

Appendix BPresident John Quincy Adams's Reminiscences  
of Canal Ground-Breaking Ceremonies, July 4, 1828

"4th. Independence Day. Chesapeake and Ohio Canal commenced. Between seven and eight this morning I went with my son John to the Union Hotel, at Georgetown, where were assembling the President and Directors of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company; the Mayors and Committees of the corporations of Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria; the heads of Departments, foreign Ministers, and a few other invited persons. About eight o'clock a procession was formed, preceded by a band of music, to the wharf, where we embarked in the steamboat Surprise; followed by two others, we proceeded to the entrance of the Potomac Canal, and up that in canal-boats to its head--near which, just within the bounds of the State of Maryland, was the spot selected for breaking the ground. The President of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, with a very short address, delivered to me the spade, with which I broke the ground, addressing the surrounding auditory, consisting perhaps of two thousand persons. It happened that at the first stroke of the spade it met immediately under the surface a large stump of a tree; after repeating the stroke three or four times without making any impression, I threw off my coat, and, resuming the spade, raised a shovelful of the earth, at which a general shout burst forth from the surrounding multitude, and I completed my address, which occupied about fifteen minutes. The President and Directors of the Canal, the Mayors and Committees of the three Corporations, the heads of Departments, members of Congress, and others, followed, and shovelled up a wheelbarrow-full of earth. Mr. Gales, the Mayor of Washington, read also a short address, and was answered extemporaneously by Andrew Stewart, the Director of the Company from Pennsylvania. After a short repose under a tent on the banks of the canal, we returned by the canal-boats to the landing, and thence in the steamboat, where, as we re-descended the Potomac, the company partook of a light collation upon the deck. I was asked for a toast, and gave, "The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal: perseverance." Mr. Mercer and Mr. Rush also gave toasts.

About half past two I was landed at Davidson's wharf, where my carriage was waiting, and, after taking Mr. Rush home, I returned to mine. The Marshals of the day escorted me home on horseback, came in and took a glass of wine, and took leave with my thanks for their attentions. The day was uncommonly cool for the season, with a fresh breeze, and towards evening there was a gentle shower. The exertion of speaking in the open air made me hoarse, and with the anxiety, more oppressive than it should have been, to get well through the day, exhausted and fatigued me, so that I was disqualified for thought or action the remainder of the day. As has happened to me whenever I have had a part to perform in the presence of multitudes, I got through awkwardly, but without gross and palpable failure. The incident that chiefly relieved me was the obstacle of the stump, which met and resisted the spade, and my casting off my coat to overcome the resistance. It struck the eye and fancy of the spectators more than all the flowers of rhetoric in my speech, and diverted their attention from the stammering and hesitation of a deficient memory. Mr. Vaughan, Chevalier Bangeman Huygens, Barons Krudener and Stackelberg, and several other members of the Corps Diplomatique were present, and thought it, perhaps, a strange part for a President of the United States to perform.

Governor Kent, of Maryland, was there, as one of the directors of the company, and compared the ceremony to that said to be annually observed in China."

Excerpt from Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, vol. 8, pp. 49-50.