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Frederick

magazine

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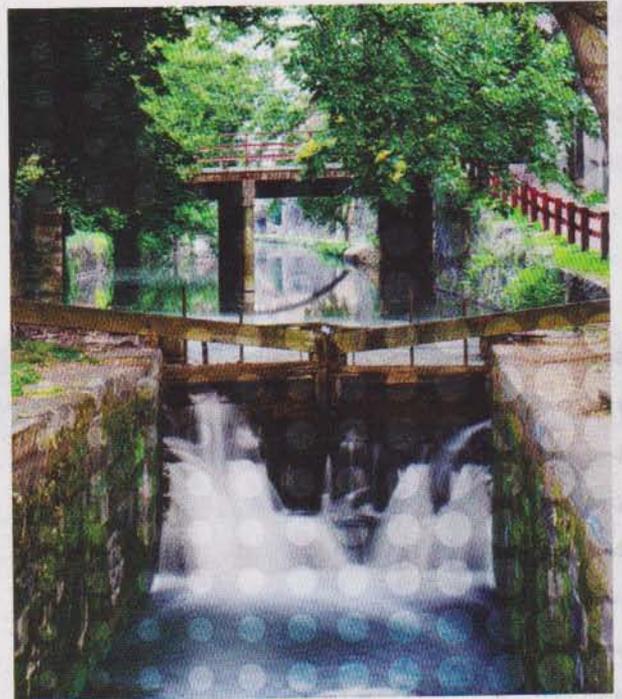


JULY 2015



22. C&O CANAL

In a county full of history, the C&O Canal offers something unique: usable history. Instead of just learning about how the manmade waterway was part of a transportation explosion in the 19th century—one that rendered the canal obsolete almost as soon as it was completed—you can use the canal's towpath as a hiking trail. And if you really want a feel of the 1800s, stay overnight in one of the refurbished lockhouses that were once occupied by canal workers ensuring safe passage of boats.



AUTUMN 23.

It's a matter of taste, but while every season has its fans (even winter), autumn is when Frederick County really shines, putting on a brilliant Technicolor coat of leaves that just begs to be photographed and shared on Facebook. A drive north on U.S. 15 in October boasts a view that would give any New England landscape a run for its money.

Another bonus about autumn in the county is enjoying the bounty of delicious apples from the local orchards.

