



January 28, 2016

Last summer the Friends of Fletcher's Cove submitted the following document as a nomination for the DC Preservation League's 2015 list of Most Endangered Places. We were recently informed that "due to the amount of submissions" no entries were chosen and the program will be revamped in 2016. Endangered natural resources will no longer be eligible for the list as the program narrows its focus to saving landmark buildings and public spaces. Despite this disappointing outcome, the DCPL nomination provided our group a timely opportunity to gather research on the historical and cultural significance of Fletcher's Cove and better articulate our cause. Our Most Endangered Places submission will continue to be available to the public to read or download as we raise awareness and gather support. Please explore the many highlighted links to further information about the fascinating history of Fletcher's Cove and the specialness of the place.

Mark Binsted
Historical and Technical Committee
Friends of Fletcher's Cove



DC PRESERVATION LEAGUE

Most Endangered Places Nomination

Submission Sponsor: **FRIENDS OF FLETCHER'S COVE**
friendsoffletcherscove.org

Site Name: **FLETCHER'S COVE**

Location: Potomac River between Key Bridge and Chain Bridge

Street Address: 4940 Canal Rd. NW, Washington, DC 20007

Owner Name/Address: National Park Service
C&O Canal National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, MD 21740-6620

Overview

Fletcher's Cove is a cherished natural resource located just below the fall line in the Potomac Gorge, within the boundaries of Washington, DC. As the highest navigable point on the Potomac River and a gateway to the full bounty of the spring spawning runs, this unique inlet has played an important role in our region's history. With the growth of our nation's capital into a world-class city during the course of the twentieth century and federal ownership of the riverbank, Fletcher's Cove developed into the place we know now—a greater metropolitan retreat to nature for everyone (photos 1-4). One of the most frequented stops along the [C&O Canal National Historical Park](#), the main attraction of the Cove remains the public boat availability and Potomac access originally provided by the Fletcher family well over one hundred years ago (photos 5-6). Today this longstanding access to fishing, boating and recreation on the river is threatened and could be eliminated due to a man-made landform, dating to the 1960's, that altered the flow of the river and has contributed to problems of excessive siltation ever since. The Cove is filling in and two previous dredging projects failed to provide a permanent solution. Now the [Friends of Fletcher's Cove](#) group is working closely with the National Park Service and the [C&O Canal Trust](#) to develop a plan for the permanent restoration of the Cove. We believe that until a comprehensive, federally funded floodplain and riparian habitat restoration project is implemented, Fletcher's Cove will remain one of DC's most endangered places.

Historic and Cultural Significance

Convenient access to the river has been important to every culture that settled along the Potomac. An archeological dig in 1998 (photo 7) uncovered eight underground silos built by Native Americans at Fletcher's Cove about 2,000 years ago. According to the *Washington Post*, this was a significant discovery that possibly pointed to the use of sophisticated grain storage much earlier than previously known ([article 1](#)). One of the thousands of artifacts recovered was a piece of pottery from with the imprint of a net on its surface, an early clue to the importance of fishing at the cove.

Captain John Smith's exploration of the tidal Potomac in 1607 almost certainly reached Fletcher's Cove as a final destination. He recounted fish so thick "we attempted to catch them with frying pans." For a time during the Colonial era Fletcher's Cove served a defensive purpose. According to a National Park Service handbook, [*The Archeology and History of the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park*](#) (p.29-30), the site was known as Garrison Cove for decades in the early 18th century. King William's War had visited North America by 1692, prompting Maryland's government to build three new forts for the Maryland Rangers, one of which was located on the bluffs overlooking nearby Little Falls.

The deep water of Fletcher's Cove and its reliable access to the tidal Potomac would be exploited for commerce soon after our nation's founding. George Washington's Potomac Company sought a safe way to transport goods down the length of the river by constructing skirting canals around the most daunting obstacles. The Little Falls canal ended at the Cove in a closely spaced sequence of four stone locks; from there it was an easy journey to ports in Georgetown and Alexandria. With the opening of the canal in 1795 the site became known as Lock Cove. Local author and Potomac enthusiast Dan Guzy has explored the area for his online book, [*Navigation on the Upper Potomac and Its Tributaries*](#) (p.79-83), where he makes a case for the engineering achievements at Lock Cove to be better remembered.

Before the Little Falls canal closed in 1828 and construction of the C&O Canal began, the Edes-Cloud gristmill was constructed adjacent to the locks at Lock Cove. Operated between 1801 and 1869, the mill may have utilized or altered some of the Potomac Company locks after C&O planners decided to extend the new canal to Georgetown. The National Park Service has uncovered ruins and marked the mill site

with an informative wayside; the restored [Abner Cloud house](#), home to the mill owners, stands nearby at the Fletcher's Cove park entrance. It is not known to what extent shipments of wheat, corn and oat flour left the mill by boat, but the important river access at Lock Cove offered another source of income to Abner Cloud's heirs when their business had run its course. At the height of the Civil War in 1864, an advertisement in the *Evening Star* promoted the availability of their three fishing landings for rent in time for the "spring fisheries" to come (article 2).

The Potomac recreational fishery between Georgetown and Little Falls was well known by the late 1800's. Advertisements for private fishing landings like the Cloud's can be found in local newspapers until the federal government assumed ownership of the floodplain. Newspaper articles kept readers informed of fishing conditions as part of the local news coverage. In reporting a Lock Cove catch in 1896, an article in *The Morning Times* attests to the public's fascination with the mighty sturgeon (article 3). Far more accessible were the springtime spawning runs of herring, shad, white perch and striped bass, and the resident bass, sunfish, catfish and carp. In April of 1912 *The Sunday Star* featured a full-page spread on the "Ol' Fishin' Holes" near Washington, DC ([article 4](#)). This extraordinary coverage, including two photographs from Lock Cove (one featuring Fletcher's Boathouse) and an "Up River Fish Map," begins with an introduction claiming that the local waters were "among the best fishing grounds of the East." The writer continues: "Just a few more days of sunshine and thousands will be inquiring as to the best places to fish, the kind of fish that may be caught and where they may be found up and down the historic Potomac." Readers are directed to take the Cabin John streetcar out of Georgetown to New Cut Rd. (now Reservoir Rd.): "It is only a short walk to Fletcher's boathouse. Then all that remains is the hiring of a boat, and good fishing may be found as far up the river as Little Falls or at points down the river." Forty years later the interest had increased to the point where anglers can be seen covering every rock below Chain Bridge in a photograph from the National Geographic Society's *The Book of Fishes* (photo 9), published in 1952. Several rowboats from Fletcher's Boathouse are also visible.

