



Sharpsburg Town Crier

*Max Grim and
Warren Davis Edition*



Volume 32

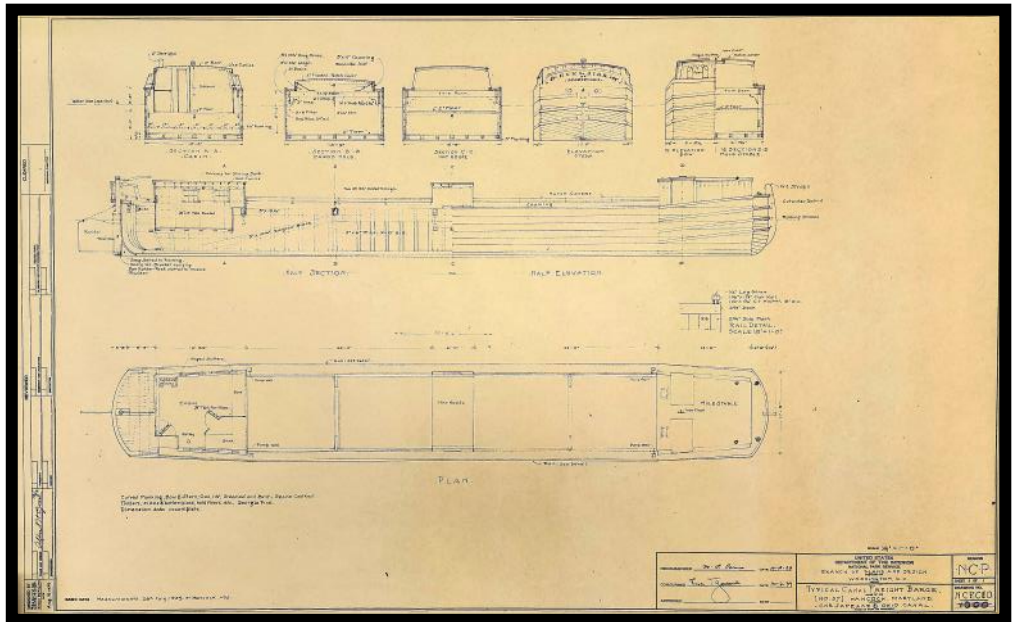
July 2024

Number 7

Artifact of the Month, a Puzzle, and a Little History of the C&O Canal

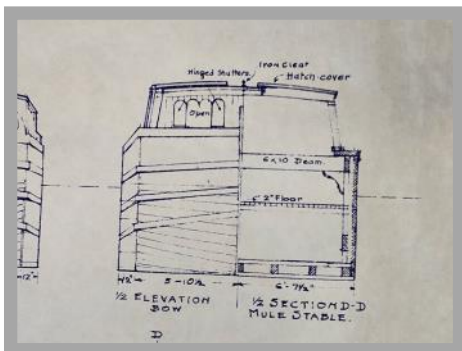
Two weeks ago, Ed Beeler, Director of the Sharpsburgh Museum of History, approached the Editor with a recent acquisition. It is a blueprint for a C&O Canal Boat, specifically a freight carrier. The donor told Ed that it was sent to his father, presumably the addressee recorded on the cardboard mailing tube. The donor then departed without leaving any contact information. The mystery began.

The address label on the tube is dated 1974 from the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, and addressed to Mr. Leo Bowers of Inwood, West Virginia. A close look at the blueprint itself shows it was “designed/measured” by the names White and McGrew and “drawn” by McGrew on August 19, 1939, another puzzle. You see, the C&O Canal folded in 1924. Clearly this is not a design for building a real working canal boat. History had long bypassed that need. Was this an effort to record the technical design of a freight hauling boat before the last one rotted to pieces in the soggy mud of the abandoned canal?



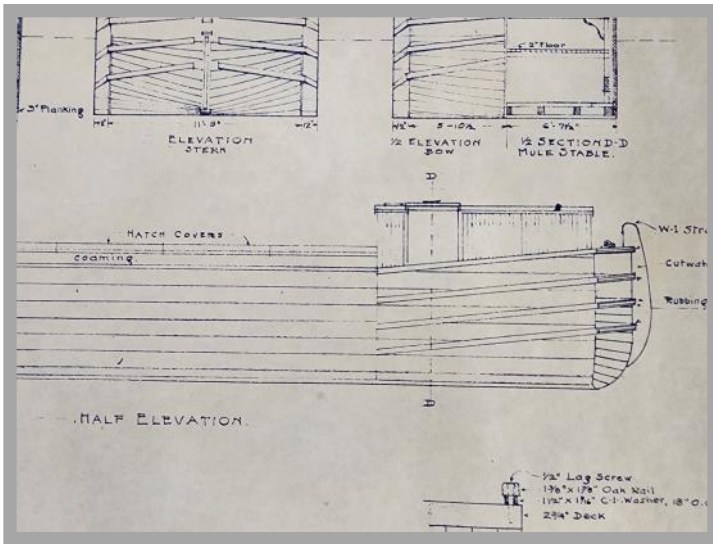
Entire Blueprint

At any rate, it affords us the opportunity to review the story of the C&O Canal, its place in history, and its importance to this town.



