

C&O CANAL

TRAIL TO HISTORY

SHEPHERDSTOWN • SHARPSBURG
WILLIAMSPORT



canaltrust.org

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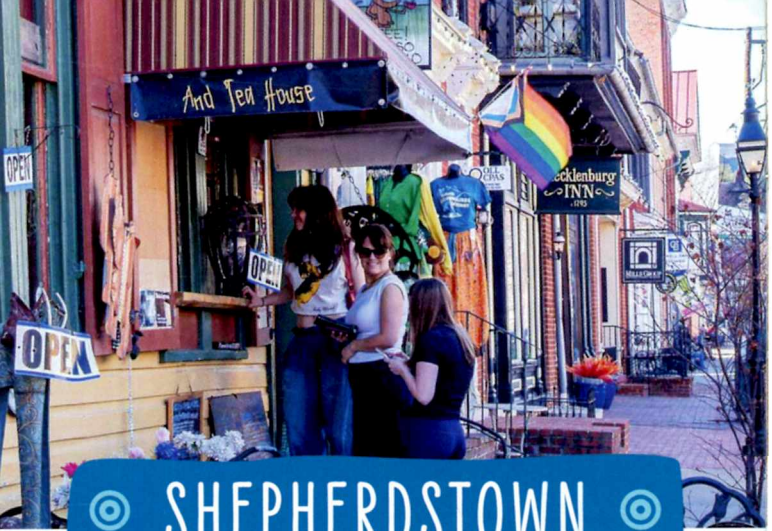
Take a journey into the rich history of our Canal Towns along the C&O Canal towpath. Explore our region in your car, ride a bike, raft the river, or take a leisurely stroll in our historic towns. Visit our historical parks and learn about our region's varied history. Pioneer settlement, transportation innovations, struggles for freedom—it all happened here.

Visit, explore, and enjoy!



Between **Shepherdstown** and **Williamsport**, the Potomac River and the C&O Canal follow a 25-mile serpentine path through an area of pastoral landscapes and rich, historical heritage. Bustling canal construction and trade helped form all three of these towns, but remembrances of September 1862 loom larger today. Today, along with battlefields, aqueducts and historic houses, tourists in this region can also take in contemporary drama, fine dining, and some of the best local ice cream in the Mid-Atlantic.





SHEPHERDSTOWN

As you near Shepherdstown from the east along the C&O Canal, you will pass Boteler's Ford, or Pack Horse Ford, an easy crossing of the Potomac River during low or moderate water levels. This area saw a lot of action during the Civil War. Stonewall Jackson's troops made the crossing in September 1862 on their way from Harpers Ferry to the Battle of Antietam. After that watershed event, when Robert E. Lee's army retreated back into what was then Virginia, the shelling and shooting across the river here were described by Confederate General A.P. Hill as "the most terrible slaughter that this war has yet witnessed."

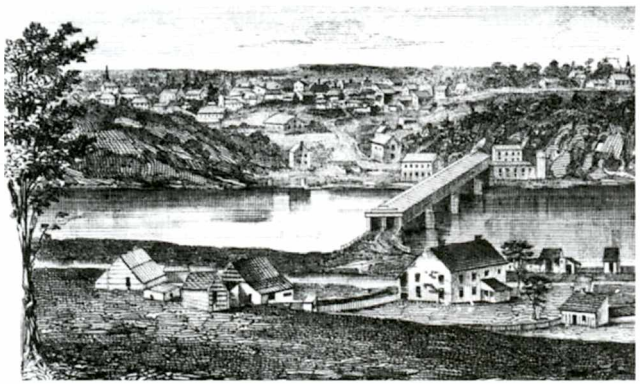
This crossing and the ensuing battle nearby provided the closing chapter of Lee's 1862 Maryland Campaign. Local activists are working to preserve the ruins, vistas, and interesting geological formations along the West Virginia shore of the Potomac and have the area designated as a National Battlefield.



Bridgeport Lock



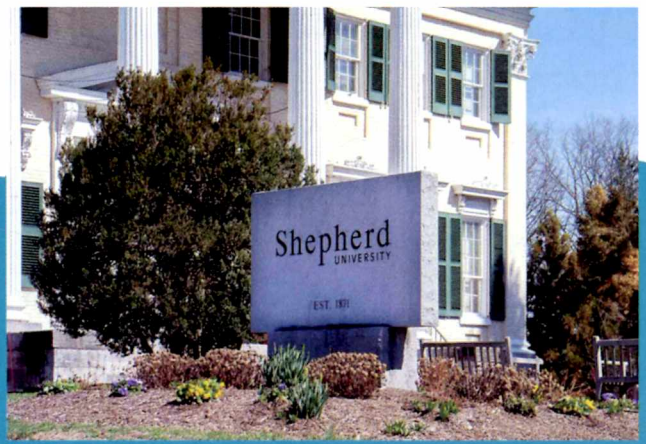
Ferry Hill Plantation



Shepherdstown Covered Bridge

The Civil War left its mark in the town as well. During those bloody days of September 1862, it was transformed into a vast hospital, as sick and wounded soldiers filled churches, businesses, and private homes. Wander around Elmwood Cemetery, and you'll see the graves of fallen Confederates. Across the river, Ferry Hill Plantation overlooks Shepherdstown and the C&O Canal. It was the home of Henry Kyd Douglas, the author of one of the war's most colorful first-person accounts, *I Rode with Stonewall*.

And Shepherdstown's story didn't start at the Civil War. It is one of the two oldest towns in West Virginia. A busy warehouse, a cement plant, and the grain trade made it one of the busiest towns along the C&O Canal. In a town park high on a hill overlooking the Potomac stands a monument to James Rumsey, an early canal engineer and business partner with George Washington.



Shepherd University

Working on the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, Rumsey invented what many believe was the first steam-powered boat, though it would be Robert Fulton who later made the technology commercially viable.

Today's Shepherdstown is a lively college town and cultural center, and you can enjoy its restaurants and lodging or visit its interesting retail district that includes a bicycle shop and a historical museum. In July, the Contemporary American Theater Festival offers premier performances of drama by prominent American playwrights.



German Street

BIKE ACCESS

Shepherdstown lies across the Potomac River from the C&O Canal towpath. A ramp connects the towpath with a broad sidewalk across the river. Continue for 0.7 miles, turn left on W. German Street and you will arrive downtown.

POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food, bike rental, other services, and Shepherdstown's vibrant cultural calendar, visit www.shepherdstownvisitorscenter.com

Boteler's Ford and Battle of Shepherdstown site. Undeveloped historic sites two miles east of downtown on River Road.

The Entler Hotel and Museum, 129 E. German Street. The 1786 hotel houses the town's historical museum along with period artifacts, furnishings, and documents. www.historicshepherdstown.com/

Ferry Hill Plantation, 16500 Shepherdstown Pike. Overlooks Shepherdstown and the Potomac River. The home of Confederate officer and author Henry Kyd Douglas. Grounds are open but house is closed to the public.

The Little House, 120 N. Princess Street. Used as a Shepherd College teacher training project.

Mecklenburg Tobacco Warehouse, 215 N. Princess Street. Oldest tobacco facility in West Virginia (1790).

Outdoor recreation includes bicycle and boat rentals, bird walks, farm markets, and more. www.shepherdstownvisitorscenter.com

Rumsey Monument and Park, 206 N. Mill Street. A monument to James Rumsey, who invented the steamboat and operated it on the Potomac near Shepherdstown. The park overlooks the Potomac.

Sheetz Building, 101 W. German Street. The Sheetz family manufactured guns and stocks from before the American Revolution to the 1830s and ran a tavern from 1810 to 1820. They manufactured gun stocks for the armory at Harpers Ferry.

Shepherdstown Visitor Center, 100 German Street. Tourist information in one of the Shepherdstown's most unusual structures is a visitor center in the middle of the street. Through the years, it served as a market house, Odd Fellows hall, firehouse, and the town library.



SHARPSBURG

Sharpsburg lies two or three miles off the C&O Canal, depending from which point you measure along this bend in the canal and river. Founded in 1763, Sharpsburg is the oldest town in Washington County, Maryland. Despite being a slight distance away from the towpath, it is still considered a Canal Town because of the trade and employment that the C&O Canal brought to Sharpsburg after arriving in 1835.

Before the canal arrived, Sharpsburg's Main Street was part of the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road, a common route used to travel from Pennsylvania to South Carolina, and it saw troops march through town during the French and Indian War in the 1750s. Like Shepherdstown, Sharpsburg was settled by German and English farmers and merchants, and its small size belies the fact that George Washington once considered it a possible site for the nation's capital.



Antietam National Battlefield



Tolson's Chapel



Antietam National Cemetery Chapel

Sharpsburg was greatly impacted by the Civil War. September 17, 1862, provided one great interruption in Sharpsburg's peaceful history when it became the site of the Battle of Antietam during Confederate General Robert E. Lee's first invasion into the north. During that bloodiest day in American history, 40,000 Confederates faced off against 87,000 Union troops led by General George B. McClellan. Neither side ended the day with a clear victory, and the battle resulted in more than 23,000 troops dead, wounded, or missing.

