated wood in lieu of building stone for lock construction was not a satisfactory substitute for the absence of proper building materials.

The continued inflation in labor costs and raw materials added problems wrought by the inflationary spirals of the later 1830s. Several contractors underestimated construction costs in bidding on contracts for construction by as much as 15% and consequently, had to default on their contracts. Labor unrest was shown in the strikes, slow downs, and riots taking place along the whole line of the canal after 1836.

Of primary importance to the story of the construction of the canal was a controversy between the two engineers, Purcell and Fisk, over specifications for component structures especially the locks. This controversy was not limited to the locks under discussion, but they were among those affected by the requirements that were involved.

Early in 1835, Thomas Purcell, a canal engineer, prepared a revision of the 1829 specification for locks. The changes were limited, almost entirely concerned with the foundations. Purcell's suggested change was designed to remedy the outstanding defect that had appeared among some of the locks that had been in use for sometime. That defect was the narrowing of the lock's passage, or chamber, due to the inward tipping of the lock's walls. Fisk attacked Purcell's modification as leaving the basic cause of the narrowing of the lock chambers was due, in large part, to the action of water and frost upon the walls of the structures..."

Purcell's recommendations were not accepted by the company and those of Fisk were. Within six months Purcell resigned his position with the company in disgust.

The financial panic which swept our country in 1837 brought chaos to the canal in the form of worker unrest at the Paw Paw Tunnel where contractor Lee Montgomery was pushing tunnel construction with a force of over 400 men. The poor economic conditions put contractors along the canal in a very bad position. Many contractors were unable to pay the workers for prolonged periods, therefore, strikes and work slow downs followed.

In May 1838, violence occurred at Prather's Neck where workers began to destroy work they had completed on the locks in the area to protest non-payment of their wages. The immediate cause of workers unrest was the refusal of David Lyles, the contractor for Sections 205-206 of the canal (the Four Locks) to the wages of workers on these sections. Lyles was involved in a dispute with the board of directors of the canal company over fulfilling the demands of his

contract. The company refused \$4,000 which it had withheld from Lyles pending completion of the contract and his money was used to make partial payments to the workers. The canal directors now called upon local militia to protect canal property and work operations and were refused. The militia companies stated that when called out to suppress past worker disturbances the state of Maryland and the canal company had refused to pay the troops for the services they had rendered.

The area in which "Four Locks" is located is in a portion of the Clear Spring district of Washington County, Maryland. The principal town in the area is Clear Spring, located about four miles east of the "Four Locks" area of the canal. The country in this part of Maryland is made up of fertile farmland, raising a rich variety of field crops such as, wheat, corn, oats, and barley. Cattle raising and dairying are also important agricultural activities of this region.

The early settlers were, as in other sections of Washington County, primarily of German descent and came into the area in ever increasing numbers from Pennsylvania after the Revolutionary War. A sprinkling of old English families and French settlers also occupied the area.

To encourage rapid settlement, the state of Maryland offered free land grants to those officers and enlisted men who had fought in the Continental Army. The size of the grant was based upon the length of service of the individual as well as upon the rank held in the Army during the War. While members of the professional classes, such as doctors and lawyers, as well as large planters, farmed in the area as slaveholders, most of the farmers may be described as using free labor, either members of their own family or workers hired locally during the spring planting time and at the harvest period in the autumn.

The principal towns in this section of Maryland such as Hagerstown, Sharpsburg, and Williamsport, had at this time been linked for years by the National Road (the first great turn-pike road built in our country). The towns had prospered as service and supply points for the farmers of the regions even prior to the American Revolution.

Lockhouse 49, located on Section #206 of the C & O Canal was built (according to canal company records) to serve as the lockhouse for Locks 47-50, the Four Locks, which cut across Prather's Neck. The contract for construction of this lockhouse was let in the summer of 1837 to a Jesse Schofield. In August 1837 work was commenced on the house and the work was completed in February 1839. Total cost for completion of the lockhouse was \$1,447.50.

Lockhouse 49 is comparable in construction to the brick lockhouses built at the lower end of the canal in the Palisades District. I examined the house recently and it is very well constructed. I would say that it is one of the finest examples of the lockhouses still remaining along the canal.

