

RILEY FAMILY HISTORY

Including the memories of  
Joan Paull  
Volunteer at Riley's Lock (Lock No. 24)

Written by  
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## PREFACE

Raymond Riley gave the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical park (C&O Canal NHP) an oral history, circa 1973.<sup>1</sup> It was the only one taken live in color. It has now been put on a DVD and has been transcribed into electronic form; that oral history is available on a DVD from the C&O Canal NHP as CHOH #UNK OHT and the transcription is also available in both printed and electronic form from the C&O Canal NHP.

After the transcription was completed, Joan Paull was contacted. Besides also being a member of the C & O Canal Association, she and her Girl Scout Troop have opened Riley's Lockhouse at Lock No. 24 on weekends for visitors for over 30 years. She knew Raymond Riley for many years and agreed to listen to the DVD and verify the transcription. She also agreed to research the family history locally and we have collaborated ever since. The following work incorporates everything she was able to find.

A table of vital statistics is provided at the end of this story. The table was initially built from data Joan Paull collected at the Darnstown Presbyterian Cemetery. Then as census reports provided different data, the table was revised. When obituaries, family bibles, World War I Draft Registration cards or other solid data were found, the data was again refined. Thus the data in the tables is believed to be the most accurate.

All photographs are C&O Canal NHP photographs unless otherwise credited. We hope the story is interesting reading and welcome any additions, corrections and comments.

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<sup>1</sup> "Interview with Raymond Riley by Mrs. Martha Ross" CHOH #UNK OHT, at Seneca, MD, undated.

We start this family history by excerpting from two interviews of Raymond M. Riley,<sup>2</sup> one interview of Mrs. Helen Riley Bodmer,<sup>3</sup> and the oral history Raymond Riley gave the Park Service, already mentioned. William H. Riley, the family patriarch, emigrated from Ireland at the age of 16, circa 1849. He found work at the Seneca sandstone quarry. After arriving, he met and subsequently married Mary C. \_\_\_\_\_ of Maryland. We haven't found much information on William Riley until the 1880 census.<sup>4</sup> By then he was working on the canal as was the oldest son, James A. Riley. Mary C. Riley and all their seven children were born in Maryland, probably in the Seneca area although that remains to be confirmed.

On April 22, 1890 John C. Riley married Roberta J. Ricketts and they lived on Reddens Hill, off River Road. John Riley also worked at the Seneca sandstone quarry until 1892. Sometime in 1892 the quarry shut down and coincidentally William Benson gave up lock tending at Lock 24. John Riley took the lock tending job. He moved his family into the lockhouse, which was made from red Seneca sandstone and completed in 1829. John and his father had worked in the same quarry that produced the red Seneca sandstone for the Seneca Creek Aqueduct, Lock 24 and the adjacent lockhouse, but some years after they were completed. The Seneca Creek Aqueduct and Lock 24 were one continuous structure; the only one of its kind on the canal.

What with the quarry, the canal and an agricultural society it wasn't too long before a community developed. Evidence of that community was the construction of a warehouse and other buildings along the canal for the stowage of agricultural products; various grains for shipment to Georgetown and fertilizer from the seaport at Georgetown. Looking closely at the berm side

warehouse in the adjacent photograph, large doors could have been used for loading and unloading items such as bales of hay or bags of fertilizer. The four smaller openings on the near side of the large doors could have been openings for chutes; the granaries at Whites Ferry and Monocacy had similar openings. The bins behind the openings would have kept the bulk corn separate from the bulk oats, wheat, rye, etc. Warehouses and/or granaries were typically built on the berm side of the canal so that boats loading or unloading would not impede traffic.



The 1900 census reported that John C. Riley, age 38, was working as a Lock Tender.<sup>5</sup> Living with him were: Roberta, his wife, age 29, they had been married 11 years, she had 4 children and they were all then still living; Cleveland J., age 7; Upton, age 4; Raymond, age 2; and an infant

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<sup>2</sup> Kytte, Elizabeth, *Home on the Canal*, (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1983), pp. 226-241.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-246.

