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Haverstown

People
to Watch

July/Aug
2015



\$3.50



A night at Lockhouse 49 near Clear Spring at mile marker 108.7 offers a chance to step back in time to when the C&O Canal was an important pathway for getting coal from the Allegheny Mountains to customers in Maryland and Washington D.C.



Where The Water Once Flowed

by Missy Sheehan & photos by Turner Photography Studio

Experience the life of a C&O Canal lockkeeper at one of two rehabilitated and furnished lockhouses in Washington and Frederick counties.



If you've ever strolled along the C&O Canal imagining what life was like for those living and working along it during its heyday, wonder no more. Thanks to the Canal Quarters program — a collaboration between the National Park Service and the C&O Canal Trust that began in 2009 — visitors can actually stay overnight in six rehabilitated and comfortably furnished lockhouses where the operators of the canal lock gates used to reside with their families.

Living alongside the 74 lift locks that spanned the 184.5-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 Washington County at Four Locks near Clear



The “Grand Old Ditch” may not be so grand anymore, but the lockhouse and surrounding area still holds much history for the willing traveler to discover.

Spring, and another is in Frederick County near Point of Rocks. These two rural retreats are perfect for history buffs looking to experience canal life firsthand, outdoor enthusiasts biking or walking the canal towpath, or families and couples seeking a unique rustic and educational experience.

“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 story of a different era in the canal’s history —

from its construction beginning on July 4, 1828, and completion in 1850, up until the end of its operation in 1924, when a flood damaged it beyond repair. “Because the canal operated for so long, there’s a tremendous continuum of history that can be told,” Kevin says. “Just like the layers of an onion, you peel them back and find one fascinating story after another.”

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 four canal locks that were built within 1,530 feet of each other. The two-story, no-bath brick house that was built in 1839, is

bigger than some of the other lockhouses. “They would have expected a larger family to live in the house to help take care of the four locks,” explains Kenny Clopper, who, along with his wife, Barbara, is one of the Canal Trust’s volunteer quartermasters who help take care of the house. “And this was a family job so the whole family participated back in the day,” he adds.

While several of the lockhouses have electricity, full kitchens, indoor plumbing and even heating and air conditioning, Lockhouse 49 features

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

AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

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 is one of the three lockhouses

known as "stone tents" that do not feature any modern amenities, according to Robert. A three-quarters of a mile walk from the nearest parking area, Lockhouse 28 also is the most remote of

toilet, as well as a wheelchair ramp to the first floor.

Water can be brought in, or guests can trek to a water pump more than a mile down the towpath at Bald Eagle

Island Hiker Biker Campsite. Guests also must bring their own linens when staying in any of the lockhouses.

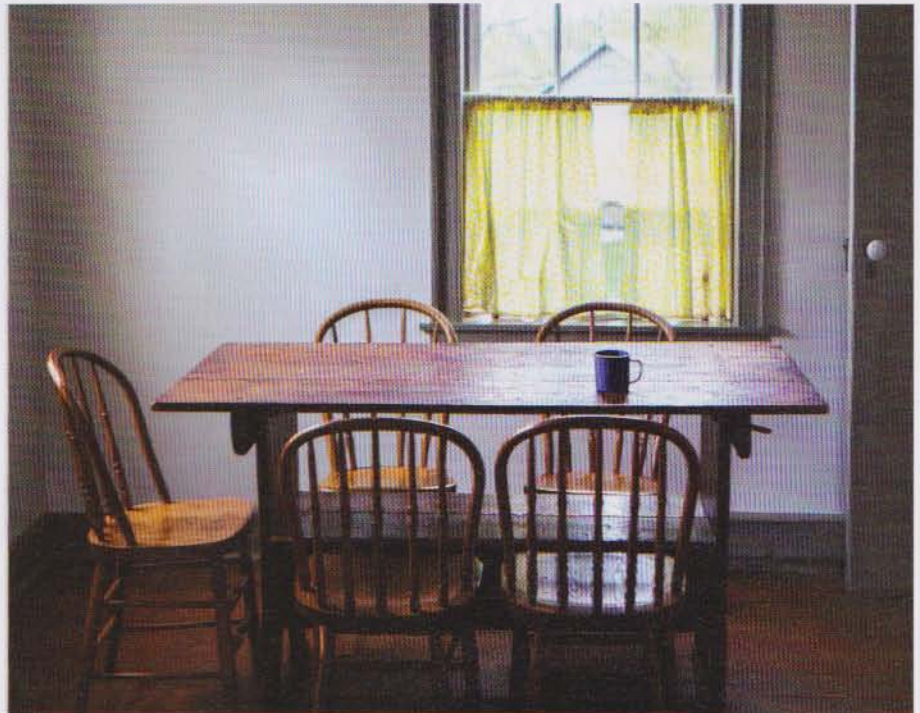
Each lockhouse sleeps up to eight people and is furnished with antiques and antique replicas that are designed to look like the style of furniture that was once in the

home. 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 Robert, who

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KEVIN BRANDT, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

the six lockhouses. "This place is more for the heartier folks," Robert says. The structure features an outdoor fire ring, a picnic table and an outdoor portable





picked out virtually all of the furnishings in each of the lockhouses, taking special care to find pieces that fit the appropriate time period of each building.


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 experience and learn about some of these structures, but to also help preserve them, Becky says. "If they're sitting vacant, there's always the possibility of things going wrong," she says. "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 the Cloppers and Paul Buscemi, one of the quartermasters for Lockhouse 28, who clean the houses and perform other routine maintenance tasks regularly.

With two dozen other lockhouses along the canal, several of which are vacant and eligible, Becky 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," Becky 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 Kevin, 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." 

Locking in your Reservation to Local History

Costs to stay overnight in a lockhouse range from \$100 to \$150 per night. Guests can arrive anytime after 2 p.m., and are expected to leave by 10 a.m. the following day.

Those interested in booking a night can call 301.714.2233, or do it right online at www.canaltrust.org/quarters