

Old Lock Pump House  
Chesapeake and Delaware Canal  
Maryland

Prepared by  
Dr. M. H. Nelligan  
Resource Studies Advisor  
Northeast Region  
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Old Lock Pump House, Chesapeake and Delaware Canal,

Maryland

Location: Chesapeake City, Cecil County

Ownership: Secretary Robert S. MacNamara, Department of Defense, Washington, D. C.

Significance

The Old Lock Pump House at Chesapeake City, Maryland, is unique in that it is still largely intact and the heavy machinery in it has hardly been changed since its installation over a century ago. Long preserved and made available to the public by the Corps of Engineers, the Lock Pump House has the added distinction of being probably one of the first engineering monuments to be recognized as such in this country.

The Old Lock Pump House was built in 1837 to house a steam engine, boilers, and pumps--the latter being used to replace the water lost in opening and closing a nearby canal lock of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. By this time the canal, begun in 1824 and linking the lower part of the Delaware River to the upper part of Chesapeake Bay, had been in operation for over six years. As traffic increased, this pump proved inadequate, and in 1850 it was replaced with the present lift wheel, driven first by one steam engine, to which another was teamed in 1854. The complete installation consists of the great lift wheel which is 37 feet in diameter and capable of pumping 20,000 gallons (or 130 tons) per minute to a height of 14 feet, two steam engines built by Merrick and Sons of Philadelphia (one in 1851, the

other in 1854), and related valves and ring gears. The wheel is housed in a stone well 10'8" wide and 22 feet deep, into which originally water was led through a tunnel to nearby Back Creek. The other dimensions of the installation are equally impressive; for example, the total height of the engine is 19'3", and the diameter of the fly-wheel is 18 feet. The boilers, the last set of three sets, are gone, as is the canal lock which the pump supplied with water. Otherwise, the buildings and machinery remain intact, in excellent condition.

#### Condition of the Site

The Corps of Engineers deserves the highest commendation for recognizing the preeminent historical significance of the pump complex and preserving it virtually intact since it went out of use in 1926. It is also to the credit of the Corps that this unique engineering survival has been maintained in good condition over the years and made available to a small, steady stream of visitors.

Now, however, the approved and planned widening of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal scheduled to be under construction in 1965, makes it necessary for the Corps to choose one of two alternatives:

1. Allow the machinery to go to a museum, such as the Smithsonian Institution or the Ford Museum at Dearborn and tear down the Pump House, or
2. Move the complete installation--building and machinery to a nearby site. Of the two, the latter is, of course, the preferable course of action since it would keep the building and machinery

intact. Corps officials are of the opinion that technically the removal would be relatively easy.

References: Greville Bathe, "The Left Wheel Pumping Plant of the C&D Canal," An Engineer's Miscellany (Philadelphia, 1938); Robert M. Vogel, "Some Current Considerations Regarding the Steam Pumping Plant of the C&D Canal, Chesapeake City, Maryland," Special Report, Smithsonian Institution, 17 April, 1964.

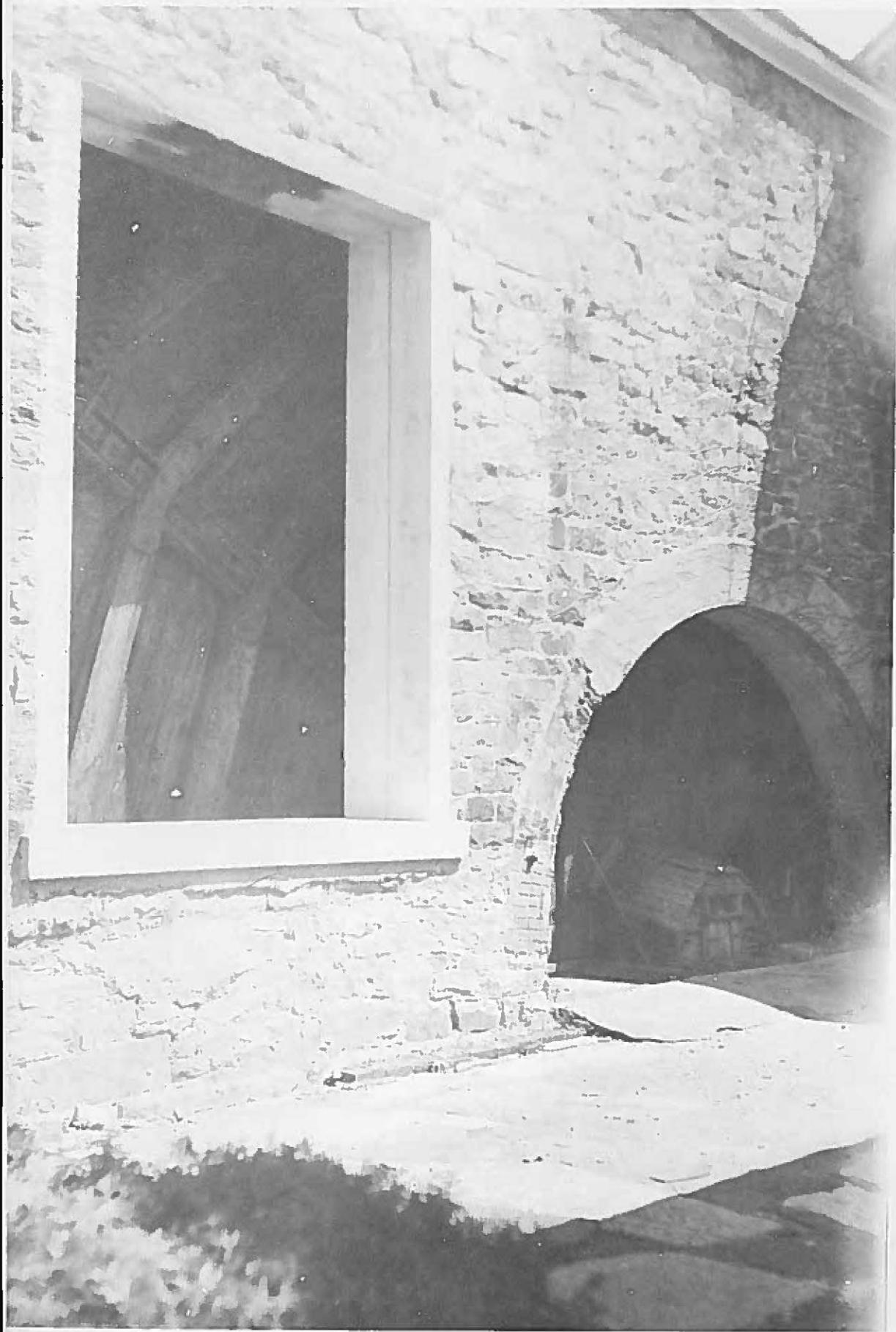
The Old Lock Pump House,  
Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, Maryland

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution



The Lift Wheel, Old Lock Pump House

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution



Steam Engine, Old Lock Pump House

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution

