



# ALHFAM

AN ORGANIZATION OF PEOPLE WHO BRING HISTORY TO LIFE

## BULLETIN



Spring 2015

VOLUME XLV, No. 1

ASSOCIATION FOR LIVING HISTORY, FARM AND AGRICULTURAL MUSEUMS



## How to Furnish Historic Structures

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ALHFAM is an organization of people who bring history to life. ALHFAM enables its members to make history a valuable part of the lives of museum visitors. It achieves this purpose through the exchange and sharing of ideas, information, tools and experiences centered around an accurate, active, participatory, object-based historical interpretation.

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The *ALHFAM Bulletin* is a quarterly publication of the Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums and is a benefit of membership. Single copies are available for \$5.00 to members and \$7.00 to non-members. USN-ISSN-0047-4851

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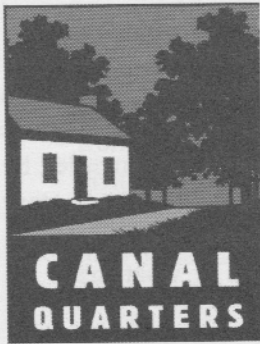
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*The restored, furnished and operable kitchen of C&O Canal Lockhouse 10 awaits its next set of overnight visitors. Photograph courtesy of the C&O Canal National Historical Park, the C&O Canal Trust and Heidi Glatfelter.*

# Canal Quarters: Furnishing Historic Structures for Use as Overnight Accommodations

by Heidi Glatfelter



When boats were running the 184.5 mile length of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal from Cumberland, Maryland, to Georgetown, in the District of Columbia, lockkeepers and their families made their homes in the small four-room lockhouses that lined the canal. At the first sound of

a canal boat horn, they would spring from their beds and run to operate the locks.

Today, thanks to the Canal Quarters program, anyone can spend a night in one of these authentic lockhouses and experience life as a lockkeeper. Modern visitors undoubtedly get a better night's sleep than their historic counterparts, as the late-night canal boat horns have long since fallen silent.

The Canal Quarters program, the innovative interpretive experience that enables guests to spend the night in historic lockhouses, is entering its fifth year in 2015. The program has been recognized with three major industry awards, including the 2014 Chairman's Award for Achievement in Historic Preservation from

the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. It is just as popular with the public, having hosted over 10,000 guests from 37 states for more than 3,000 stays.

The program was created and is run by a partnership between the C&O Canal National Historical Park (Park), which owns the lockhouses, and the C&O Canal Trust (Trust), which administers the program. The Trust is the official nonprofit fundraising partner for the Park, which is part of the National Park Service system.

The C&O Canal National Historical Park contains over 20,000 acres of land and over 1,000 historic structures, including the canal, the towpath, culverts, aqueducts,

and the historic lockhouses. It is Maryland's largest National Park, as well as the ninth most visited in the nation. With over 5 million visitors a year, the Park is busier than the hallmark Yosemite, Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon. The Park is very popular with hikers, bikers, paddlers, boaters, anglers, birdwatchers, photographers and more. It also connects to the Great Allegheny Passage at Cumberland,

Maryland, allowing bikers to ride from Georgetown all the way to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



*Lockhouse 6 is perched along Lock 6 in Brookmont, Maryland, at mile marker 5.4. Photographs courtesy of the C&O Canal National Historical Park, the C&O Canal Trust and Heidi Glatfelter.*

In 2007, the Park wanted to create a new program that would assist in the maintenance and preservation of the lockhouses; it also hoped to use the lockhouses as interpretive pieces for visitors. The newly formed C&O Canal Trust chose to take on the project with the Park. Together, they evaluated the inventory of lockhouses to determine which would be the most appropriate for the program. Some houses had been updated with electricity and plumbing during their lives as temporary homes for the Civilian Conservation Corps workers charged with cleaning and restoring the canal area during the New Deal, or as homes for Park employees. Others were still rustic, lacking modern amenities.

Although the existing amenities of the homes played a role in whether they were selected for the Canal Quarters program, that was not the deciding factor. Part of the charm of the program was to allow people to live “back in time.” It was agreed that some lockhouses should remain amenity-free to correctly capture the time period.

