

GOOD TIMES | POSITIVE PEOPLE | LIFESTYLES

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M A G A Z I N E

CHARITY

6 People Who Make
A Difference in
Montgomery County



Gas Station Dining

Experience History
Along the C&O Canal

Mark Wenner's 43 Years
As the Nighthawks Frontman

Reclaiming Our History
Of Distilling Whiskey

And More!





CANAL QUARTERS Lockhouse (right) 10 is just inside the Beltway on Clara Barton Parkway and renovated to the 1930s era, the final years of the C&O Canal. Lockhouse 22 (left) is much more rustic with a water jug and wash basin to give guests the feel of the hardship of 19th century life on the canal. The dining room at Lockhouse 25 (above) reflects the canal's Civil War heritage near Edwards Ferry.



OLDEN SLUMBERS

Spend the Night in a Restored C&O Canal Lockhouse
and Take a Journey Back in Time

By Charles Jeffries // Photography by C&O Canal Trust

THE SILENCE OF DUSK ON THE C&O CANAL ISN'T really silence at all. It's just that there is no din of rush-hour traffic, no clamor of getting dinner on the table in order to get to soccer practice on time, so the ambient noise of the day winding down is birds singing their way back to the nest, crickets chirping, bullfrogs in full-throat baritone resonance.

But then the "silence" is broken by the familiar crepitate of thin tires rolling across compacted gravel as they pass Lockhouse 25 at Edwards Ferry.

"Hey, it looks like someone's living in there," one bicyclist says to his companion as they eye the warm light glowing from the windows as they roll by on a crisp autumn evening.

Actually, someone is living in there – well, not living, just spending the night. Six of the historic canal lockhouses have been restored and can be booked for stays of up to three nights, providing a Williamsburg-esque living history getaway.

Montgomery County has its share of nice hotels

with over-the-top luxury, but the no-star accommodations along the historic canal are the only ones that offer a glimpse of the rough-and-tumble life of a century or more ago.

The unique getaways are part of the Canal Quarters program established by the C&O Canal Trust for guests to experience what life in a lockhouse might have been like during different periods of the canal's history. Here at Lockhouse 25, completed in 1830, guests get a feel for life in what was once a thriving village around Edwards Ferry. The ruins of Jarboe's Store still stand across the narrow roadway that leads to what was once the launching point for the ferry when it operated between 1791 and 1836.

Lockhouse 25 depicts life at the time of the Civil War, when Confederate troops targeted the canal in an effort to disrupt Northern commerce.

An overnight at Lockhouse 25 at mile marker 30.9 near Poolesville won't have you dodging musket fire or ending up as cannon fodder, but it is authentic to

< WEEKENDER >

the rustic period – no electricity, no running water and none of the creature comforts we are accustomed to in our suburban existence.

The community prospered as farmers from Loudoun County, Virginia, brought their crops across on the ferry, then transported them via the canal to the port of Georgetown. But the prosperity was short-lived. Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861 and the ferry crossing became a militarized zone for four bloody years.

Each refurbished lockhouse interprets a different era of the canal. Four of the six that now accommodate guests are in Montgomery County, and Lockhouse 21, known as Swain's Lockhouse, is now being rehabilitated. Becky Curtis, C&O Canal Trust program manager, says there are 16 other lockhouses suitable for



Need to Know: Registration for stays at the lockhouses is on a first-come, first-served basis and can be made up to a year in advance. Per night costs range from \$100 to \$150.

www.canaltrust.org
or 301.745.8888

rehabilitation, and the goal is to eventually line the towpath to allow a hut-to-hut experience for hikers and bikers traveling the full 184.5-mile canal.

Follow the canal south to Lockhouse 22 near Potomac where you get a feel for the physical difficulty it took to build the canal, especially as it bypasses rugged Great Falls. The amenities here are bare (the nearest water pump is a mile away), but guests

get a feel for the hardships of the 1840s along the canal, where the arduous construction of locks to elevate the canal along the rapids and waterfalls of the Potomac was physically demanding for engineers, stone cutters and masons.

“So few places allow visitors to truly experience the past beyond watching it from behind a velvet rope or museum case,” says Curtis. “We tried to create as authentic and immersive of an experience as possible. The furnishings

While You're Out

Lockhouse 6:

Praline Bakery & Bistro

Go to buy pastries to take back to the lockhouse for breakfast, but stay for dinner. It's a neighborhood favorite in Glen Echo/Brookmont, serving classic French dishes like Beef Bourguignon, Seafood Feuilleton or Poulet Grand Mere, sautéed chicken, bacon and mushrooms in a creamy wine sauce. Don't worry, you can walk off the calories on the C&O Canal.