The Fletcher family settled along the Potomac in the 1850's and operated Fletcher's Boathouse over the course of at least four generations. The original business is believed to have opened shortly after the Civil War to sell bait and fishing gear, and to service fishermen's private boats. Before long wooden rowboats were built and offered for rent to the public out of a building on the C&O Canal (photo 8). By May of

1905 advertising had begun, as evidenced by a classified ad Capt. Joe Fletcher placed for “Boats for Hire” in the *Washington Times* (article 5). In 1909, an article in the same newspaper previewed the fishing season and announced the loss of Capt. Joe four months earlier. He is credited for operating a boathouse for “many years” and for being the “best posted man about fishing in town and...conceded by all to be an authority” (article 6). His son, Joseph Cleveland Fletcher (photo 10), was also an expert on the river and carried on the business for four decades. His obituary in 1950 states that “Mr. Fletcher knew the currents, snags, bars and rocks of the Potomac, knew where the fish were and how to get to them, and had some of the river’s largest rockfish to his credit” (article 7). Those anglers lucky to know Joseph’s son, Julius Fletcher (photo 11) and his sons, Joe and Ray Fletcher (photos 10,12), were exposed to the same fishing skills, knowledge of the river and life changing influence. When Joe and Ray gave up the business at the end of the season in 2004, *Washington Post* outdoor writer Angus Phillips reflected on the specialness of Fletcher’s Boathouse over the years and its appeal to people from all walks of life ([article 8](#)). Famous politicians, even presidents, “rub elbows with plumbers, house painters, maintenance men, immigrants, even homeless people who come to fish for food.” The Fletcher family deserves a special place in the social history of Washington, DC for their role in fostering this unique sense of community along the tidal Potomac for so long.

An important part of the Fletcher’s Cove experience is its ever-changing group of regular customers, the so-called “river-rats.” Along with the Fletchers, they have always been the best source of information about fishing, if not life in general. It has become customary for the old-timers to share their knowledge with kindred spirits and encourage young anglers. Anyone can come down to the river, rent a rowboat and anchor near one of the masters, either for a bit of conversation or to learn by example. Richard Tehaan, Mike Alper (photos 13-14) and Gordon Leisch have kept meticulous records of their outings going back as far as sixty years. In many cases these records document the decline of the fishery even as they point to the best times, locations and weather for fishing. Mr. Leish’s wisdom and connection with history inspired a recent [Field and Stream blog](#), written by author Bill Heavey, one of his friends from Fletcher’s. Angus Phillips met up with the river-rats for over thirty years to write about DC’s famous rite of spring–fishing for shad, striped bass and perch out of Fletcher’s Cove. His last entry in 2009 ([article 9](#)) recounted another successful early morning trip with “top rod” Mike Bailey at a place he considered

“beautiful beyond measure.” Phillips played a unique role in conveying what the regulars already knew and more people should know about the Fletcher’s Cove experience: “On a soft, sunny spring day, there’s nothing like rowing out into the current, dropping anchor and casting for shad or bottom-fishing for perch or rockfish in the heart of the nation’s capital. Steep, forested banks on either side muffle traffic sounds, birds are everywhere scarfing silvery fish and the river rolls on.”

Canoeing on the Potomac River, particularly in the area of Georgetown is as rich in history as that of recreational fishing, dating back to the turn of the century. An activity with roots in the Native American culture would become a great way to exercise on the river and a social event for some (photo 15). To meet the incredible demand, Fletcher’s Boathouse offered canoes for rent to the public in the Potomac and the C&O Canal. Family sojourns in the canoes and sturdy wooden rowboats helped keep the business viable after the spring spawning runs were over. Due to strong currents, canoes were limited for use downstream from the Fletcher’s Cove, the same section of the river served by the Georgetown boathouses. The scenery there features the wooded Virginia palisades, waterfalls, small islands and the rocky DC floodplain. Birdlife is plentiful and sightings of ducks, geese, heron, osprey and bald eagles are common. After World War II, canoeing to riverside concerts at the Lincoln Memorial steps became an exciting way for the middle class to experience the river. The Watergate concerts, held until 1965 when jet traffic noise became unbearable, took place three miles downriver from Fletcher’s Cove and concluded well after sunset, so customers at the boathouse were given battery-powered lanterns to clip to their canoes. Canoeing on the river had declined by the 1990s, to be overtaken by the increasingly popular flat-water kayaks (photo 16) after the Fletchers retired.

When the National Park Service selected a new concessionaire for [The Boathouse at Fletcher’s Cove](#) in 2005, they instructed Guest Services Inc. (GSI) to maintain the character of place and easy river accessibility offered by the Fletcher family for over one hundred years. Phillips quoted NPS concessions program manager Steve LeBel in his column: “We don’t really want to change anything.” Despite the challenges presented by threats to the cove environment, GSI has delivered on the mandate while still bringing welcome change. As a first order of business, a fleet of kayaks was purchased and the lightweight craft have proved to be a huge hit with river enthusiasts, exercise seekers, bird watchers, picnic goers, summer campers and,

thanks to the Internet, tourists from around the world. New wooden rowboats, carefully modeled on the last plywood design the Fletchers used, were also purchased, but the siltation threat and lack of water has necessarily reduced the number by half. Wait lists for boats are common on weekends but customers are usually willing to stick around the timeworn shop (unchanged since the 60's) for a chance to paddle close-to-home on the Potomac. The Washington, DC area youth movement and a rapid advances in social media have combined forces to benefit business at the concession. GSI provides Fletcher's Cove a comprehensive website and exposure on *Facebook* and *Instagram*, and gets high marks on review site *Yelp*. New customers turn up every day to take a kayak; recently a young woman was overheard saying: "I never went out here before—it was perfect!" Turning to her boyfriend she added, "this is going to be *our* spot."

The popularity of fishing at Fletcher's Cove is on a decade-long rise, resulting in long wait lists for boats on spring weekends. Fishing for shad brings scores of new faces every year, as advances in tackle, stable boats for rent and the rebounding populations of shad combine to produce easy catching. The [Tidal Potomac Fly Rodders](#) (TPFR) and the [National Capital Chapter of Trout Unlimited](#) (NCC-TU) claim Fletcher's Cove as home waters and have a strong web presence. Weekly Shad Reports (article 10) from NCC-TU reach over a thousand subscribers by email. Area fly shops Orvis and The Urban Angler spread the word across the country about DC's famous fishery and offer lessons at the Cove. Traditional shad planking is demonstrated each May by fisheries biologist Jim Cummins of the [Potomac River Shad Restoration Project](#). Despite challenges to the fishery, the river-rats continue to astonish newcomers with catches of American shad, striped bass (photo 17), walleye, blue catfish, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass. As for the younger crowd, many are as skilled in technology as they are fishing, and a search for fishing at Fletcher's Cove on *Google* or *YouTube* returns countless hits. Best of all, today's Fletcher's Cove continues to be a place where children first learn to fish. The District's Department of the Environment teams up with the National Park Service, GSI and local sponsors to offer an [annual kids fishing event](#) in the spring. All season long lucky boys and girls come down to the boat dock with rod in hand, excited about taking a ride out on the river (photo 18).