In their decision-making, the group also looked at access to parking, access to neighboring towns, the estimated cost of repairs, and possible stories that could be told based on the individual histories of each house. Eventually, six lockhouses were selected for the program.

Each lockhouse was to depict a different time period in canal history, with furnishings and interpretive tools helping to set the mood and tell the story. (See table below.)

With time periods and themes chosen, it fell to C&O Canal Trust Board Member and project volunteer Robert Mertz to furnish the lockhouses. But Mertz wasn’t preparing a typical furnishing plan, because all six lockhouses would be hosting overnight guests. With each lockhouse needing to accommodate up to eight guests at a time, the furnishings that went into the lockhouses would be touched, sat in, slept in, and cooked on.

Robert Mertz tells how he approached the project: “I started with the target that we had to provide accommodation for eight people, which meant sleeping and eating. We had only four rooms per house—two bedrooms upstairs with four beds each, and two rooms downstairs with seating for up to eight. Then I considered the interpretive theme, which set the time period in which the house had to be furnished. This meant that the furnishings could predate, but not postdate, the period. Then I had to decide what sorts of furniture we needed.”

Mertz took detailed measurements of each room in the house and made a scaled furnishing plan using pieces of paper to ensure that everything would fit. For beds,

Lockhouse	Time Period	Story	Location
Lockhouse 22	1830s-1840s	Early phases of Canal construction	Near Potomac, mile marker 19.6
Lockhouse 28	1830s-1840s	Competition between the Canal and the B&O Railroad	Near Point of Rocks, mile marker 48.9
Lockhouse 25	1860s	Civilian life on the Canal during the Civil War	Near Poolesville, mile marker 30.9
Lockhouse 49	1890s-1920s	Heyday of the Four Locks community	Near Clear Spring, mile marker 108.7
Lockhouse 10	1930s	New Deal programs on the Canal: CCC, HABS, WPA	Near Cabin John, mile marker 8.8
Lockhouse 6	1950s	Justice William O. Douglas’s 184.5-mile hike along the Canal	Near Brookmont, mile marker 5.4

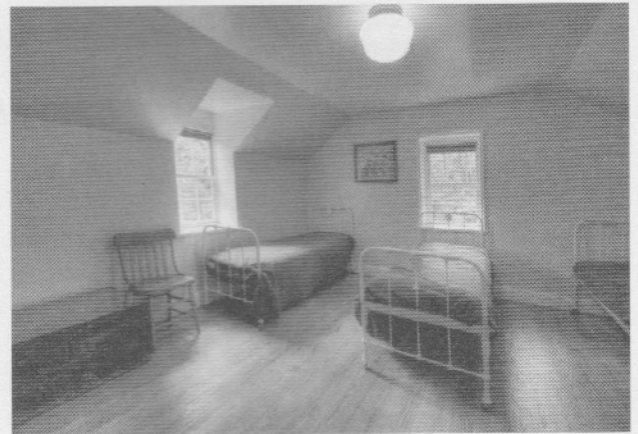


*The living room of Lockhouse 6 features furniture from the 1950s, in keeping with its interpretive theme.*

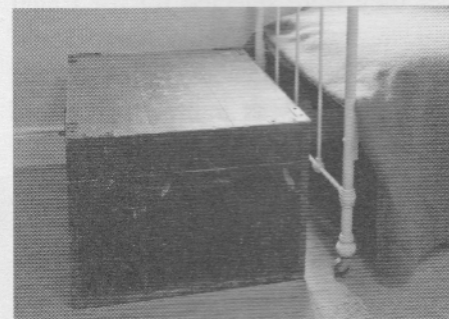
he used a combination of single, double and trundle beds. As he figured out how to sleep eight people while ensuring they would have room to move around when they were awake, he assembled a list of the needed furniture, along with recommendations on sources and cost. He knew everything he selected needed to be durable, and also simple, “as befitted a lower income family” that would be living the life of a lockkeeper.