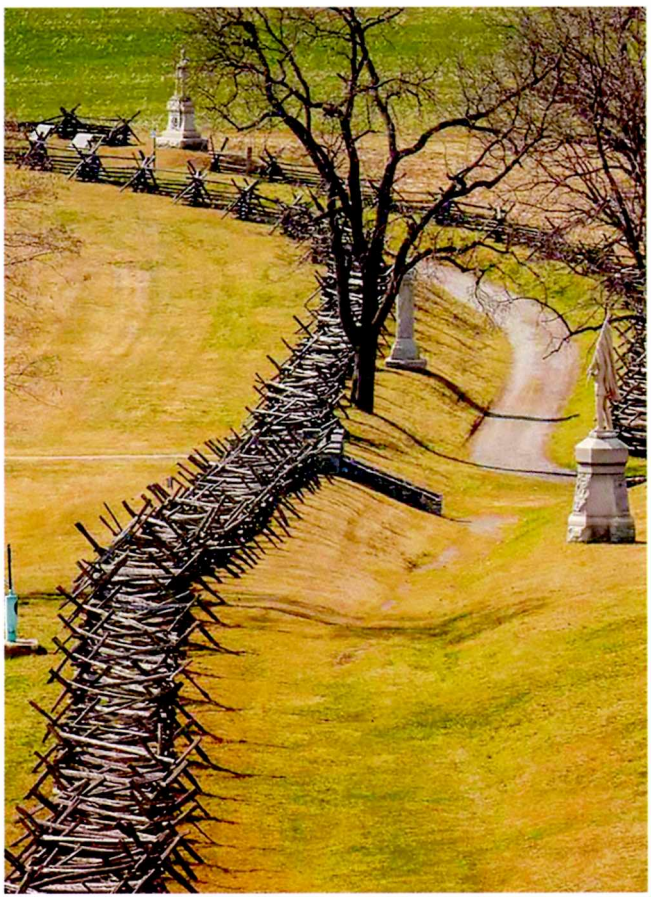


Ferry Hill

After the battle, McClellan refused to pursue Lee's army as it retreated across the Potomac. President Lincoln believed this inaction delayed an end to the war, and he soon fired McClellan. Lincoln was, however, emboldened enough by Lee's retreat to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. The Civil War hence became a fight to end slavery—not merely a battle to preserve the Union.

Tolson's Chapel served as a school for 18 African American students beginning in 1868, just four years after Maryland abolished slavery in 1864. Twelve of the students were formerly enslaved people.

Today, Sharpsburg looks very similar to the way it did in the 1800s, with many of the same buildings lining Main Street. Antietam National Battlefield Visitor Center lies just outside town, and there you can pick up a map for a hilly but beautiful ride around the battlefield.



Antietam National Battlefield

POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food and other services, visit www.sharpsburgmd.com

Antietam National Battlefield. Site of the 1862 Civil War battle, the bloodiest day in American history. The visitor center has films and exhibits. The battlefield has walking trails, driving or riding tours, and a National Cemetery. Guided tours are available. www.nps.gov/anti

Hagerstown Model Railroad Museum, 17230 Shepherdstown Pike. Open for special events or by appointment. www.antietamstation.com

Killiansburg Cave, C&O Canal mile marker 75.7. Sharpsburg residents used the cave as a refuge during the Battle of Antietam.

Newcomer House, 18422 Shepherdstown Pike. Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area Visitor Center and exhibits. A former mill complex built in the 1780s. www.heartofthecivilwar.org/newcomer-house

Pry House, Civil War medicine exhibits, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike. Served as hospital and military headquarters during the Battle of Antietam. www.civilwarmed.org/pry/plan

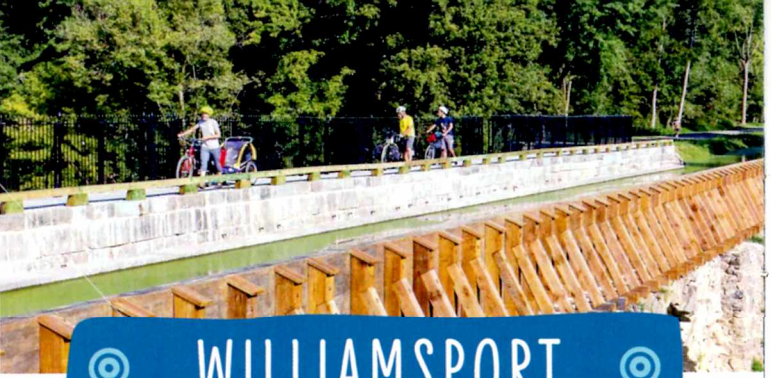
Tolson's Chapel, 111 E. High Street. 1866 African American church that served as a Freedmen's Bureau School after the Civil War. Tours available by appointment. www.tolsonschapel.org/

The Upper Potomac in the Civil War, 51 paintings by noted artist Garnet Jex, Sharpsburg Historical Society, 101 Main Street, by appointment only. Contact 301-992-9767.