<sup>4</sup> 1880 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, 3rd Election District, enumerated on 6/\_\_\_/1880, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> 1900 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, Darnestown District, enumerated on 6/2/1900, p. 2B.

[Ernest], age 8/12. Raymond Riley stated that all the children, except Cleveland, were born in the lockhouse. Since Cleveland J. Riley was born on July 10, 1892, presumably on Reddens Hill, it would have been sometime later that year, 1892, that John Riley moved his family into the lockhouse.

"The same rains which caused the historic Johnstown Flood of 1889 left the canal a total wreck. The canal company was unable to raise sufficient funds to repair the canal and found it necessary to declare bankruptcy. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (as the major bondholder) offered to restore the canal, knowing that a railroad competitor was likely to buy the canal if there was a forced sale. The Maryland Circuit Court for Washington County at Hagerstown, Maryland, authorized the B & O Railroad to complete repairs and to operate the canal as a 'last ditch' effort.

"The railroad completed repairs to the canal in 1891 and it was back in operation in 1892. The receivers then organized a subsidiary company, the Canal Transportation Company, as a device to enable the canal (through funds received from the railroad) to show a profit each year as required by the court order. The new transportation company agreed to provide any additional boats required to keep the canal navigable. The contract, dated 1894, went into effect on 1 January 1896."<sup>6</sup>



In the adjacent photograph, the boat entering Seneca Creek Aqueduct is labeled "Canal Towage No. 3" dating the photograph as during

the receivership period. Notice the nearly submerged rowboat, just above the rowboat was the waste weir in the berm abutment of the aqueduct, the white "wait house" and two unidentified structures on the river side of the canal; the Alnutt store was one of the structures. That is the Potomac River to the far right.

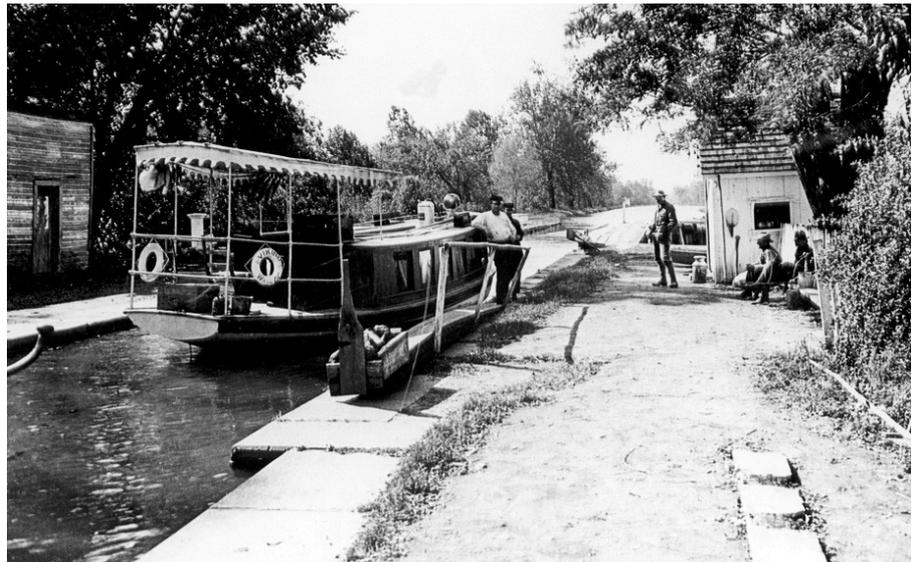
The photograph on the next page shows a similar, loaded canal boat also with an awning over the cabin, entering Seneca Creek Aqueduct. The previously mentioned waste weir is more evident in this view looking westward. The low white railing provided visibility to the edge of the aqueduct whereas the high white railing on the other side of the towpath was helpful in preventing mules or men from falling into Seneca Creek.