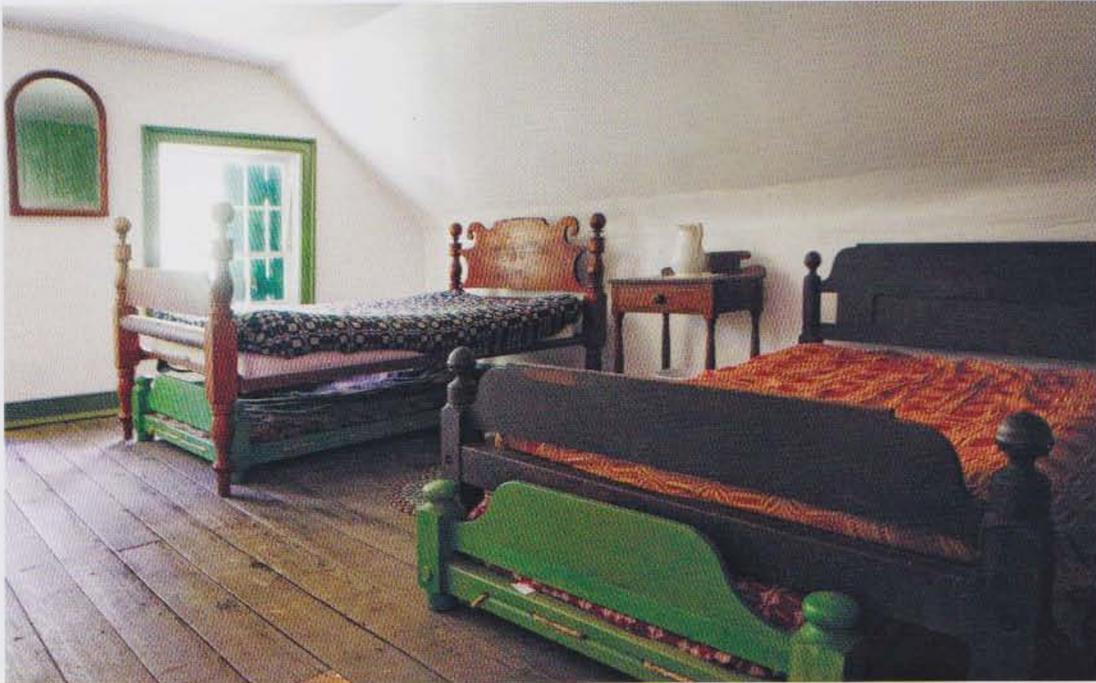


Bicyclists coast past the C&O Canal lockhouse near Point of Rocks. This is one of six homes once occupied by lockkeepers that are now available for overnight stays. **Facing page:** A bedroom in the house appears very much the way it would have in the 19th century.

Living in History

C&O Canal Lockhouses Offer Guests Authentic, Overnight Tastes of the 1800s

BY MISSY SHEEHAN ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY TURNER PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO



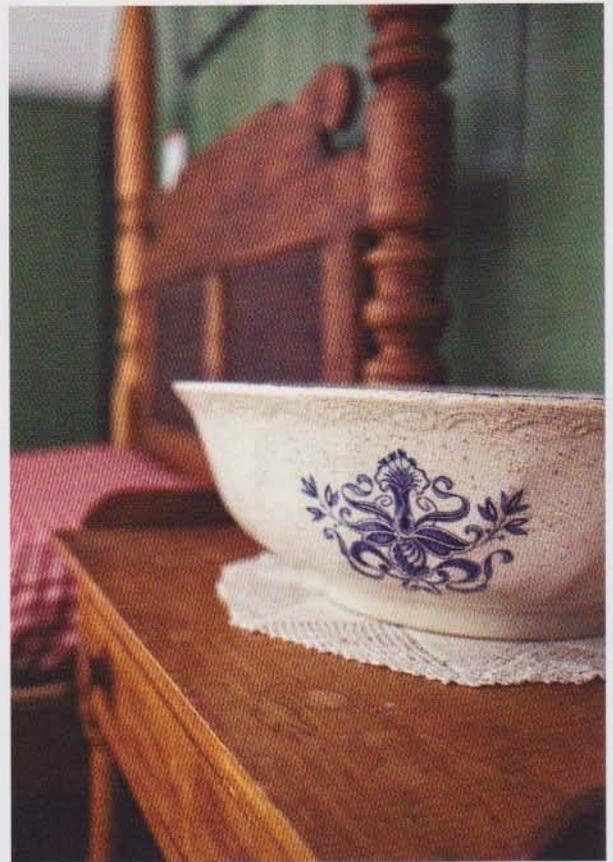
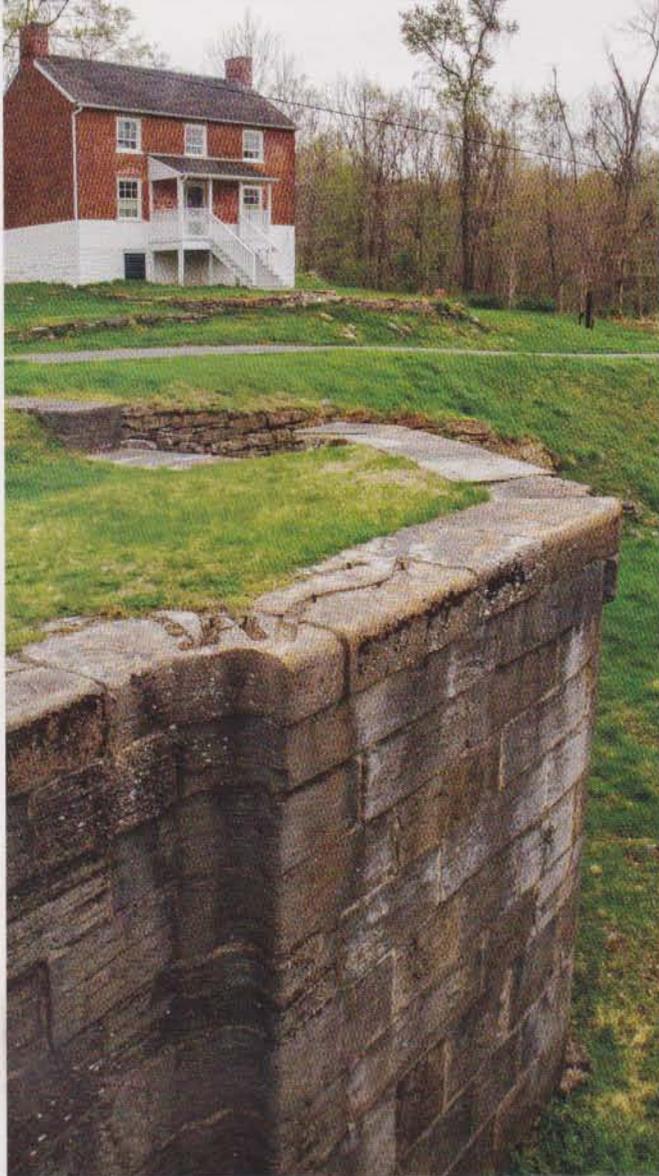
IF YOU'VE EVER STROLLED ALONG THE C&O CANAL IMAGINING WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE FOR THOSE LIVING AND WORKING ALONG IT DURING ITS 19TH-CENTURY HEYDAY, WONDER NO MORE. Thanks to the Canal Quarters program—a collaboration between the National Park Service and the C&O Canal Trust—visitors can now stay overnight in six rehabilitated and comfortably furnished lockhouses where the operators of the gates used to reside with their families.