Fletcher's Cove today honors a simpler time in its history but continues to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. GSI's monthly chronicle of life at Fletcher's Cove

may be the best way to glean the historical and social significance of the place. Written by Dan Ward, one of the managers for the site and a Fletcher's employee since the late 1960's, the [Archived Fishing Reports](#) are a must-read. As an example, one paragraph from his November 22, 2010 report ([article 11](#)) is repeated here:

“At the boathouse, we love visitors from an earlier era. It reminds us of how enduring this place is and how it has touched so many in highly personal ways. As Ray Fletcher and I painted boats one day a couple of weeks back, up walked a lovely woman who had been poking around the place for a bit. Her face had that uniquely human and indescribable look of seeing something soothing to her soul and familiar to her mind's eye. Her name was Chris. As tears welled up in her eyes, she told us about her dad, Joseph Tisinger, who taught her to fish at Fletcher's back in the early 1960's. Joseph, as a boy, fished at Fletcher's in the 1930's and knew all the river-rat regulars. As Chris spoke of her happy days at the boathouse, I could see the little girl in the tile-red boat learning to unhook the silvery perch she and Dad were catching and then dropping into a bucket. White perch, as she recalled, were the most delicious of fish. She spoke of beautiful memories and how the perch used to “run like crazy here.”

The Threat Facing the Site and the Immediacy of the Threat

Ten months ago the National Park Service suddenly closed access to the dock at Fletcher's Cove because silting conditions there had grounded and tilted a floating walkway, making it unsafe for public access. The decades long problem with siltation had once again interrupted the public's access to recreation on the river, a few weeks before the 2014 season was to end for the winter. This unfortunate event proved to be a wake-up call for both river enthusiasts and park officials. The cherished Potomac River resource must not to be taken for granted.

The deep cove that George Washington chose as the terminus for his canal and that the Fletcher family had used to store so many red rowboats is now gone. Areas that were once ten feet deep are now ten inches deep—at high tide. At low tide, especially during the summer months when river levels are low, the cove is more land than water. A narrow channel has been carved through the silt by the flow from the C&O Canal spillway and a local creek. This is the pathway to the river for patrons of the boathouse. The threat to Fletcher's Cove is the narrowing of this pathway to the point where it becomes non-navigable by rowboats and kayaks. This has already

happened for brief periods when the river level, tide patterns and north wind combine in a “perfect storm” (photos 19). What’s more, the same conditions leave very little space to operate a dock. The walkway that was replaced this year is only necessary because the main dock has been pushed out further toward the remaining water (photo 20). The floating dock almost never floats, even at high tide.

The siltation at Fletcher’s Cove is largely a manmade condition. In the late 1960s excavated soil from the Dulles Interceptor Sewer project was dumped at the river’s edge and in the floodplain north of the cove (photo 21), with the intention of improving the sheltered area used for the boat dock. This fill area essentially acted as an earthen dam or levy. It was soon discovered that redirecting the natural flow of the Potomac, especially during seasonal flooding, resulted in increased deposits of silt where it previously did not settle (photos 23-24). Blocked off from the scouring effect of normal flooding, the cove began to fill in at an alarming rate, so much so that a correction was attempted in the early 1980’s. A narrow channel was excavated through the fill to reintroduce a beneficial flow but was too narrow and soon became clogged with driftwood and overgrowth (photo 22). A short slide show explaining the threat to the Cove can be seen at friendsoffletcherscove.com.

In recent months officials from the National Park Service, environmental engineers and a federal hydrologist have visited Fletcher’s Cove to evaluate the siltation threat. A consensus has developed that the fill area north of the cove has caused widespread damage to the floodplain environment. In the absence of high water scouring, eddy currents bring silt and debris upstream toward the dock. The same effect has caused repeated damage to the picnic area south of the dock, where reverse currents leave massive deposits of driftwood during moderate flooding. Beyond what is visible, it is not yet known what effect the 1960’s project has had on habitat and wildlife, including the great Potomac fishery.

Actions Needed to Alleviate the Threat

A short to medium term fix for Fletcher’s Cove can be achieved with a third dredging project. The cove was dredged in 1986 and 1997 to keep the Fletcher’s Boathouse concession viable (photos 25-26). History has proven the improvements from dredging to be temporary and there are obvious environmental concerns raised by any such project. Nevertheless, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, under

Superintendent Kevin Brandt, plans to undertake this work by 2017 if the budget can be appropriated. Sediment present in the cove requires sampling and analysis to assess potential disposal locations for the dredged material. Funding for this work must be secured soon in order for contractors to begin by November of 2015.

Just as a consensus has been reached over the cause of the threat, so to is there agreement that the best long-term solution would mean returning the riverbank to its original state before the fill was deposited over fifty years ago. Environmental scientists consider this work to be a restoration of the floodplain and riparian habitat, and there are many examples of successful projects around the country. Once undertaken, advanced computer modeling would confirm the necessity of removing all fill; otherwise, a partial removal plan could be devised. As with the cove dredging, sampling and analysis of the fill material is a necessary first step. If hazardous substances are determined the alternatives for removal may be far more difficult to implement, and this could place the project under a different federal agency. This work will be performed at the same time the cove sediment is studied.

The longer-term remediation of Fletcher's Cove may benefit from a unique opportunity to collaborate with an environmental restoration project ten miles downstream. The [Dyke Marsh](#) wetland south of Alexandria has been endangered by severe erosion for seventy-five years. Dredging projects from 1940 until 1972 removed about 54 percent of the 1937 marsh. Now the resource is far more vulnerable to erosion from storm waves and the resource continues to vanish. A federally funded project to restore Dyke Marsh, under the direction of the National Park Service, will proceed soon. Requirements for massive amounts of sediment and fill to carry out the restoration could possibly be met with material from Fletcher's Cove, collected and transported by barge to Dyke Marsh. Depending on the results of soil sampling, this convergence of need would benefit both environments and could necessarily accelerate the much-needed restoration of Fletcher's Cove.

How a Listing on DCPL's Most Endangered Places List Would Help the Site

Friends of Fletcher's Cove (FFC) was formed this past winter in reaction to the potential loss of access to the Potomac through the Fletcher's Cove boat concession. Hundreds of individuals and organizations responded to the original statement of concern over the October 2014 dock closure, and our support continues to grow. FFC

has a specific mission: to help ensure that there is sustainable public access to the Potomac River at Fletcher's Cove, so that the community can enjoy the river's rich natural and historic wonders. To that end, we sponsor this nomination to seek the greater public awareness of the cause and a sense of legitimacy for our organization that a listing as a one of DC's most endangered places would bring. We believe the designation could help us advance the project within the federal government and ultimately secure funding for a long-term solution. FFC is working closely with officials from the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the C&O Canal Trust. Now there is an opportunity for the DC Preservation League to join us, and to help tell the story of the rich cultural and social history of Fletcher's Cove as we work to preserve the resource.