<sup>6</sup> Hahn, Thomas F., *THE C. & O. CANAL BOATMEN* (Published by the American Canal & Transportation Center, Shepherdstown, W. Va., 1980), p. 9.



When Helen Riley went on her frequent visits to her father, she was more at the lock than in the lock house. "My father had a long bench out by the shanty in front of the locust tree where people would

come and sit and watch the boats go by. It was a big wide board and it was usually filled with people, I sat on it lots of times and watched the boats go through. And listened to the people talk." In the adjacent photograph, taken about the same time of an ascending excursion boat (note the windows along the side instead of hatch covers) the big wide board with people watching boats go by, is evident.



Raymond Riley remembered "My father could look way up there for half a mile and see a boat coming. If he seen a boat coming, he'd just change the lock, shut the gates, fill the lock up, open the gates. . . He had a bridge, a little old footbridge, and he'd walk across and go up there and open *that* gate. Now, lots of times they had a foot board on the top [of the lock gates] you could walk across; you couldn't step from one part to the other. You had to take and go all around and come across the bridge." That one plank bridge was in the retracted position, above. When rotated across the lock, it provided access to the towpath side, with the hand railing it would have been safer than going across on the foot board on the closed lock gates.

Raymond Riley remembered the lockhouse as having two rooms on each floor, with a fireplace on each floor. The house at Lock 24 was of the "Type II" configuration, 18' x 30'. The basement, cellar or ground floor had two walk-out accesses; a workroom on one side and a kitchen being on the other side of the central stairs. Helen Riley Bodmer told Joan Paull that the

kitchen in the basement was used in the summer. While the following photograph was taken after the lockhouse and grounds were restored, it does show the back of the lock house as

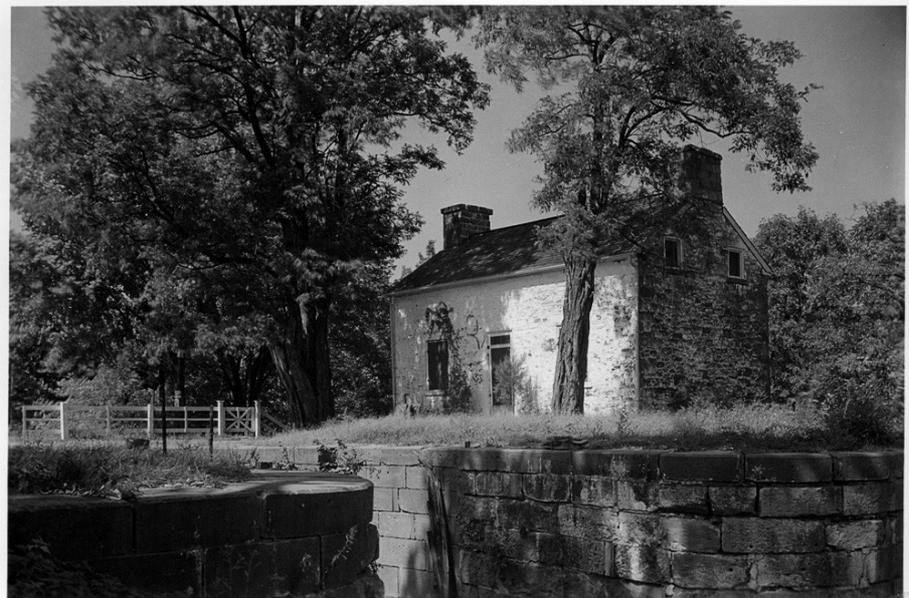
Raymond Riley remembered it, with the two ground floor doors evident. The kitchen, on the left or east side for this lock house, would have had a tall fireplace with suitable cooking cranes for the meal preparation. The first floor included a living room and a parlor; the



Lock 24 Rileys Lock Restored Lock House

parlor was on the right or west end for this lockhouse. Joan Paull and the Girl Scouts used the parlor as their visitor interaction room; it had the fireplace for the first floor although the fireplace was not operational. The second floor contained the two bedrooms, each had a fireplace and so only two flumes were needed for each chimney.