The Canal is a part of a bigger story about transportation in the early history of our region. Our town is at a crossroads of early agricultural production, mineral extraction, and industry. The neighborhood is well known for iron and the various limestone products (lime, plaster, concrete).

Sharpsburg is an important piece of transportation history in the most southern part of Cumberland Valley. The early Poto-



mac River crossings¹ gave access to the bounty of Shenandoah Valley and points south, particularly the iron produced along the west slope of the Blue Ridge. The colonial era Philadelphia Road connected that town with central Georgia and passed right through our town².

Then came the C&O Canal that connected the north-south Philadelphia Road and expanded transportation with an east-west component.

Later, in the early 1870s, the Shenandoah Valley Railroad³ came through town and took over the bulk freight and passenger business north-south, eventually all the way to Roanoke, Virginia.

But let's get back to the Canal.

It's axiomatic even today that the most economical means of moving heavy freight is by water. It was only logical, then, that efforts would be made to connect the eastern seaway to the Mississippi River Basin and the vast riches and markets in the interior of the continent. One of those efforts was the C&O Canal project that aimed at connecting Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River at Pittsburg, opening the vast interior to trade by way of the connected Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and thousands of their tributaries all the way to the Rocky Mountains.

The C&O Canal was preceded by the Poto-

mac Canal project which was not sufficiently well engineered to accommodate the Potomac's highly variable water levels. It failed in 1828.

Construction on the C&O canal began in 1828 near Washington, DC, and reached Cumberland, MD, in 1850, an elevation change of just over 500 feet of rise. It was 185 miles of waterway with 74 lift locks, 11 aqueducts to cross creeks and small rivers and hundreds of culverts to cross streams. The project also featured a staggering 3100 foot tunnel right through a mountain at Paw Paw, WV. Keep in mind, this was the era of hand labor, horse and mule power, and black powder engineering explosives.



History and invention overtook the dream of reaching the Ohio River. First the steam engine (railroad), then the internal combustion engine (trucks and trains) rendered the canal unprofitable.

The Canal became derelict despite having been purchased by the US government in the 1930s. Parts of the lower canal were restored as a public park feature. The power of the Potomac River was returning most of it to nature. The boats rotted where they were abandoned and floods carried them away. Many still living, including the Editor, remember the canal as a brushy unkept strip of land beside the river where the farm fences went all the way down to the waterline.

Through a series of steps the towpath was cleared. Finally, in 1971 President Nixon signed the legislation creating the C&O Canal

National Historical Park. What we see today is the result of many decades of improvements in preservation, access and use.

The canal is a significant part of the story of many families in this area. If you had ancestors in town in the 1920s, you probably had family members working the canal⁴. We tend to focus on the boat families, but there were many other jobs that outnumbered those; lock keepers, maintenance workers, and the large number of workers who managed the highly dynamic water levels to name a few.

Two stories stand out in Sharpsburg canal lore. Again, these people are remembered by townsfolk still living.

Boat Captain Raleigh Bender (yes, the one who opened Bender's Tavern) held the Cumberland to Washington record for a loaded coal-drag. When the canal folded, he went in to the tavern business.



Captain Tom Spong and
Three Children on Canal
Boat 74

The other is the tragic story of the Spong family which you can read in the May 2023 Edition of Town Crier, "The Spong Family Tragedy: A Remembrance, a Long-Ago Catastrophe, and a Living Memory".

The Editor is in touch with some local canal history experts who may have insight into why Department of Interior created blue-

prints of a canal freighter long after they were being constructed. If any enlightenment emerges, subsequent Criers will post an Addendum.

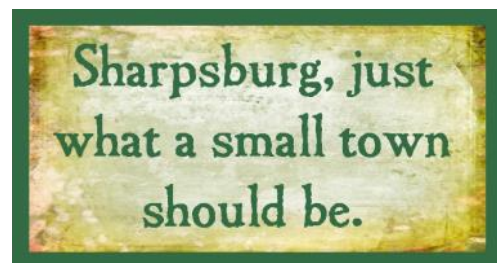
- Editor

¹ Initially Blackford's Ford and later a mile upstream, the Ferry. You may visit both these sites today and in low water conditions; you can still see the ruin of the old ferry slip.