1-2. Aerial Photo of Fletcher's Cove (top); View from GW Parkway Overlook



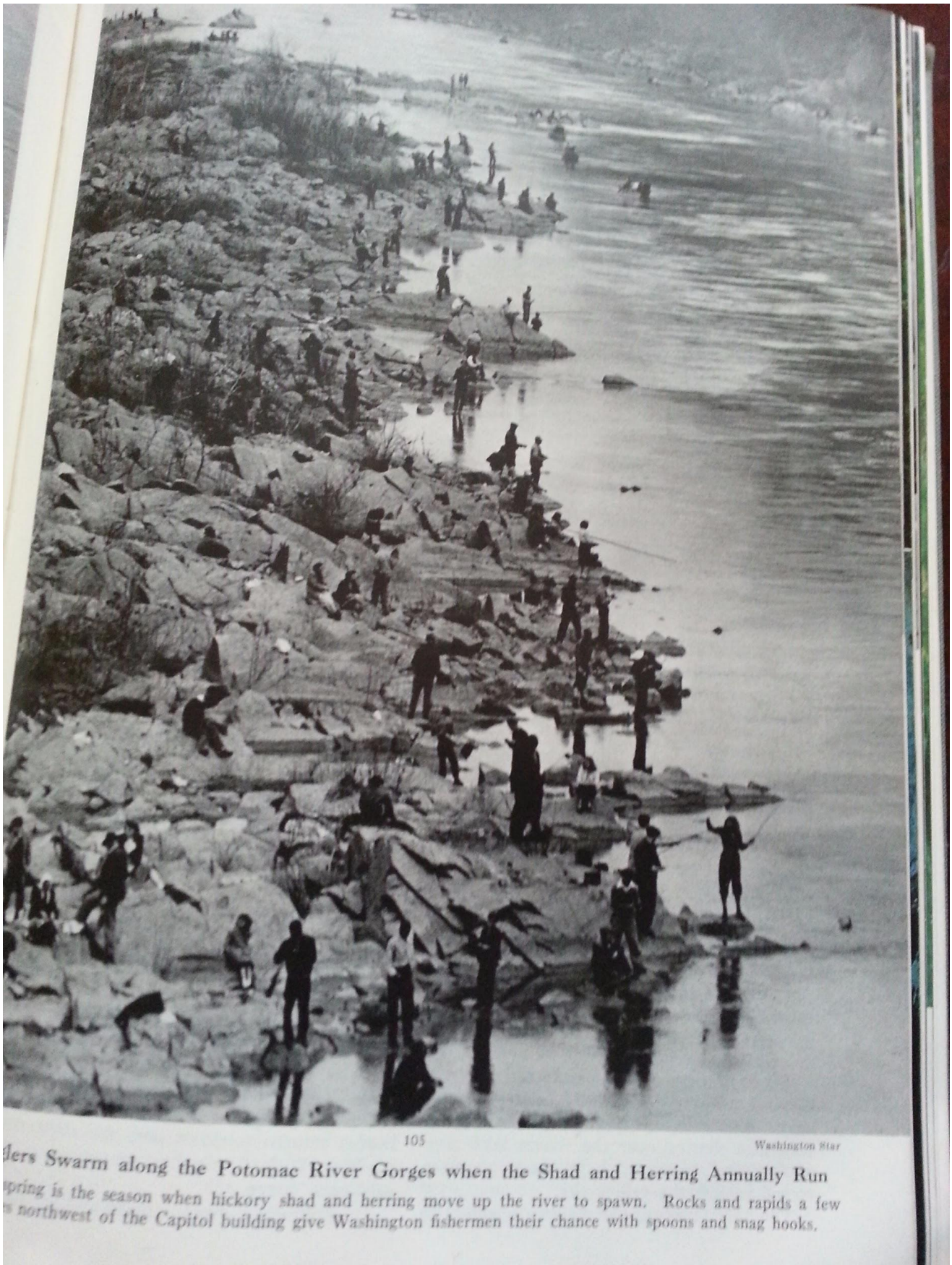
3-4. Fletcher's Cove in Summer and Fall, View from the Circle



5-6. Public Access to Fishing and Recreational Boating from Fletcher's Cove



7-8. Archeological Dig at the Cove, 1998; Original Boathouse Still Standing in 1963

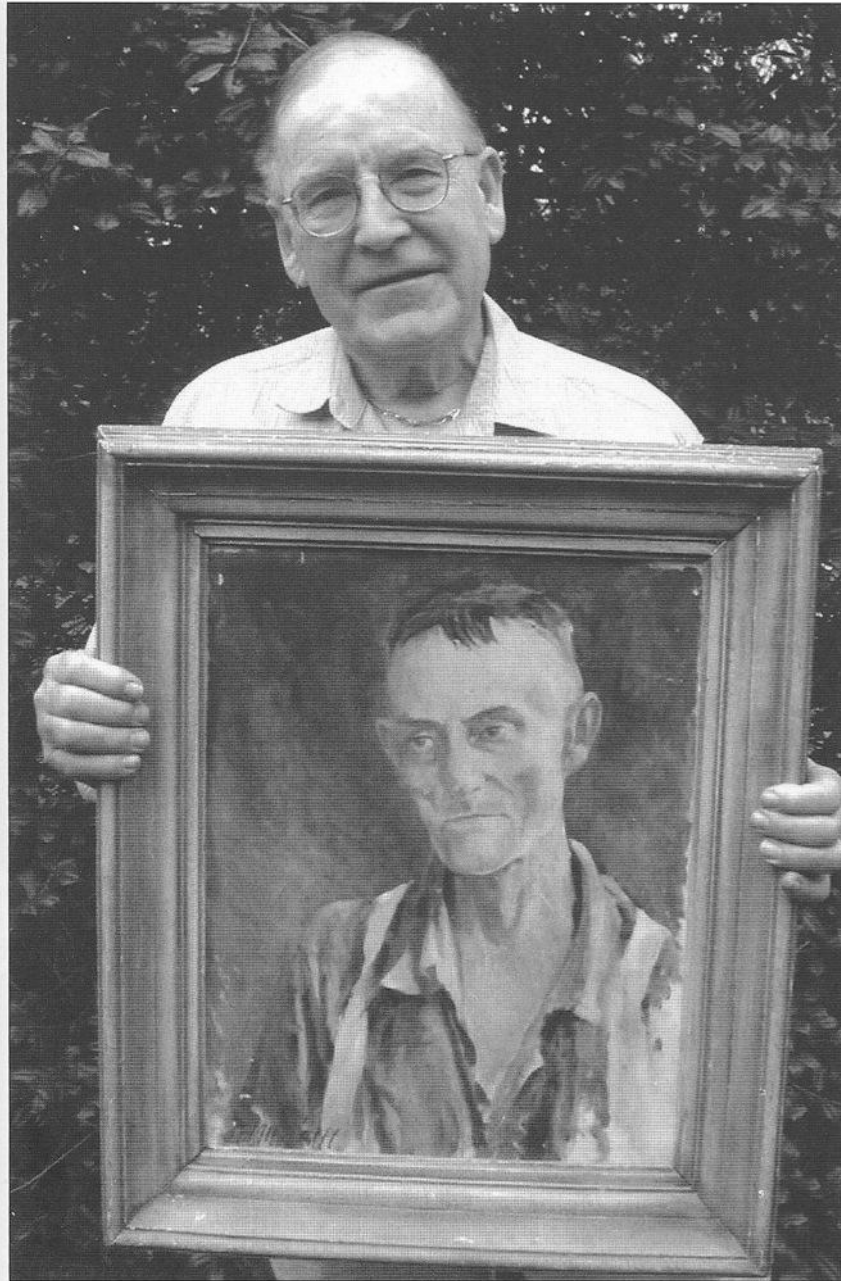


105

Washington Star

Fishers Swarm along the Potomac River Gorges when the Shad and Herring Annually Run
Spring is the season when hickory shad and herring move up the river to spawn. Rocks and rapids a few
miles northwest of the Capitol building give Washington fishermen their chance with spoons and snag hooks.