While the adjacent photograph was also taken after the canal closed, it does show the house had been whitewashed and set parallel to the canal; other lock houses were set perpendicular to the canal. For the upstairs bedrooms, there were no dormer windows but rather windows were built into the gable ends. Otherwise there were no windows in the ends of the lock house. The lock tender spent a lot of time in the wait house or on the nearby bench.



Lockhouse 24 - 1936

Raymond Riley had a hazy memory that his little sister, Katie, drowned when she was three years old. Our data indicates that Roberta Catherine (Katy) Riley drowned Sept. 19, 1905; she was just two months past her third birthday. Mrs. Helen Riley Bodmer stated that her mother was expecting a baby in the fall of that same year and Mrs. Riley couldn't keep another child around the water. So she moved to the house up on the hill. Marvin Lee Riley was born on Oct. 11, 1904. If Marvin was born on Oct. 11, 1905, that would be consistent with Mrs. Bodmer's statement. Raymond Riley was only five years old at the time, which would make 1902 the year Katy was born. In any case, the event had a dramatic effect on the family living arrangements. Mrs. Riley and the children moved up to the house on River Road, after putting the tenants out, while Mr. Riley remained living, for the most part, at the lock house.

Mrs. Bodmer remembered: "The cherry furnishings that my mother brought up to the house on the hill, that was her good wedding furniture. She didn't bring the wood stove because my father had to cook (some of his meals) for himself. We went down to visit him two and three and four days a week. We never stayed at night, just stayed the day. My mother had a colored woman who watched after me, and she was free then to go to the lock and cook."

At the lock house "there were double beds in each room because my father rented the rooms out to campers. People would make arrangements to come up to fish for the day. My father would outfit a boat and have it ready for them. He would put minnows in the boat for them to fish with. Some would stay a day and some would stay as much as a week. If somebody wanted to stay overnight, and didn't have a place, he let them stay in the lock house. (Some) would have their tents and their cabins up along the river, and of course you couldn't get to them without a boat. He had one couple that came for a month every summer.



While the above photograph was undated (we know it was taken before Hurricane Agnes in 1963 because all three arches in the aqueduct were intact), it does show the available boats on the berm side of the aqueduct. It looks like two rowboats had outboard motors. To the left, near to the wing wall, was a spring where the Mr. Riley got their water; it has since been erased.

Mrs. Bodmer remembers her father as "a very tiny man" whose presence in the house up on the hill warmed and brightened every winter while the canal was closed. "My father came home in November and stayed until March. That was a real joy, to have him home all winter. My father just stayed at home and worked around the house. He had to go down to the lock every day to see that everything was all right and that the lock house was kept locked up. He walked down in the morning and came back. I don't know what other (chores) he had down there; you get up early and went to school, and you didn't know what your father did all day."

The 1910 census reported John C. Riley, age 37 (we know he would have been 48 years old), working as a farm laborer.<sup>7</sup> We thought we might have the wrong John C. Riley except that living with him was: Roberta, age 48, they had been married 19 years, she had seven children six of whom were still living at the time; Cleveland, age 17; Upton W., age 14; Raymond M., age 9; Ernst, age 8; Mervin, age 7; and Helen, age 2. Daughter Katy died in 1905; she would have been the seventh child. Son, Cleveland, was working on a Canal Dam. That 1910 census was collected on May 5, 1910, the canal boating season typically started near the first of May. So, John Riley may well have been working on nearby farms to get extra money before the canal opened for the season and he would have been constrained to the Lock 24 area.