² Mrs. Madge Carter, was a Sharpsburg Elementary School teacher up until the late 1950s and known to many of us still living. She told generations of us kids that the old stone wall that's now behind Sharpsburg Bible Church was beside the Philadelphia Road as it wended its way down to the ford. Other historians add that later, the road was modified to where the current rail bed is to reach the ferry slip.

³ The Shenandoah Valley Railroad gave way to the Norfolk and Western and then the Norfolk and Southern whose air horns we endure all-day-every-day (and yes, even through the night) in our time.

⁴ Another local teacher, Miss Louise Hebb, who worked at the school until the early 1960s, was the daughter of a nearby lock keeper. At ten years old, her job was to listen for approaching boats and manage closing the gates, flooding the lock, and opening the gates. Keep in mind, those gates were multiple-ton mechanisms. Her "trick" was to lean on the iron gate lever as it slowly-slowly moved to the open position. (Charming Aside: She "listened" for the little brass trumpet (think fox hunting) that the canal boat crew blew when approaching the lock, but still out of sight.)



About the Town

Caught in the Act!!

Meet Ms. Jenny Hender-shot, Washington County Coordinator of the Maryland Bluebird Society. Here we see her “caught in the act” of volunteering, of doing good. Specifically, she’s monitoring and maintaining one of the nearly 100 blue-



bird boxes on the Antietam Battlefield. She is one of three folks who give their time to encourage the bluebirds to thrive here. And thrive, and increase, they do. This program is so successful that we have bluebirds all year long! Any boxes that the bluebirds



don’t fill are eagerly occupied by barn swallows. It’s win-win-win. Good for bluebirds, good for swallows, and good for our spirits.

If you ever need to feel good about something, go out on the battlefield in any season and watch the bluebirds as you contemplate the events that this place witnessed. Her bluebirds form a peaceful counterpoint in our time to that human devastation in that time.

Jenny gives her time, effort, and love to support these little blue guys. Can I just say? We take to Heaven what we give away in life and don’t let anyone tell you differently. Jenny’s Heaven will have bluebirds in it...which she will tend.

- Editor



There are two local events you’ll want to attend soon.

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church invites you to a **Ice Cream Social** on Saturday, August 3, from 1PM to 3PM. Meet them out front...it’s their treat. Take the church tour...ring the “Chapline Bell”! More on Page 8.



Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Company announces a **Crab Feed** on October 19, starting at 12Noon. See all the information on Page 9.



Community Calendar (August to October)

August 1 at 3:30: **Puppet Show and Bookmobile Stop**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 3 at 10AM: **Lego Club**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 5 at 6PM: **Town Council Meeting**
Sharpsburg Town Hall
106 E Main St, Sharpsburg, MD
21782
301-432-4428

August 5 at 7PM: **Dr. Tom Clemens, Washington County’s Forgotten Military Hero**
Civil War Lecture Series
Sponsor, Rohrbach Inn at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
209 W. Main St.
301-432-5079

August 7 at 1PM: **Adult Book Share**

Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 10 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, **Sharon Murray – Colonel B. F. Davis**

Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org

August 12 at 7PM: **Dr. Jim Broomall, “The hills were black with spectators’: Civilians on the Antietam Battlefield**

Civil War Lecture Series
Sponsor, Rohrbach Inn at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
209 W. Main St.
301-432-5079

Week of August 13, Anytime the Library is Open: **Tween and Teens** (Stop in and make a paracord bracelet or a pony bead lizard to put on your hiking backpack.)

Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 14 at 3PM: **Adventure in Fun: Reptile Show**

Sharpsburg Park on High Street
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 19 at 7PM: **Steve Stotelmyer, The Legend of Barbara Fritchie**

Civil War Lecture Series
Sponsor, Rohrbach Inn at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
209 W. Main St.
301-432-5079

August 22 at 3:30PM: **End of Summer Reading Club Party (Chalk and Bubbles!)**

Sharpsburg Park on High Street
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

August 24 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, **Joe Stahl – Col. Harrison S. Fairchild**

Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org

August 26 at 7PM: **John Schildt/ Laura Marfut, “Roads to Antietam”**

Civil War Lecture Series
Sponsor, Rohrbach Inn at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
209 W. Main St.
301-432-5079