4611 Sangamore Road, Bethesda

301.229.8180

www.pralinebistro.com

Lockhouse 10:

The Wild Tomato

This laid-back bistro serves up comfortable American favorites and makes a killer burger. Its creative artisan pizzas are popular and for the hearty appetite (the place is a favorite of kayakers coming off the river) the big plates of meat and seafood entrees are plentiful.

7945 MacArthur Blvd., Cabin John

301.229.0680

www.wildtomatorestaurant.com

Lockhouse 22:

River Falls Tavern

Stay with the river theme as this Potomac crossroads restaurant is just a short drive from the lockhouse and serves American-style seafood dishes. Recently bought by chef Robert Wiedmaier's RW Restaurant Group, the tavern also does burgers – including an elk burger – and comfort fare very well in its rustic-modern dining room.

10128 River Road, Potomac

301.299.0481

www.thetaverns.com

Lockhouse 25:

Bassett's Fine Food

Poolesville isn't exactly a culinary destination but Bassett's Restaurant is a hidden gem, serving hearty food since 1993. It's more diner than fine dining but it does specialties like fried chicken, beef stew, meatloaf and roast turkey as well as anyone. And it's one of the few restaurants where you can still order grilled liver.

19950 Fisher Ave., Poolesville

301.972.7443

www.bassettrestaurant.net

are all genuine antiques or in a few cases very good reproductions – even down to the dishes and silverware. But unlike many historic sites, we want you to touch and to use everything in the house.”

Closer to Washington, D. C., the lockhouses become a little more comfortable. By the 1920s the railroad and emerging highway system had made the canal obsolete and its usefulness was winding down. At mile marker 8.8 near Cabin John, Lockhouse 10 interprets the final years of the canal with a 1930s-era kitchen and bathroom, electricity and running water. But the dichotomy of its existence inside the Beltway and within earshot of the whirl of traffic on the Clara Barton Parkway offer a contrast almost extinct in Montgomery County.

Likewise, Lockhouse 6 is just steps from the parkway and offers easy access to Georgetown, Bethesda and Northern Virginia. It depicts the 1950s, long after the canal’s heyday, but after the federal government had taken over and rebuilt portions of the canal.

The concept of the C&O Canal was envisioned by George Washington, but it was James Monroe who signed the bill chartering construction in 1825 and John Quincy Adams who actually turned the first ceremonial shovel of dirt, although it is said the rocky soil near Lockhouse 6 rebuffed his initial attempt at breaking ground, perhaps an indication of how difficult building the canal would be.

Despite all the planning and hard work, the canal was never finished, a 50-mile stretch to connect the canal to navigable waterways leading to Pittsburgh and the Ohio River was

The Plan to Pave Paradise

It probably would have been a fitting end to the C&O Canal. The 184.5-mile waterway closed in 1924 and quickly became overgrown, decrepit and essentially useless. And then, as the Washington area’s growth following World War II became apparent, the future seemed different and the federal government thought the C&O Canal would serve the region better as a paved parkway. Congress appropriated \$40,000 for a feasibility survey to determine how the roadway would provide better access to Washington, D.C., and economically help western Maryland towns.

The *Washington Post* endorsed the plan, but one influential reader took exception. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, an avid outdoorsman, environmentalist and conservationist, wrote to *The Post* saying the long-neglected canal and the Potomac River were rich in beauty, history, wildlife and recreational opportunities and should be preserved.

“It is a place for boys and girls, men and women. One can hike 15 or 20 miles on a Sunday afternoon, or sleep on high dry ground in the quiet of a forest, or just go and sit with no sound except water lapping at one’s feet. It is a sanctuary for everyone who loves woods, a sanctuary that would be utterly destroyed by a fine two-lane highway,” Douglas wrote. And then he threw down the gauntlet that saved the canal.

“I wish the man who wrote your editorial ... would take time off and come with me. We would go with packs on our backs and walk the 185 miles to Cumberland. I feel that if your editor did, he would return a new man and use the power of your great editorial page to help keep this sanctuary untouched.”

The paper accepted the challenge and when word spread, the hiking group grew from a justice and an editorial writer to 58 people interested in saving the canal.

On the last night of the hike, Douglas organized a committee to draft a plan to save the canal. That committee became the C&O Canal Association, and on January 8, 1971, the government’s plan to pave over the canal officially ended with the passage of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Act.

never built. The railroad beat the canal to opening commerce to the West and less than 100 years after breaking ground, the C&O Canal was obsolete.

Now the canal has more historic structures than any other park in the National Park Service. “It’s a huge

undertaking to preserve them, and with NPS budgets declining, it’s not a problem that’s getting any easier,” says Curtis. “Canal Quarters is a way to preserve the buildings while at the same time creating unique and immersive experiences for visitors.” 