9. Fletcher's Boats Upstream from the Cove (1952 National Geographic Photo)



JOE FLETCHER WITH A PORTRAIT OF HIS GRANDFATHER, JOSEPH CLEVELAND FLETCHER. Joe Fletcher's grandfather was a fisherman. The business known as Fletcher's Boathouse began as a place to sell bait and other fishing gear and to service fishermen's boats. The recreational part of the business came later. The Fletchers have been in this area since the 1850s, and four generations of them have run the boathouse. Joe and his brother Ray have recently retired, but the National Park Service will keep the name Fletcher's. Joe recalled that many years ago, his grandmother would make pies and dinner for the rail men who came through on the B&O line bringing coal to Georgetown. Although there wasn't a scheduled stop at Fletcher's, they would stop the train and give the Fletchers enough coal to last until the next time they came through. (AS.)

10. Joe Fletcher with Portrait of Grandfather, Joseph C. Fletcher
(From *The Palisades of Washington, D.C.* by Alice Fales Stewart, 2005)



11-12. Julius Fletcher ca. 1955 (top, center) and Ray Fletcher in 2010



13-14. Legendary Fletcher's Cove Angler Mike Alper, Then (1960's) and Now



15-16. Canoeing Near Georgetown, 1901; kayaking at Fletcher's a Century Later



17-18. Jim Range's Big Striped Bass (top); Kids Heading Out to Fish at High Tide



19-20. River Access Closed at Low Tide, 2013 (top); Siltation Around Old Walkway



21-22. The New Fill Area in 1965 (top); Unsuccessful Relief Channel in the 1980's



23-24. Siltation Threat to Cove; Fill Area (bottom right) Blocks High Water Scouring



25-26. Dredging Projects at Fletcher's Cove in 1986 (top) and 1997

MYSTERIOUS SILOS FOUND NEXT TO C&O CANAL

By Linda Wheeler November 1, 1998

Archaeologists are puzzled and excited about the discovery of eight underground silos near Fletcher's Boat House on the C&O Canal.

Archaeologist Bill Barse said the silos, about seven feet across and five feet deep, were built about 2,000 years ago during a period when American Indians were not known to have lived in villages or to have used storage pits. Similar holes have been found elsewhere along the East Coast, he said, but they all date from about 1000 A.D., or later. By then, American Indians had turned to farming, tended to stay in one place for long periods of time and used to silos to store their harvests.

What the older silos were used for and why American Indians kept building new ones is a mystery -- and another reason for the excitement about the discovery.

If the silos prove to be contemporaneous -- built during the same time period -- that would indicate that a sizable population lived at the site, Barse said. If the silos aren't of the same time period, then they may indicate that a small group or a family occupied the area for a long period, digging and then filling one silo after another.

Either way, the find is "very significant" and will "greatly expand what we know about Native Americans in the Potomac Valley and their lifestyle," Barse said.

The discovery might suggest that Native Americans, or at least those living at that location, had obtained a level of sophistication not previously believed to have been attained at that point in history.

Seven of the silos are cylindrical, and one is bell shaped. Barse said he believes the odd one took on the bell shape when the makers encountered a large rock about four feet below the surface. They made up for the lost space in that silo by digging a cavity around the rock.

Barse said they have recovered thousands of artifacts from the excavation, many more than anyone had anticipated. He showed off one of those artifacts, a tobacco-brown piece of pottery of coiled clay construction with the imprint of a knotted net on the surface. Barse said it dated from "Zero A.D."

Barse and other archaeologists at the dig are employed by URS Greiner, a Baltimore engineering and

architectural services company that has a contract with the National Park Service to excavate the site.

Thursday, about a half-dozen archaeologists were sifting through soil or carefully scraping dirt when Joe Moore yelled, "I found a gorget."

The half-dollar-sized piece of carved shale was passed from one archaeologist to another, each admiring the stone-drilled holes in the broken breast plate.

Barse grinned as he turned the irregularly shaped gray stone over in his hand. "That is rare," he said. "It's the third one we've found here."

He said the purely decorative pieces are an unusual find because most of the early inhabitants of the Potomac Valley -- and elsewhere -- were living at a subsistence level and devoted their time to making only utilitarian objects such as bowls.

When Capt. John Smith explored the Potomac River in 1608, he saw villages of Indians and gave them the name Algonquians. Smith noted that they planted crops and fished the river.

Barse said he doesn't know if the silo-makers he has discovered were related to the Algonquians who Smith met.

The silos were uncovered after the Park Service decided to build a new bridge that can be used by cars, bicycles and pedestrians. The current pedestrian bridge is in poor shape and the tunnel under the canal used by cars to reach the river is too small for emergency vehicles. The new bridge is intended to accommodate everyone.

Before such construction can begin on federal land, government regulations require that an archaeological study be made. If the excavation leads to important findings, a project could be canceled or delayed, although that would be unusual.

Park Service archaeologist Jill Halchin, a liaison between Barse's group and the Park Service, said the silos are significant and the magnitude of the artifacts impressive, but she still believes the construction will start as planned next week.

"This is a tremendous find that indicates a lot of activity on this site," she said. "However, I think we have done a sufficient excavation, and the construction will begin on schedule." CAPTION: Archaeologists Jenny Marston, foreground, and Jeff Harbison examine one of the underground storage pits discovered near Fletcher's Boat House on the banks of the C&O Canal in the District. ec CAPTION: (Photo ran in an earlier edition) Mystery On the C&O Canal: Archaeologist Jenny Marston stands in one of eight underground storage silos discovered near

Ebening Star.

VOL. XXIII.

WASHINGTON, D. C., TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1864.

No. 3,416.

A GOOD CHANCE FOR SPRING FISHERIES

Will be rented at public auction, for cash, at the Market House, Georgetown, D. C., on FRIDAY, 12th of February, at 10 o'clock, the three Fishing Landings on the Potomac, near Georgetown, belonging to the heirs of Abner Cloud. Each Landing will be rented separately.

THOS. DOWLING, Auct.

Article 2

THE MORNING TIMES, SUNDAY, AUGUST 3, 1896.

ANOTHER STURGEON CAUGHT.

Third During the Last Two Weeks in the Potomac.

The third sturgeon of this season and one of three caught in the Potomac during the last two weeks, was hooked Friday afternoon at Lock Cove, a short distance this side of the Chain Bridge, by Lawrence Brown and William H. Hurley, of Georgetown. The fish was a buck and measured three and a half feet long. He weighed about 125 pounds.