August 28 at 6PM: **Master Gardener Program, Pollinators**

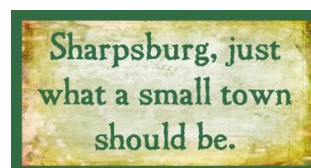
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

September 7 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, **Jim Rosebrock – Col. Stephen D. Lee**

Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org

September 21 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, **Harry Smeltzer – Col. Albert L. Magilton**

Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org



October 5 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, **Marty Pritchett – Col. James A. Walker**
Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org

October **19 at 2PM: Commanders of Antietam, Jim Smith – Brig. Gen. Max Weber**
Pry House Barn, 18906 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
president@antietaminstitute.org

Recurring Events

Throughout the Summer: **Where Are the Wonders of the World?**
(The picture will change every week. Tell us where the wonder is located and win a prize! For tweens and teens.)
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Second Wednesdays from 12Noon to 1:30PM: **Lunch and Fellowship at the Brethren Church**
123 E Main St.
301-432-4944 / sharpsburgcob@outlook.com

First Wednesdays of the month at 1PM **Adults: Book Share**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Thursdays at 3:30PM: **Storytime**
(Ages 3 and Up)
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Second Thursdays every month, **Lion's Club** 7PM, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 209 W. Main St, Sharpsburg, MD 21782
sharpsburglions@gmail.com

First Saturdays at 10AM: **Lego Club**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Area Churches

Christ Reformed Church
117 West Main Street
Sharpsburg
301-432-6182
Sundays: 9AM

United Christian Fellowship
18823 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
301-432-0110
Sundays: 8:45AM Fellowship, 9AM Sunday School, 10AM Worship & Children's Church

Sharpsburg Church of the Brethren
123 E Main St, Sharpsburg
Sundays at 10AM, Sunday School at 10:30AM
301-432-4944

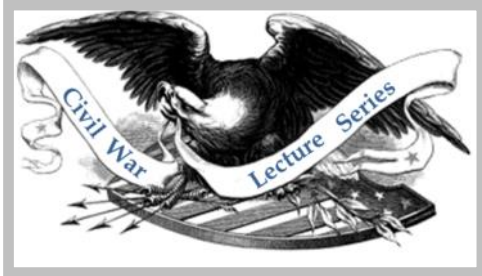
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
209 West Main Street
Sharpsburg
301-432-7098
Sundays: 10AM, Sunday School
(Second and Fourth Sundays starting September 25)

Burnside First Church of God
3904 Mills Rd, Sharpsburg
Sunday Worship - 9:00am, Sunday School - 10:15am



Sharpsburg Bible Church

5134 General Stuart Court, Sharpsburg
301-432-5309
Sunday School 9:30 AM to 10:30 AM,
Sunday Morning Worship & Children's Church 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM



Mayor & Councilpersons

Russ Weaver – Mayor
Jacob Martz – Vice Mayor
Mia Parsons – Council
John Hammond – Council
Ed Beeler-Council
Robbie Waters – Council
Joe Kudla – Council
(Debbie Smith – Town Clerk)
106 East Main Street
PO Box 368
Sharpsburg, Maryland 21782
Phone: 301-432-4428
Fax: 301-432-8990
<https://sharpsburgmd.com/>
townofsharpsburg@comcast.net
<https://www.facebook.com/TheTownOfSharpsburg>
Zoning Administrator-Tim Lung
Sharpsburg.md.zoning@gmail.com

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ATTACHMENTS:

Ice Cream Social at St. Pauls!!

**Saturday, August 3 from
1PM to 3PM in the Commu-
nity Hall behind the church.
Ice cream, chips, and hot
dogs...and the fellowship of
your friends and neighbors!**



It's our treat!



**209 West Main St.
Sharpsburg**

**Parking at the rear of the
church.**

**Follow us on Facebook or go to
<https://stpaulssharpburg.com/>**



Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Company



Crab Feed



OCTOBER 19, 2024

COCHRAN'S AUCTION COMPLEX

7704 MAPLEVILLE RD, BOONSBORO, MD

Door open at Noon, Dinner at 1 PM, Crabs 2-5 PM

Ticket includes: 1 Chicken Dinner w/Sides, "All you can eat Maryland Crabs", Corn on the Cob, "Fireman's Milk", & Assorted Beverages & Snacks



Must be 18 to attend & 21 to drink alcohol.
Crab provided by J.R. Thomas Seafood & Catering - No Refunds

GAMING & RAFFLES ALL NIGHT

See an SVFC Member for Tickets or contact
sharpsburgvfc@gmail.com or Text 443-398-4510

TICKETS ONLY \$50