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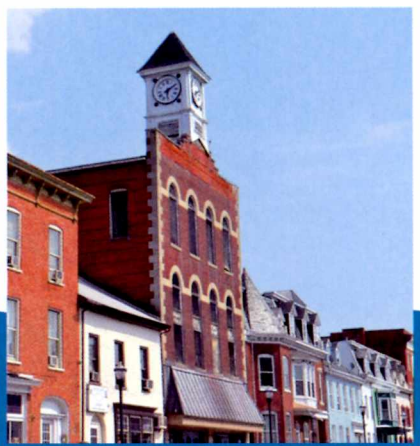
From Snyders Landing (mile marker 76.6), take Snyders Landing Road for 1.5 miles and turn left on W. Main Street. From Shepherdstown, take Shepherdstown Pike north for four miles to get to Sharpsburg.



WILLIAMSPORT

Williamsport lies at the halfway point between Georgetown and Cumberland on the C&O Canal. Its location between the Potomac River and Conococheague Creek made it a natural crossroad for Native Americans, fur traders, and European settlers. Williamsport was settled in the late 1700s, and the arrival of the C&O Canal brought both benefits and misfortunes to the town in 1834. The coal trade and other commerce boomed, bringing new businesses and prosperity. The town's population grew, and new warehouses, sawmills, and factories sprang up. However, the cholera epidemics and labor riots that were problems elsewhere along the canal were especially devastating in Williamsport.

Fords, ferries, and pontoon bridges across the Potomac at Williamsport made this one of the most important river crossings during the Civil War. In 1861, on a hill that still bears his name, future Union General Abner Doubleday placed an artillery battery to guard against Confederate invasions into Maryland. Stonewall Jackson's troops crossed the river here in 1862 on their way to invade Harpers Ferry.



Downtown Williamsport



Lockhouse 44 at Williamsport

A major battle was barely averted in 1863 when high water blocked General Lee's Confederates from retreating into Virginia following the Battle of Gettysburg. As Union troops skirmished with the rebels and prepared for battle, the water at last subsided enough for hasty construction of a pontoon bridge that would carry Lee's men to safety. Life in Williamsport was greatly disrupted during this time, since troops from both sides used almost every building in town as a hospital.

Williamsport is home to an impressive collection of canal and related nineteenth-century technology. The town boasts a lockhouse and working lock, a lift bridge, a turning basin, and a trolley barn. Williamsport's Bollman bridge is the only structure of that type along the C&O Canal and one of the few remaining anywhere.

In 2019, the Conococheague Aqueduct was fully restored and re-watered, allowing visitors to paddle across or take an interpretive boat ride. It is the second longest aqueduct and the only fully functional one in the Park. It had a turbulent history during the Civil War. The Union Army tried to destroy it to prevent Confederate troops from escaping through Williamsport after the Battle of Antietam. Confederate troops later damaged the aqueduct in an attempt to disrupt the Union's transport of coal.

Today, along with visits to town restaurants and shops, you can explore the Cushwa Basin and check out the view from Doubleday Hill. Visit Williamsport during its annual C&O Canal Days to see a welding demonstration, check out the interior of Lockhouse 44, explore the trolley barn, and experience town festivities.

BIKE ACCESS

Cross at the lift bridge or the Bollman bridge at Salisbury Street. From there, it is just a short walk or ride up Potomac or Salisbury Street to downtown Williamsport.

POINTS OF INTEREST

For information on lodging, food and other services, visit www.williamsportmd.gov

Byron Memorial Park, E. Potomac Street. Enjoy all-inclusive playground equipment, wellness equipment, a swimming pool, and seasonal community events.

C&O Canal sites. Several prominent historic features are just yards away from downtown Williamsport along the C&O Canal, including the restored and working Conococheague Aqueduct, the Bollman bridge, the railroad lift bridge, the Cushwa Basin, the power plant dam, and Lock 44.