Living alongside the 74 lift locks that spanned the 184-and-a-half-mile canal running from Georgetown to Cumberland, these lockkeepers, as they were called, were responsible for seeing boats through their respective locks 24 hours a day,

seven days a week, according to Becky Curtis, director of programs and partnerships for the Canal Trust. Only 26 of the 57 lockhouses that used to stand along the canal remain today.

While four of the six lockhouses available for

overnight stays are closer to Georgetown, one of them is here in Frederick County, near Point of Rocks, and another is in Washington County at Four Locks near Clear Spring. These two rural retreats are perfect for history buffs looking to



Above, left: A lockhouse in Washington County is located at Four Locks near Clear Spring. The accommodations are perfect for history buffs looking to experience canal life firsthand. **Above, right:** The authentic décor in the Point of Rocks house includes this period washbowl.

experience canal life firsthand, outdoor enthusiasts biking or walking along the canal towpath, or families and couples seeking a unique rustic and educational experience. The rates for the lockhouses range from \$100 to \$150 per night.

“It’s an opportunity for visitors to really immerse themselves in history,” says Kevin Brandt, superintendent of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. “You can spend the night in a structure that was once used as a residence and really feel like you’re stepping back in time.”

UNLOCKING HISTORY

Each of the six lockhouses tells the interpretive story of a different era in the canal’s history, from its construct-

damaged it beyond repair. “Because the canal operated for so long, there’s a tremendous continuum of history that can be told,” Brandt says. “Just

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—Kevin Brandt

ion, beginning on July 4, 1828, and its completion in 1850, until the end of its operation in 1924 when a flood

like the layers of an onion, you peel them back and find just one fascinating story after another.”