While Raymond Riley was never a boatman in the full-fledged sense of living on the canal boat eight months of the year and hauling coal from Cumberland to Georgetown, he did do local hauling between Seneca and Georgetown, starting when he was 15 years old [1912]. He started boating by bringing an empty boat, named *Seneca*, up from Georgetown to the Ernie Darby and Will Tschiffely grain warehouse a little bit down the canal from Riley's Lock. That was quite probably the warehouse shown on page 3, above. After loading 4,000 bushels of wheat, they couldn't get anybody else to carry it back to Wilkes and Rogers Mills in Georgetown, so Raymond got the job. For the next two or three years Raymond ran boats; he hauled straw, hay, corn, all stuff like that. Crossties, cord wood, telephone poles, anything anybody wanted hauled. Raymond remembered making about two trips a week to Washington City. Then sometimes he'd get tied up along the canal, waiting for the farmer to go get his crop, and then on to the next farmer along the bank to get his stuff on, like that. That was slow loading; the above photograph shows the



<sup>7</sup> 1910 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, Darnestown, enumerated on 5/5/1910, p. 11B.

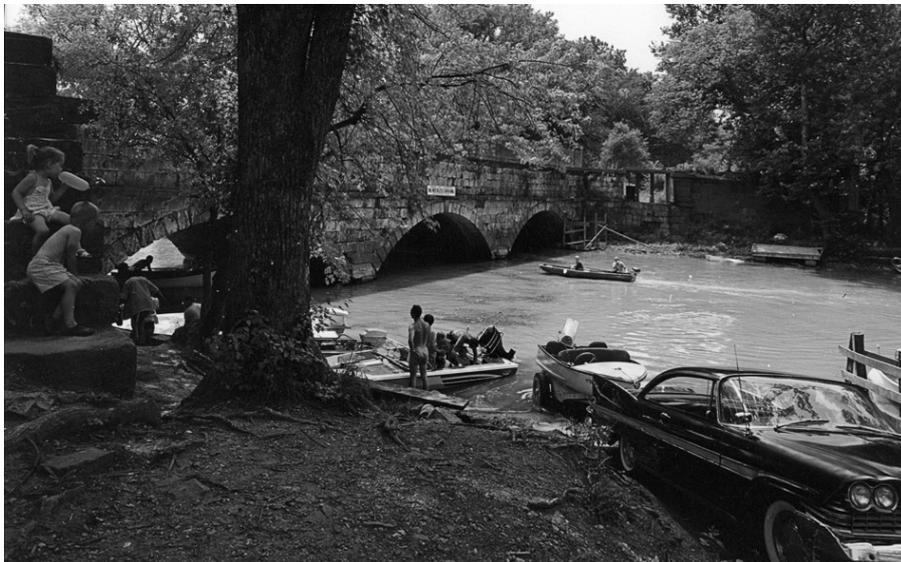
loading of 200# bales of hay from the berm, no wharf, but there was a derrick. Hatch covers served as gangways.

World War I came along and Raymond signed up for the draft. He was inducted into the Army on October 26, 1918, served as a Private in Company D, 62nd Armored Tank Battalion, and was honorably discharged on December 5, 1918.<sup>8</sup> Apparently he never went overseas.

The 1920 census reported John Riley, age 57, working as a Lock Tender on the Canal.<sup>9</sup> Living with him were: Alberta [Roberta], age 49, his wife; Raymond, age 22; Mervin, age 15; and Helen, age 12. Mr. Riley reported that he owned his home free of a mortgage. Because the census was enumerated on February 3, 1920 we surmise that he was reporting from the River Road home, not the lock house. Son, Raymond, reported his occupation as a General Farm Laborer. The rest of the children had left the home place.

The 1930 census reported John C. Riley, age 68, was working as a Watchman on the Canal.<sup>10</sup> He owned his home which was valued at \$3,500 and he owned a radio set. Living with him was: Roberta J., age 59, his wife; and Raymond M., age 32. Raymond reported his occupation as a Carpenter, Builder.