C&O Canal Visitor Center, 205 W Potomac Street. Housed in the former Cushwa coal and brick warehouse. Historical exhibits and an 1890s replica boat ride. www.nps.gov/choh/planyourvisit/williamsportvisitorcenter.htm

Doubleday Hill Monument and Riverview Cemetery, W. Salisbury Street and S. Commerce Street. Historic cemetery, where the town's founder is interred and Civil War cannons honor General Abner Doubleday. Overlooks the town and the Potomac River.

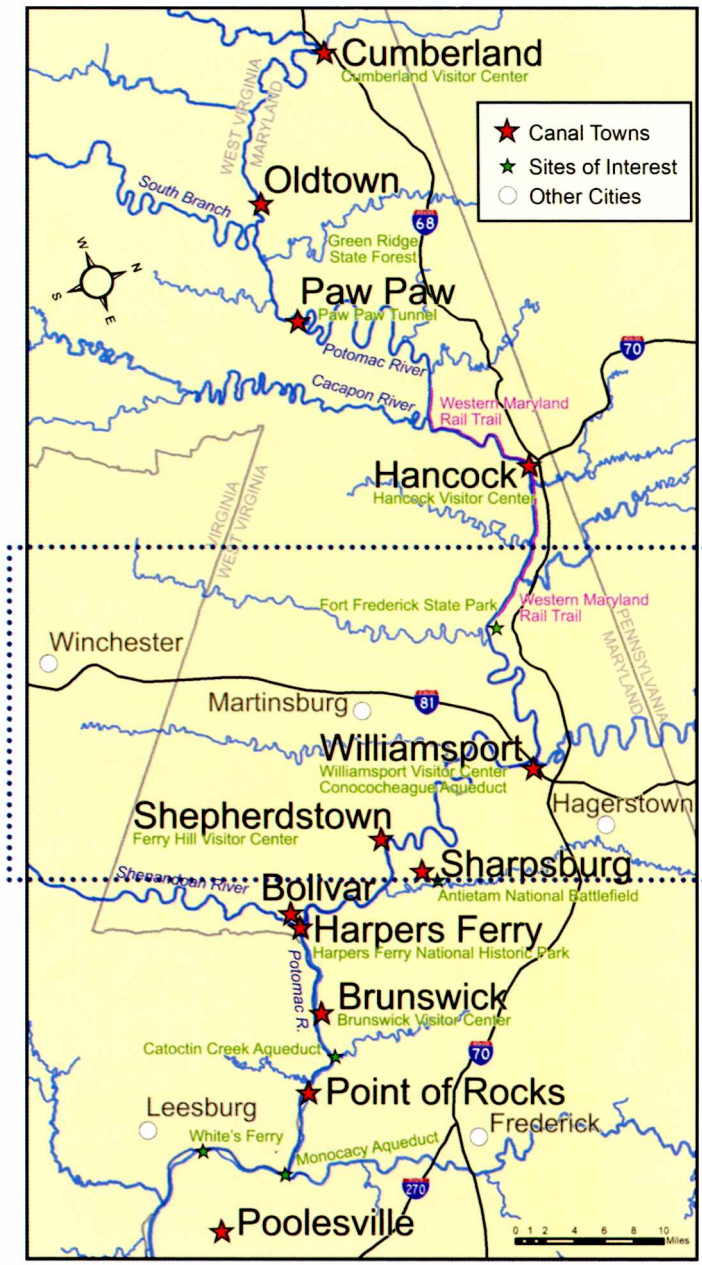
Fort Frederick State Park, C&O Canal mile marker 112. The stone fort served as Maryland's frontier defense during the French and Indian War. Visit https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/western/fortfrederick.aspx

Lockhouse 49, C&O Canal mile marker 108.9. A lockhouse with partial amenities available for overnight stays. Furnished to depict the 1920s. www.canalquarters.org

Springfield Farm and Barn, 12 Springfield Lane. One of the largest barns in Maryland. Springfield Farm supplied much of the food and supplies for Williamsport and Washington County in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Adjacent arboretum commemorates fallen soldiers of the Civil War. Now available for rent. www.williamsportmd.gov/visitors/springfield-farm/

Williamsport Town Museum, 12 Springfield Lane. Located in an old milk parlor, lower level of the Springfield Barn. Local historical exhibits and memorabilia. www.williamsportmd.gov/visitors/springfield-farm/

MAP



The C&O Canal Explorer app has over 600 points of interest mapped for you in a searchable format, allowing you to find hiking trails, campgrounds, history, trailheads, parking, and more at a glance.

The app also calculates the distance from your location to nearby amenities, and points of interest. The C&O Canal Explorer app will encourage you to tread new paths and journey to new parts of the Park!
www.canaltrust.org/app

www.canaltowns.org

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The C&O Canal National Historical Park is a recognized site on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.