During the years of canal operation, Four Locks was a thriving section of the canal containing a mule barn, warehouses, stores, and residences for canal personnel who lived and worked in the area.

The actual construction of Locks 47-50 between 1835-1837 took place at a time of severe financial trouble for the canal company. In 1837, a financial panic took place in our country

which in many areas brought economic and commercial activities to a virtual standstill. The immediate cause of the panic was failure of numerous banks which had bankrupted themselves by overextending monetary loans to individuals and businesses throughout the country without returning adequate cash reserves to meet depositor demands for daily operations.

The Hassett House, located on the east side of the Four Locks Road and about four miles west of the village of Clear Spring, MD, was built as a dwelling house in the year 1836 by William Hassett, the District Engineer for the C&O Canal in the Hancock Division of the canal. Mr. Hassett had two sons, one of whom inherited the property upon his father's death. Although the present house has only 3 ½ acres of ground around it, the property once was part of a large farm operated by the Hassetts at this location. The Hassetts also owned and farmed two other farms located inland from the canal in this area.

The house is a very fine example of a mid-nineteenth century farm home. The house is built of native stone approximately two stories high. It has two attached one-story porches and a two-story open porch attached to the south side. It has frame double hunt windows and a gable roof covered with under locking asphalt shingles with galvanized gutters and down spouts. The house has a full basement with stone foundation walls, dirt floors, hand-hewn logs for floor joints, and a large stone fireplace. On the first floor the house is divided into four rooms, two pantries, and a large connecting hallway. The rooms consist of a family room, den, dining room, and kitchen. The dining room has plastered walls and a wide pine floor. The dining room also contains an old fireplace with a wooden mantle. The kitchen also contains an old fireplace which has been "walled-up". Ceiling heights on the first floor are approximately 10 feet.

The second floor contains four bedrooms and a bath. Room walls are of plaster lath construction and the floors are of pine. The master bedroom has a built-in fireplace. Presently, this property is occupied by District Ranger Michael Mastrangelo and his family as a dwelling place.

After Mr. Thomas Hassett's death his wife lived in the house and after her death it passed through several hands until purchased by the federal government for the National Park Service in 1973. A copy of the deed selling the property to the United States is included with this report.

The Ankeney or Anders Property as it is sometimes known is a small wooden house located on a triangular piece of land across from Lockhouse 49, and adjacent to Lock 49 in the "Four Locks" section of the canal. The property stands on a piece of land granted to William Hassett, C&O Canal Engineer, in an 1870 lease (100 years) by the President of the Canal Company. Little is known about the house except that Mr. Donald Ankeney, the present owner, believes it was built by an ancestor of his. Mr. Ankeney inherited the property from his mother who was a niece of Mrs. Thomas Hassett and she inherited it upon her aunt's death in 1941.

As indicated, the property belonged to the Hassett family for many years. The house itself is a simple wooden cottage and has no outstanding features except for a small wooden porch across the building's front. The United States desires to acquire the property for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park but funds are not available to purchase the property at this time.

The house is unoccupied and boarded up at the present time. Several years ago Mr. Ankeney allowed a local couple to use the house during the summer months and serve as caretakers on a rent free basis.

Received for Record May 17, 1973
at 2:00 o'clock P.M. Liber 56

WARRANTY DEED

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park

Tract No. 76-111

THIS DEED, made this 16th day of May 1973, by and between Arthur J. Weber and Elton D. Weber, his wife. Grantor(s), and the United States of America, Grantee.

WITNESSETH, that the Grantor(s) for and in consideration of the sum of Fifty-Two Thousand Five Hundreds Dollars (\$52,500.00) the receipt and adequacy of which is hereby acknowledged, do(es) hereby grant and convey, unto the United States of America, and its assigns, a fee simple title, including all the right, title estate and interest of the said Grantor(s) in and to any streets, alleys, ways, watercourses, strips, gores, accretions, railroad rights of way or strips of land abutting, adjacent, adjoining, or contiguous to or traversing in and to the following described land(s):