In trying to land the fish into the boat Mr. Brown was pulled overboard, and Hurley, in trying to save Brown, also went into water. Both men were thoroughly soaked, but they saved the fish, which was cut up and distributed among their friends.

One of the men in charge of the Aqueduct Bridge says he has seen several in the water, or rather has seen the water disturbed as these fish usually do in swimming. The water in the river is very muddy now, and that in itself is an indication that sturgeon are about, or that they are in the near vicinity.

Article 3

A VIEW OF THE ROCKS AT BIG EDDY . CHAIN BRIDGE.

WATERS of the Potomac Among Best Fishing Grounds of the East—The Various Finny Tribes and Where They Are Found—Washington's Enthusiastic Fishermen Point Out Best Places for Sport—Where the "Veterans" Spend Their Time and the Novice Allows His Line to Drift With the Stream—The Fishing Outfit and the Proper Bait to Use—Fishing Laws.

FISHING in the waters of the Potomac in the vicinity of Washington will soon be rare sport, indeed. There are any number of "ol' fishin' holes" if you only know where to look for them. Just a few more days of sunshine and thousands will be inquiring as to the best places to fish, the kind of fish that may be caught and where they may be found up and down the historic Potomac. For the instruction of the public, especially the person who really wants to fish and doesn't know where to go or when to start or how to get there, it is proper that an old fisherman—a sort of expert—should be quoted liberally as well as authentically.

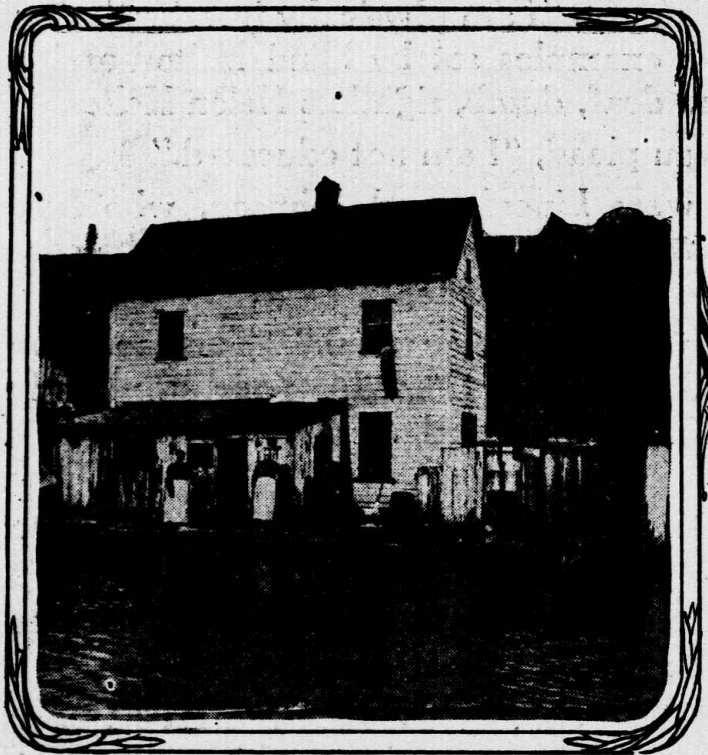
Robert E. Volkmer kindly gave the desired information and prefaced it with the statement that even now—for the initiated—the fishing season is upon Washington with a vengeance.

"This is the very time of the year when shad, rockfish, herring and white perch commence their journey up the river," he said. "Catfish, Mississippi channel; yellow perch, carp, sunfish, mullet and eels also are plentiful and can be caught anywhere on the river from the arsenal, at the lower end of the city, along the channel up to and in the Little river, on the Virginia side; also in Georgetown channel, opposite Reynolds' boathouse, and among the rocks along Analoostan Island. Then farther up come the Three Sisters, Hens and Chickens, Walkers point, Dixey's landing, Lock cove, Fletcher's boathouse, Boiling Rock, Flat Rock, Blacksmith shop, Eads Mill, Bush cove, Hellgate, Stone crusher, Chain bridge, Big Eddy, Turkey foot Rock, Little Rock and Little Falls.

"This is as far as the smaller fish, such as white perch, herring and yellow perch, can go, and is the end of tidewater. The larger fish, such as shad, rockfish and catfish, go up and over Little Falls, as far as the Great Falls. Some nice strings of large fish are caught during the season at the feeder, Sycamore Island, out from the first lock above Cabin John bridge, Dickey's and the Great Falls eddies, except shad, which return to salt water after spawning."

How to get to where these fish may be caught, it is readily seen, becomes an important matter, at least for the amateur. But a veteran angler comes promptly to the rescue with the suggestion that the fisherman go to Georgetown and hire a boat at a boathouse. Right opposite are the Little river, Georgetown channel and Analoostan Island, which are very good places for fishing. Also from Georgetown the Cabin John Bridge cars may be boarded. They will take the fisherman to New Cut road station. It is only a short walk to Fletcher's boathouse. Then all that remains is the hiring of a boat, and good fishing may be found as far up the river as Little Falls or at points down the river.

When the shad and other fish become scarce the season for small and large



BOAT HOUSE AT NEW CUT ROAD AND CANAL ROAD

men find great sport in the snagging of herring, and occasionally shad from Fletcher's at Lock cove, as far as Little Falls on both shores, when the fish are plentiful.

The sport of fishing for the game small-mouth bass from the Little Falls and on up the river is excellent with both spoon and live bait. They are generally good size, weighing from two to six pounds. The larger they are the more exciting time is had in landing them. They are quite plentiful starting from the feeder above the Little Falls, Sycamore Island, Dickey's, the Great Fall eddies and Tremmel's boathouse above the dam, where both boats and meals may be obtained at reasonable prices. Then come Pennyfield, Black ripples, the Cable, Stubblefields Falls, Seneca brakes, around Six Mile Island, Buzzard's roost, Seneca, Point of Rocks, and many good spots as far up as Harper's Ferry. These are convenient to get to for a good day's outing, and not very far from the city.

There also are crappie, pike, pickerel, suckers, eels, sunfish and carp. Snapping turtle and bullfrogs also are caught at these places, and in the canal which follows the river on the Maryland side.

The Potomac river from its mouth up, including its tributaries, if not the best, is one of the best, fishing waters along the east coast for most any kind of freshwater fish known. Farther down from the city good crabbing and salt-water fish are plentiful, and many visit places from the city as far down as Colonial Beach for good fishing. With such conditions existing, one can enjoy a good day the year around, if he loves the sport of fishing.

Among the names of the fishing places along the Potomac in the vicinity of Washington is that of the Hen-and-Chickens, which acquired this rather unique cognomen because a farmer in that neighborhood in the long ago used a portion of a chicken as bait. It proved

to be a discovery on the part of the farmer. The bait was so successful that he confided his find to his neighbors and friends, whose success in fishing with that kind of bait thereafter bordered on the phenomenal. So pleased was everybody concerned that in honor to the farmer the point was given the name of Hen-and-Chickens, and has ever since been so designated.