An antique enthusiast, Mertz located most of the furnishings at antique shops, estate sales, and auctions. “Especially helpful was a friend who handles estate sales. She found some amazing pieces that I had been looking for. I let her and several antique shop owners have lists of the furnishings requirements for the lockhouses, and they would let me know when they had a piece I needed. This is how I acquired some of our hard-to-find, iconic pieces.”

Lockhouse 10, located in Cabin John, interprets the 1930s, when the Civilian Conservation Corps personnel lived in several segregated lockhouses while they worked to restore the canal from massive flood damage. Mertz found U.S. Quartermaster Corps M1905 beds, including one that “came from a Sioux militaria dealer in Missoula, Montana, whom I located through someone from a CCC camp in Ohio.” He also was able to locate a CCC chest owned by the family of Dr. William Knott, a CCC surgeon and doctor from Washington, DC, who served in the 305th Company of the CCC in Cowans Gap, Pennsylvania, during the 1930s.



*Three U.S. Quartermaster Corps M1905 bed frames and a chest that were used by the Civilian Conservation Corps welcome guests on the second floor of Lockhouse 10.*



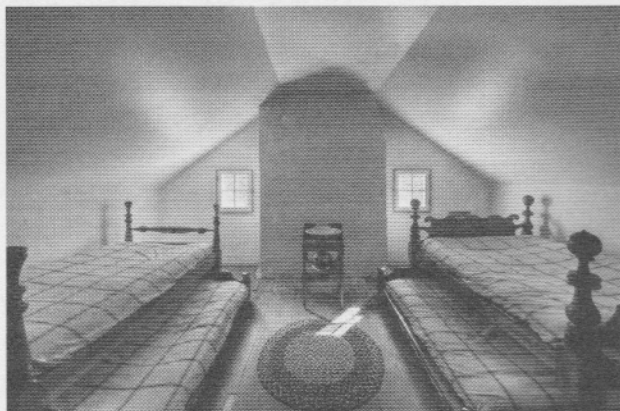
*The CCC chest owned by Dr. William Knott, a surgeon and doctor who served in a CCC camp in Pennsylvania.*

Two other unique finds that furnish Lockhouse 10 stand in the kitchen—an authentic 1928 Westinghouse stove and a 1934 Kelvinator refrigerator, both restored and fully functional. However, keeping them functional has been a challenge. As the closest repairman for such appliances is located in Georgia, the refrigerator has made several trips up and down the coast.



*The 1928 Westinghouse stove and 1934 Kelvinator refrigerator are highlights of Lockhouse 10's kitchen.*

In instances where authentic furnishings could not be located or were cost-prohibitive, Mertz improvised. “For trundle beds in the nineteenth-century lockhouses [22, 25 and 28], I went to Mount Vernon and saw a trundle bed they allowed me to photograph and measure. I had a friend who was a skilled cabinet maker in Virginia make twelve of them.”

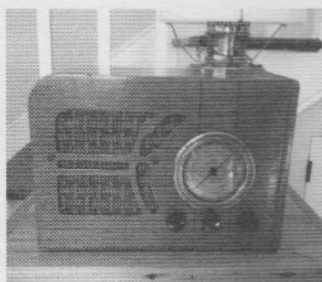


*The upper floor of Lockhouse 25 in Poolesville, MD showcases period beds and reproduction trundles.*

However, some very special iconic period pieces came as donations from people who learned about the project. One of the first was an authentic Simmons Hide-a-Bed covered in its original raspberry-colored fabric and manufactured in 1950. This piece now lives in Lockhouse 6. Most recently, a chapter of the Maryland Questers donated antique radios to the two most modern lockhouses, 6 and 10. Each radio was retrofitted to play MP3 audio files; the Trust is currently researching period-appropriate music and radio shows for guests to download and enjoy on the radios, adding to the experience.



*Above: 1953 Emerson radio.  
Below: 1938 Silvertone radio.*



Not every acquisition worked out, however. “My first set of four chairs was a mistake, as it turned out,” remembers Mertz. “They were cheap--\$90 for four--but with rush seats, they only lasted a year. It would have cost about \$75 each to re-rush them, so we replaced them with more durable plank-seated chairs.” Remarkably, the Canal Quarters program has experienced very little damage or theft by the guests of the lockhouses. Most often, if something disappears, the guest contacts the Trust within a few days, admitting to their mistake: “Oops! Johnny accidentally packed the dominos! Can we drop them off to you tomorrow?”

