

schedule and \$9.5 million over budget, the railroad was already there, having arrived eight years earlier. The "Great National Project" would go no farther toward the Ohio Valley. The canal operated uneasily for the next seven-plus decades. During the Civil War, Confederates attacked its aqueducts and sabotaged locks and berms to drain sections in an effort to disrupt coal and arms shipments. Flood damage was frequent. Nonetheless, in 1875, the canal's busiest year, approximately a million tons of coal traversed the waterway, which at its peak was plied by approximately 500 boats annually, carrying, in addition to coal, lumber, corn, wheat, flour, dry goods, and other cargo.

The canal boats were 92 feet long and 14.5 feet wide, and fit snugly into the seventy-five locks between the Appalachian Mountains at Cumberland and sea level at Georgetown. Living quarters were astern. Mules and horses not being used on the towpath were rested in stables in the bow and dined from "hay houses" amidships. Cargo was carried in the holds. Canalizing was often a family affair, with eighteen-hour workdays common. Danger lurked everywhere. One drunken boatman fell into a lock and was crushed between his boat and the lock wall. The long workdays and Spartan conditions led to trouble. "You had to be pretty rough to be on the Canal," recounted one old boatman, decades later. "We'd go fighting all the time . . . made no difference who you hit." Fear crept in as the sun fell: "It was lonely," wrote another, years later. "I was half afraid . . . you'd see that little bow lamp back 100 feet. You were scared at night. It was another world." In 1916 a pipe burst and sprayed steam into the cabin of a canal boat docked along the wall adjacent to the Georgetown Power Co. plant. Captain Sam Spong's three children, asleep in the cabin, were literally cooked to death, and their mother badly scalded trying to save them. In 1992 a researcher discovered that one of Spong's sons had carved his name onto a stone atop the wall of Lock 16, a disquieting reminder of a young life lost on this commercial waterway.

Photographs of the period show the flow of life on the canal in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century: A mother, bent over her washboard, gazes at her children (tethered to the deck so as not to go overboard); grinning, grizzled drivers lead mules along the towpath; happy lock-tender families pose in front of their small, trim homes; and mules strain in the Cumberland Basin to start boats bound for