"Col." Hurley is one of the typical fishermen of the Potomac waters—typical in physique, countenance, in his walk, in his gestures, in the clothes he wears, in the way he smokes a good cigar, and even up to the grin that plays continually about the corners of his mouth when he talks of his favorite sport.

"The joy of fishing is too great for me to get hungry," he said. "I actually forget there is such a thing as eating when the fishing is good. Life to me is sweet indeed when my hook and line are in the water and I feel a fish nibbling at the bait. If I have a cold I lose it. I even forget to sneeze, and nothing could tempt me to cough. That's why I catch fish. That's why so many other men do not catch fish."

"Col." Hurley tells a remarkable story of a fish carrying two hooks and a line, which had belonged to him, for a period of six months.

"It was a big bass, and I was hauling him in, feeling certain that I would soon add him to my collection of that day's sport. He was strong; he was a fighter. He ran in every direction, and by all the adroitness known to his tribe he tried to escape while I reeled him nearer and nearer the water's surface. Once he came up so near the boat that I saw his eyes. They were staring straight at me. He looked so pitifully at me that for once in my life I felt a twinge of regret that bordered on sorrow. The fighting qualities of that fish almost unnerved me. But I reeled on. Then something happened. I don't know just how he did it, but in a

Humorous Bits From

LIVER WENDELL HOLMES in his verses, "The land, who frequently rises in the more august Senate to express in crisp language his views on life and its issues. Senator Rayner recently declared, with

THE WASHINGTON TIMES, SATURDAY, MAY 27, 1905.

Boats for Hire

At the Frame House for 50c per day, for the rest of the season, by Eeeds' Mill, Capt. Joe Fletcher.

Article 5

THE WASHINGTON TIMES, SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 1909

GEORGETOWN
FISHERMEN READY
FOR BUSY SEASON

Perch Will Be Biting Soon.
Captain Fletcher
Missed.

Fishermen are getting their tackle ready for a busy season. The lovers of the sport say that, from present indications, the season will be an extra good one.

For the last three weeks many good catches of Mississippi catfish have been made. Perch will start biting about April 15. The vicinity of the "Three Sisters," about a quarter of a mile above the Aqueduct bridge, is where the best catches are made.

Capt. Tom Barker, who for a number of years has furnished anglers with boats and live bait, is preparing for the season.

The services of Capt. Joe Fletcher, who for many years kept a boat house on the Georgetown bank of the Potomac near Edes' Mill, will be greatly missed this year. Captain Fletcher, who was the son-in-law of the late "Bull" Frizzell, upon whom, it is said, the Chain bridge fell without inflicting an injury, died about four months ago as the result of a paralytic stroke. Fletcher was perhaps the best posted man, about fishing in town and was conceded by all to be an authority.

Article 6

THE WASHINGTON POST
Friday, August 18, 1950

J. C. Fletcher Dies; 50 Years A Riverman

Funeral services for Joseph Cleveland Fletcher, 67, who knew the ways of fish, boats, and the Potomac after more than half a century on its banks, will be held Saturday at 11:30 a. m. at the Chambers Funeral Home, 3072 M st. nw.

Burial will be in the cemetery of the Walker Chapel Methodist Church, Arlington.

"Captain" Fletcher, proprietor of Fletcher's Boathouse near Chain Bridge, died in his waterfront home there Wednesday after an illness of more than a year.

Before returning home 11 days ago, he had spent a year in the Washington Sanitarium at Takoma Park, Md.

The boathouse now has been in the Fletcher family for four generations. It was founded by his grandfather, also named Joseph Fletcher, in the days when the C&C Canal was a going concern and mule teams towed freight barges from Georgetown to Cumberland, Md.

Born in the same house in which he died Wednesday, Mr. Fletcher knew the currents, snags, bars and rocks of the Potomac, knew where the fish were and how to get them, and had some of the river's largest rockfish to his credit. He was a member of the Isaac Walton League.

His boathouse furnished boats and fishing tackle for fishermen, and canoes for countless weekend spins and Watergate concerts.

During his half century on the river Mr. Fletcher often assisted in the rescue of capsized amateur mariners, occasionally helped recover bodies of drowning victims.

Surviving are his two sons, Julius Fletcher, the fourth generation of Fletchers to operate the boathouse; Joseph Fletcher, also of Washington, and two sisters, Mrs. Elizabeth R. Magruder and Mrs. John Bernd, Arlington.

Fletcher Family's Potomac Journey Nears an End

By Angus Phillips November 5, 2004

Fall has returned to Fletcher's Cove on the Potomac. The canoes are neatly stacked, the rental bikes tucked away in the big tin shed the late Julius Fletcher helped his father build after the great flood of 1936 washed everything away. The new structure was anchored to boulders with steel cables so it wouldn't float off when the next big one came, as come it did 36 years later.

A dozen pale red wooden rowboats bob in the rain at the floating dock in case a late-season angler should turn up, keen for a last try at catfish or bass. Leaves are red, the ground is cold and all is as it long has been, except that for the first time in more than a century no Fletcher is hard at work patching and painting boats for next year.

Brothers Joe and Ray Fletcher, the fourth generation of their family to sell bait and tackle and rent boats and bikes from the little shed halfway between the C&O Canal and the rolling river, are retiring at the end of the year, giving up the contract they have had with the National Park Service. They are worn out, but the decision is not without regrets.

"We've been here 145 years," sighed Joe, 63, who came up with that figure the same way he deduces much of what he knows about the river. "That's what my father told me."

Whether Fletchers were here before the Civil War or made their appearance some short time after is uncertain, but there is no disputing the indelible mark this family leaves. The little eddy over which they preside downstream from Chain Bridge is named Fletcher's Cove; it's right there on the map. And if the National Park Service, which owns the land, follows its word, Fletcher's will stay Fletcher's in name and spirit for years to come.

"We don't really want to change anything," said Steve LeBel, concessions program manager for the National Capital Region of the NPS. The brothers pay the park service a concession fee to run the business and they spend seven days a week on the job during the busy summer months. In the winters they work on equipment when the weather permits.

"We hoped to have Ray and Joe carry on but they're not interested," said LeBel, who will seek a new concessionaire. "It's the best fishing hole in D.C. It's regionally known, if not nationally, and we're committed to being ready for the fishermen when the spring runs come next April."

Those spring runs are the heart of Fletcher's trade. Fishing starts in mid- to late-March, when hordes of white perch

move upriver from deep holes downstream where they wintered. The perch, loaded with roe, seek fast, fresh water at the top of the tidal reach where their eggs hatch best.

Next come shad and herring, bright from the sea and heavy with roe. Generations of Marylanders and Virginians have converged on the Potomac around Fletcher's each spring to dip-net herring and shad, extract the roe and salt-cure the flesh, though the practice has declined in the last 25 years.

"The fish are still here, people just aren't as interested any more," Joe Fletcher said.

Finally, the river in late April and into May teems with spawning striped bass, locally known as rockfish, which attract another wave of anglers keen to catch a trophy up to 50 pounds.