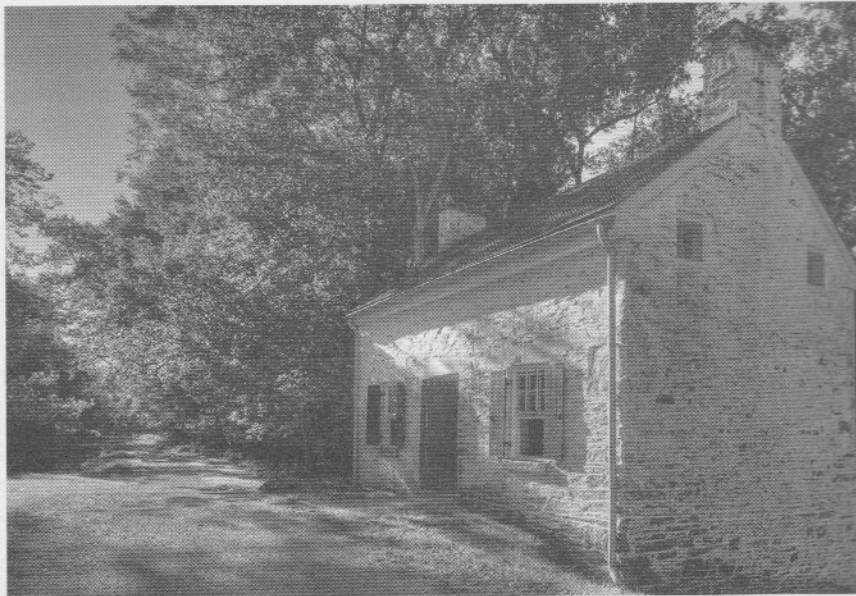
The lockhouses also contain interpretive materials in the form of pictures on the wall with captions, scrapbooks, history books, and more. Each house also includes a guest book, where visitors record their memories of their stays before they depart. From these books, we know that people celebrate all types of occasions at the lockhouses, from birthdays, anniversaries, and family reunions to children’s birthday parties, Halloween parties, and holiday celebrations. Past guests have decorated the lockhouses with Christmas twinkle lights and fixed Thanksgiving meals completely over the fire. We even had a couple get engaged on their first stay at Lockhouse 10, and then return a year later for their wedding and honeymoon!



*The first floor of Lockhouse 22 in Potomac, Maryland, features interpretive signage on the walls.*

Integral to the program are our volunteer Quartermasters, who live near the lockhouses and are their primary caretakers. The Quartermasters receive the schedule of guests each week and are always on call if guests have problems. They will also visit their lockhouses between every stay to ensure the place was left in good order. Each guest is asked to leave the lockhouses in the shape they found it, with floors swept, dishes washed, and trash removed. Quartermasters ensure this policy is met and also help with light maintenance issues as needed.

The C&O Canal Trust and the C&O Canal National Historical Park are currently in the process of evaluating several other lockhouses and historic homes for additions to the Canal Quarters program. You can learn more about the program and reserve your stay in a Canal Quarters lockhouse at [www.canaltrust.org/quarters](http://www.canaltrust.org/quarters). ☞



*The towpath runs right in front of Lockhouse 22 in Potomac, Maryland.*

The Canal Quarters program currently has three rustic nineteenth-century lockhouses with no electricity or running water that cost \$100 a night (22, 25, and 28). Lockhouse 49, with electricity but no water, is \$115 a night, while the two with full amenities, 6 and 10, cost \$150 a night. All proceeds made by the Canal Quarters program go right back into the continued maintenance and preservation of the lockhouses.



*Lockhouse 10, in Cabin John, Maryland, features a screened-in porch and is nestled in the trees above the canal and towpath.*

#### About the Author

*Heidi Glatfelter is the Director of Communications for the C&O Canal Trust, and also serves on ALHFAM's Board of Directors. She will be presenting on the Canal Quarters program at this year's ALHFAM Annual Meeting in Colonial Williamsburg.*