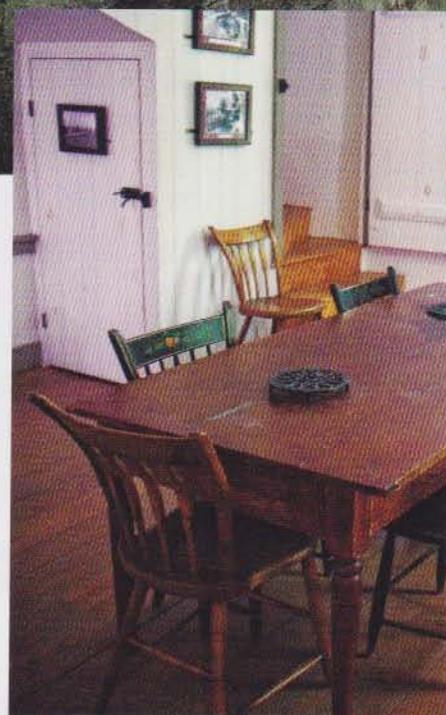
Lockkeepers were required to guide boats through their respective locks 24 hours a day, so it was a good thing their homes were within steps of the canal. You can almost picture the lockkeeper sitting at the kitchen table waiting, with a pot of coffee in hand, for a late-night calling.

Lockhouse 28 near Point of Rocks was completed in 1837 and depicts the 1830s time period. "It's supposed to show you what it was like at the beginning," says Robert Mertz, a volunteer for the Canal Trust and a former board member. The small, two-bedroom whitewashed brick house tells the story of the aggressive competition between the C&O Canal and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, which began construction the same day, as they raced each other to the Ohio River Valley.

While several of the lockhouses have electricity, full kitchens, indoor plumbing and even heating and air conditioning, Lockhouse 28 is one of the three known as

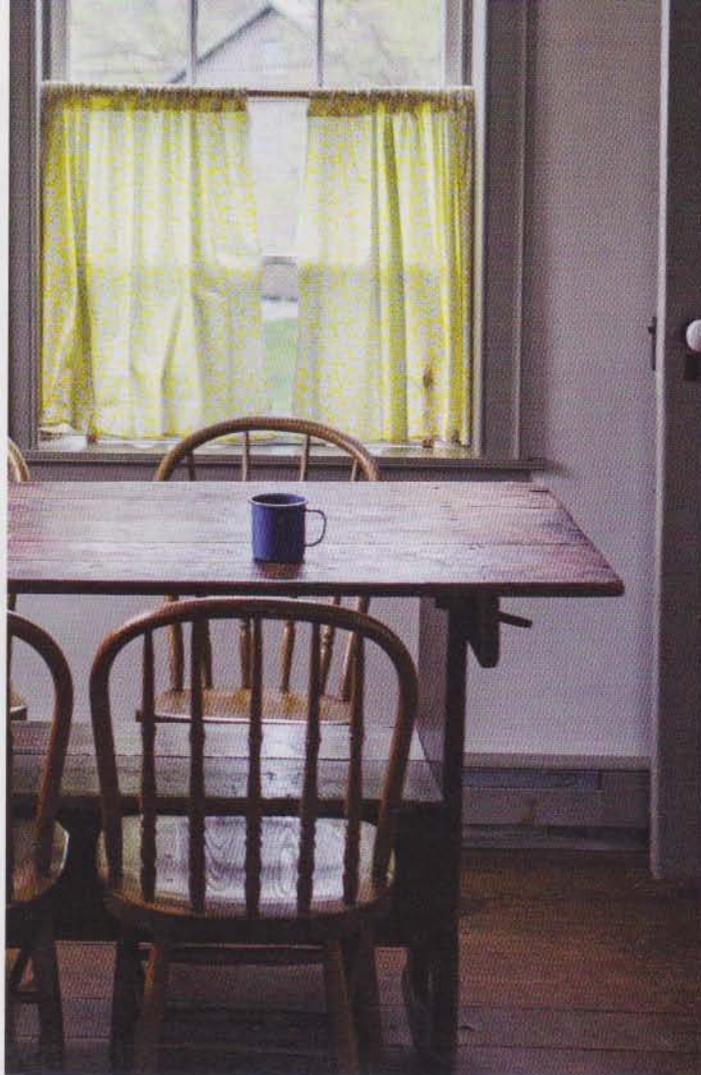
"stone tents" that do not feature any modern amenities, according to Mertz. A three-quarter-mile walk from the nearest parking area, Lockhouse 28 also is the most remote of the six lockhouses. "This place is more for the heartier folks," Mertz says. It features an outdoor fire ring, a picnic table and an outdoor portable toilet as well as a wheelchair ramp to the first floor.