Seneca Creek continued to be popular with fishermen long after the canal closed in 1924. Before long a makeshift boat launching ramp was worn into the creek bank. In the photograph below, a 1957 Plymouth Belvedere was shown with a boat and trailer at the creek-side ramp. Note that the aqueduct was still intact and no water was coming through the waste weir.



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<sup>8</sup> *Maryland Military Men, 1917-18*, record, 56,5660.

<sup>9</sup> 1920 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, Darnestown, enumerated on 2/3/1920, p. 8B.

<sup>10</sup> 1920 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, Darnestown, enumerated on 4/30/1930, p. 12B.

The next photograph was probably taken at the same time. The boat had been launched, the Plymouth, with trailer, driven to the parking area and the wooden fencing on the upstream side of the boat launching ramp was evident.



Approximately Sept. 11, 1971 a localized storm sent flood waters surging down Seneca Creek. The high water and debris resulted in the failure of the western arch of the aqueduct. In the photograph below, Park Service personnel standing on a float under the middle arch were



examining it for damage. The circular steel braces were already in place, as was the footbridge spanning the missing arch. Subsequently "Shotcrete" was applied to the exposed surfaces to protect them from the weather and further deterioration. The following photograph was taken



at about the same time, from the Potomac River side, looking east. Application of "Shotcrete" had already started, just below the pedestrian bridge, which was shown in better detail.



The above photograph was taken by the author in 2009 and illustrates that the application of "Shotcrete" has minimized further deterioration of the face of the fallen arch. Without the braces, the weight of the structure might have caused it to shift toward the viewer and thus jeopardize the integrity of the middle arch. The wooden pedestrian footbridge across the lock

gives visitors access to the towpath, and the pedestrian bridge across Seneca Creek, visible in the upper right hand portion of the photograph, maintains the continuity of the towpath. That is the Potomac River to the right of the aqueduct.

VITAL STATISTICS OF RILEY FAMILY

Name	Rel.	Birth	Married	Died
William H. Riley <sup>11</sup>	hus	1833		
Mary C.	wife	1834		
Mary A. Riley	dau	1857		
James A. Riley	son	1859		
John C. Riley	son	3/11/1862	4/22/1890	4/11/1931
Ann A. Riley	dau	1869		
Catherine Riley	dau	1871		
Agnes Riley	dau	1874		
Jane C. Riley	dau	1879		
John C. Riley <sup>12</sup>	hus	3/11/1862	4/22/1890 <sup>13</sup>	4/11/1931
Roberta J. Ricketts	wife	8/14/1870		8/14/1959
Cleveland J. Riley	son	7/10/1892		9/15/1940
Upton W. Riley	son	1/1896		
Raymond M. Riley	son	6/23/1897		9/7/1989
Ernst Porter Riley	son	10/12/1899		12/20/1981
Roberta Catherine (Kate) Riley	dau	7/14/1902		9/19/1905
Mervin Lee Riley	son	10/11/1904		2/9/1953
Helen Roberta Riley (Bodmer)	dau	2/15/1907		4/24/1996
Cleveland J. Riley	hus	7/10/1892		9/15/1940
Mary D.	wife	11/13/1895		9/18/1982
Raymond M. Riley	hus	6/23/1897		9/7/1989
Pearl A.	wife	3/24/1901		5/17/1981
Ernst Porter Riley	hus	10/12/1899		12/20/1981
Amy Teresa S.	wife	4/9/1893		7/14/1978
Mervin Lee Riley	hus	10/11/1904		2/9/1953

<sup>11</sup> 1880 Census, Maryland, Montgomery County, Medley District, enumerated on 6/1/1880 in light yellow.  
<sup>12</sup> The data in blue were read by Joan Paull from headstones at the Darnestown Presbyterian Cemetery.  
<sup>13</sup> Montgomery County Marriage Licenses, Montgomery County, MD, 1798 - 1898.