

An Abridged History of the Great Falls Tavern on the C&O Canal

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Timeline

- December 1828 - Tavern construction begins
- 1830 - A two-story brick addition with its distinctive façade is constructed on the northern end of the lock house. The entrance leads to a large public room where travelers and locals dine and socialize. Visitors, including packet boat travelers, stay in the rooms on the upper floor.
- 1831 - Downstream wing constructed for lock keeper quarters. The basement periodically used as the lock keeper family kitchen until 1876. A porch also constructed in front of what is now the main visitor entrance to the Tavern.
- **September 1832 - Initial tavern construction ends. Canal Company names the building Crommelin House after Dutch canal investors. Initially, the upstream wing of the tavern (now the main VC) is two rooms: a small barroom on the canal side, and a larger ballroom accessed by the current front entrance. Upper floors of the upstream wing, as well as the top floor of the middle wing likely both used for lodging hotel guests. The first floor of the downstream wing serves as the lockkeeper family's parlor, and the upper floor as sleeping quarters.**
- August 1848 - Canal Company rules that the lock keeper at Great Falls can sell no intoxicating liquors at the lock house located there.
- September 1849 - Canal company says Tavern may only be used as a lock keeper house and may no longer rent rooms.
- **June 1851 - Canal Company allows the ballroom (now the main VC) to be rented for use as a grocery store.**
- **January 1858 - Canal Company allows the re-establishment of a hotel at Crommelin House.**
- Prior to the Civil War, and in the post war era, a breast high white picket fence encloses a small rectangular yard along the northern wing, located about 25 feet from the line of the building.
- 1861 - Crommelin House is reported to be in "dilapidated" condition due to damage from construction of Washington Aqueduct during the previous decade.
- 1876 - Kitchen addition added to southern/downstream wing (where it stands until 1945). "Footprint" of stones outside the Tavern still demarcate the outline of where the kitchen once stood. Garrett becomes the leasee of the Tavern and oversees its heyday as a destination for picnics. A streetcar also brings people to the Tavern.
- 1877 – Lock keeper builds a well on the eastern side of the Tavern.
- 1896 - Earliest known date for existence of porch on southern/downstream section of Tavern.
- ~1900-1913 - Tavern converts from hotel to grocery store.
- 1913-1925 - Tavern leased to a private club.
- 1926 - William H. Case replaces kitchen built by Garrett with the existing frame kitchen.
- 1938 - Park Service acquires the Tavern.
- 1938-1946 - Tavern operates intermittently as a boathouse and refreshment stand.
- 1948-1950 - Tavern repaired and refurbished.
- 1851 - Portion of Tavern becomes a museum operated by the Maryland Historical Society
- 2000 - Friends of Historic Great Falls Tavern complete a refurbishment of the Tavern.

Known Lockkeepers

- Nov 1830 **W. W. Fenlon** - A canal construction contractor, Fenlon becomes keeper of Locks 19 and 20 as well as the caretaker of the Tavern. He is given general charge over other lockkeepers operating between locks 15-18. He also owns and operates the original Charles F. Mercer packet boat.
- ~1848 **Daniel Warner**
- ~1851 **Daniel Collins**
- June 1858 **Henry Busey**
- 1859-1872 **G.W. Case** - has the family cooking done in the basement under the southern wing
- 1873 G.W. Case dies and his widow, **Elizabeth Case**, takes over operations
- 1875-early 1880s **Howard A. Garrett**, owner of a feed store at Great Falls, leases Crommelin house from the Canal Company to operate as a hotel.
- 1878 Garrett subleases hotel to **J.W. Carroll**

Notable Visitors

- When Colonels John J. Abert and James Kearney, United States Topographical Engineers, reached Lock 20, in their examination of the Canal in June, 1831, they reported that "At this lock we found an excellent hotel kept by Mr. Fenlon. The house is built upon the ground of the company, and with the company's funds, and is a necessary and great accommodation to those who visit this interesting work." This is the only contemporary statement referring to the actual existence of a hotel at Great Falls. Accounts of contemporary travelers do not mention a tavern at this location.
- In 1835, Packet boat "Metropolitan" brought Andrew Jackson, the Marine Band, and 50 guests on a day trip up to Seneca, six miles past the Great Falls. They likely stopped at Lock 20 during this expedition.
- Isaack R Maus, canal superintendent in the 1860s, and his bride Mary spent their honeymoon at the Tavern in 1832.

N.B. At various times the company constructed similar establishments along the canal at places like Seneca Creek and Violette's Lock