Water can be brought in, or guests can trek to a water pump nearly a mile and a half down the towpath at Bald Eagle Island Hiker Biker Campsite. Guests also must bring their own linens when staying in any of the lockhouses.



AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

Representing the 20th century era of the canal's history and furnished in 1920s style, Lockhouse 49 near Clear Spring tells the story of the Four Locks community, which as the name suggests grew up around the



Each lockhouse sleeps up to eight people and is accented with antiques and reproductions, but don't think of the structures as museums, says Robert Mertz, a canal volunteer who handpicked the furnishings in the buildings. "The idea is that everything in them can be used," he says.

four canal locks that were built within 1,530 feet of each other. The two-story, no-bath brick house, construction of which was completed in 1839, offers electricity, an on-site

Each lockhouse sleeps up to eight people and is furnished with antiques and antique replicas, such as the rope beds and the 1800s-style trundle beds in Lockhouse 28,

canal must have been like during its operational period," Brandt says.

Don't think of the lockhouses as museums though. "The idea is that everything in them can be used—that's what they're here for," says Mertz, who Brandt says personally picked out nearly all of the furnishings in each of the lockhouses, taking special care to find pieces that fit the appropriate time period depicted in each.

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—Becky Curtis

water pump, an outdoor toilet and a hot plate and outdoor fire ring. "It's extremely realistic," Curtis says. "At that time electricity had come through, but people still had their outhouses out back."

which are designed to look like the style of furniture that was once in the home. "When you sleep on one of those rope beds and listen to the train roar by at night, you get a totally different sense of what the

INTERPRETATION AND PRESERVATION

The lockhouses are among more than 1,300 other historic structures in the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The Canal Quarters program was inspired by the desire not only to encourage people to



The Washington County lockhouse looks like an inviting place to spend the night. Guests can also enjoy the outdoors during their stay with a cozy campfire and a chance to sit and count the stars.

experience and learn about the interpretive story of some of these structures, but to help preserve them, Curtis says. “If they’re sitting vacant, there’s always the possibility of things going wrong. Having eyes and ears within the building is the best preservation tactic imaginable because when little things start going wrong you can immediately address them.”

While the National Park Service handled most of the restoration work on the six lockhouses, the Canal Trust is responsible for day-to-day operations, including guest registrations and managing teams of volunteer quartermasters like Paul Buscemi, one of the quartermasters for Lockhouse 28 who cleans the

house and regularly performs other routine maintenance tasks.

With two dozen other lockhouses along the canal, several of which are vacant and eligible, Curtis says the two organizations are working toward expanding the Canal Quarters program. “Ideally, we’ll get to the point that we’ll be able to offer a hut-to-hut experience for hikers and cyclists in the park,” Curtis says. “So they could start in Georgetown or Cumberland and make their way through time, staying in different Canal Quarters along the way.”

According to Brandt, renovations of additional lockhouses are probably a year or so away. “The Trust is



collecting money, and all of the money raised through the guest registration fees stays within the Canal Quarters program,” he says. “So it’s a self-sustaining program, it’s just not making money hand over fist.”

For more information, visit www.canaltrust.org/quarters. 