TRACT NO. 76-111

All that certain tract or parcel of land lying and situate in the Fifteenth Election District, County of Washington, Maryland, on the East side of the Four Locks Road, being more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at a point in the Neck Road at the end of 110.00 feet in the seventh or North 30 degree 20' East, 405.11 feet line of Parcel No. 1 in a deed to the grantors herein from Henry F. Starliper and Hazel L. Starliper, his wife, dated August 14, 1962, and recorded in Liber 383, Folio 489, in the land records of Washington County, Maryland, and running thence with said Neck Road by the first of eight (8) lines of division now made South 55 degree 04' West 46.03 feet to a spike in the center of the macadam roadway, thence leaving the road, North 63 degree 18' West 181.16 feet to a planted stone, thence North 5 degree 11' East 153.53 feet to a planted stone, thence North 7 degree 18' East 194.35 feet to a spike in a cleft rock marked by an iron pin, thence South 87 degree 07' East 182.53 feet to an iron pin 3 feet East of an old foundation wall, thence North 7 degree 05' East 321.15 feet to a planted stone, thence South 80 degree 10' East 134.33 feet to a spike in the center of the Four Locks Road thence with said road South 6 degree 18' West 157.13 feet to a spike in the center of the road at the northwest corner of a parcel of land conveyed to Frederick Ray Hart by Henry F. Starliper and wife, by deed dated June 28, 1957, and recorded in

Liber 324, Folio 586, among the land records of Washington County, Maryland, and running thence with the center of said Four Locks Road and with the fourth and fifth lines of said Hart deed South 5 degree 52' West 156.80 feet to a point, and South 14 degree 42' West 161.30 feet to a point in the center of the road, being also the beginning of the Hart deed, thence by a line constructed perpendicular to the aforesaid 7th line of the grantor's deed South 59 degree 40' East 7.93 feet to intersect said 7th line, thence with a portion of said line reversed and with the lands of the National Park Service, C & O Canal South 30 degree 20' West 249.38 feet to the place of beginning, containing three and forty-nine hundredths (3.49) acres of land, more or less. Being all of the same land by a Deed dated March 4, 1963 and recorded among the Land Records of Washington County in Liber 390, folio 529 was conveyed by Bernhard G. Charles and Janet H. Charles, his wife, to the said Arthur J. Weber and Elton D. Weber, his wife.

STATE OF Maryland, COUNTY OF Allegany, to wit:

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT on this 16th day of May, 1973 before me, the subscriber, a Notary Public of the State of Maryland in and for Allegany County, aforesaid, personally appeared Arthur J. Weber and Elton D. Weber, his wife, and acknowledged the aforesaid deed to be their respective act and deed.

AS WITNESS my hand and Notarial Seal.

My Commission Expires July 1, 1974

/s/ Genevieve Yonkers Schaffer
Notary Public

NOTARIAL SEAL

This instrument was prepared for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, by /s/ Roy L. Leeper admitted to practice by the Court of Appeals of Maryland on March 22, 1944.

THIS tract of land is acquired by the United States of America for the use of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

AND the Grantor(s) do hereby release, remise and quitclaim all their right, title and interest in and to all that area of land located between the high watermark and low watermark of any navigable river or stream adjacent and adjoining to said land.

TOGETHER with all, every and singular the buildings and improvements thereon and all rights, hereditaments, easements and appurtenances, rights, alleys, ways, waters, watercourses, liberties, privileges, and any means of ingress and egress thereto belonging, or in anywise appertaining.

TO HAVE AND HOLD the above described tract, unto the United States of America and its assigns, in fee simple forever; SUBJECT, however, to existing easements for public roads, public highways, public utilities, railroads and pipelines, including easements and right of ways

recorded in Liber 233, folio 58; Liber 233, folio 690; Liber 178, folio 621; and Liber 338, folio 580; rights of others in property lying within Four Locks Road; covenants and restrictions recorded in Liber 390, folio 529.

AND the said Grantor(s) warrant that the land herein conveyed is owned by them in fee simple, and is free from any mortgage, lien, judgment, or any other encumbrance whatsoever, and hereby agree to warrant and forever defend, all and singular, the title to the land herein and hereby conveyed to the United States of America, and its assigns against the claims of any and all persons whomsoever and that said Grantor(s) will execute such other and further assurances thereof as may be requisite.

AS WITNESS the due execution hereof by the aforementioned Grantor(s).

WITNESS:

/s/ G. Y. Schaffer

/s/ Arthur J. Weber (SEAL)

/s/ G. Y. Schaffer

/s/ Elton D. Weber (SEAL)

_____ (SEAL)