"I've fished Cancun, the Florida flats, Louisiana, Texas, Montana," said Mike Bailey of Seneca, who's been a Fletcher's regular for 25 years, "but there's only one place I want to be in April and that's right here. It's one of the best fishing holes in the country."

That it lies within the city limits, minutes by car from the White House and under the loom of Georgetown University's high-rises makes it that much more remarkable.

Because of its location, humble Fletcher's has always drawn a diverse crowd. Joe Fletcher rented rowboats to Sen. John F. Kennedy before he was President and later to brother Ted. Bobby Kennedy rented bikes for his brood. President Bill Clinton jogged by and stopped for lemonade. President Jimmy Carter was a regular. Chief Justice William O. Douglas lived just up the hill and stopped by on his famous walks. John Riggins and Sonny Jurgensen have been by several times, as have congressmen beyond numbering.

Danny Ward, who has worked behind the counter since 1969, when he was a seventh-grader at Gordon Junior High School, remembers helping Jordan's Queen Noor with a bandage after she fell off her bike.

Such celebrities rub elbows with plumbers, house painters, maintenance men, immigrants, even homeless people who come to fish for food. "The river is the great equalizer," Bailey said.

The place has always drawn a crowd, said Joe Fletcher. He pointed to a spot 50 feet from the concession stand where archeologists dug a decade ago and came up with arrowheads and pottery shards from native American gatherings.

It's a natural destination for fish-gatherers because it's a natural gathering place for fish. The cove lies just below Little Falls, a barrier to fish passage during spring floods. Spawning fish hit a virtual dead-end around Chain Bridge, where they mill by the millions, vulnerable to attack.

The concentrations draw predators besides humans. Flocks of black cormorants bedeck tree limbs along the river in spring while ospreys soar and herons crowd the banks, seeking easy meals.

The whole tableau is endlessly varying and gentle on the eyes, not much different today than it was a half-century ago when Joe and Ray Fletcher, who grew up in the District and attended the old Western High School, started working with their father. "I was hooked by the love of fishing," said Joe, who specializes in catching perch and intends to be out next spring as usual. "I've got a canoe," he said with a twinkle in his eye. Ray, 58, hasn't fished much in years. "I just love the outdoors," he said. "That's what got me."

Each has two sons but the next generation of Fletchers, who grew up in Northern Virginia, is uninterested. "They're college-educated, they're into other things," said Ray, whose offspring are 25 and 21. Joe's are in their 30s, both working with computers.

"They don't want to work seven days a week, weekends and holidays all summer long," Joe said.

So the string ends. When the Fletchers go, they will take with them volumes of knowledge. Joe, for example, is compiling a list of scores of named fishing spots -- the Parlor, Walker's Point, the Ledge, the Gutter, Pumphouse Cove, Boiling Rock, Split Rock, Jenkins Hole, Dixie Landing, all in sight of the boat house and each with a story, though many are lost to time.

"My father named Dixie Landing for an old guy that worked for him who used to take a rowboat downriver to Dixie Liquors at lunchtime. When he came back upstream, that's as far as he usually got."

Fletchers were there in the days before air conditioning when Washingtonians repaired to rough shacks along the river in high summer to escape the heat. Joe can take you across to the Virginia side to Little Italy, where Italian stoneworkers blasted rock from the banks and ferried it downriver on barges to help build Washington.

Ray can show you where the old train line ran along the canal, bringing grain to the flour mill in Georgetown, and coal and lumber. "My grandfather lived across the canal," Joe said. "When the coal train came through, the engineer would stop and get dinner from my grandmother, then he'd shovel off enough coal for them to get through the winter."

And so the stories go, reeling backward to simpler times. In many ways, Fletcher's Boat House is a living link to those times. "It's old-fashioned," said Ward, the longtime counterman, who came back to work at Fletcher's with a degree from Grinnell College, and hasn't left. "It's not cutthroat or hard-edged. And the fishing -- well, it's just terrific in the spring."

Ray Fletcher, left, and his brother, Joe, are the fourth -- and last -- generation of their family to sell bait and tackle

When Birds Flock, It's Time to Fish

Advertisement

By Angus Phillips
Sunday, April 5, 2009

When cormorants return to Washington, the fish are here. "They're not chasing algae," Mike Bailey said when he called to report the coming of the cormorants more than a week ago.

Bailey is one of the perennial top rods at Fletcher's Boathouse, just below Chain Bridge on the Potomac, where this month the water teems with herring, shad, perch and striped bass forging upriver to spawn. Jet black cormorants by the thousands soar in to gorge themselves alongside great blue herons and ospreys. It's quite a show.

The mid-Atlantic region boasts good places to fish for everything from tuna to brook trout, but no place is more appealing in April than the District, where cherry trees, dogwoods, azaleas, jonquils and the like bloom along the Potomac's banks and fish crowd the water.

Last year, Bailey and Larry Coburn caught a 55-pound striper one day in a Fletcher's rental rowboat, along with several 20- and 30-pounders. When the shad run, which just started, hits a peak, it's nothing to catch 15 or 20 an hour, even on a fly rod. White perch, once abundant beyond belief, are not as plentiful lately but some days you still can fill a stringer.

Hickory shad and white shad are protected; you can't keep any. That doesn't stop anglers from enjoying the sport of catching and releasing a species dubbed "poor man's marlin" for its jumping and fighting ability. Stripers, locally called rockfish, are protected until May 16, when you can keep two a day over 18 inches. The season is always open for herring and perch.

The spring abundance is only part of the appeal at Fletcher's, which is beautiful beyond measure as long as floods don't push the river out of its banks. The cool, dry spring gave the staff time to spruce up and launch all 34 wooden rental rowboats, which still go for \$20 a day.

On a soft, sunny spring day, there's nothing like rowing out into the current, dropping anchor and casting for shad or bottom-fishing for perch or rockfish in the heart of the nation's capital. Steep, forested banks on either side muffle traffic sounds, birds are everywhere scarfing silvery fish and the river rolls on.

If it's perch you're after, preferred tackle is a simple, double-hook bottom-fishing rig weighted with a one- or two-ounce lead sinker. Small bits of bloodworm are the best bait, but night crawlers and minnows work. Fletcher's usually has all three. Find a deep hole at the edge of the main current, anchor up, drop the rig and wait for a tap. It's a good way to introduce kids to fishing.

Shad also favor current-edges. Anchor, cast brightly colored shad darts downstream, then retrieve slowly and wait for a strike. Fly-rodders do the same with shad flies. The best colors are pink and green. Both perch and shad can be caught from shore, as well.

Rockfish, which should arrive in numbers any day, are best targeted with fresh-cut herring baits fished at the bottom of deep holes. Use strong tackle, as fish of 30 pounds and more are common. It's permissible to catch and release stripers before the season opens May 16, and the big ones are most abundant early. They'll move back to the Chesapeake after spawning.

The best of the season is still to come. Bailey, Coburn, Jeff Nicklason and I fished last week on a cool, breezy April Fools' Day and caught enough perch and shad to keep it interesting. A nice first foray, but nothing compared to when it's right.

You need a D.C. fishing license, \$10 for residents and \$13 for non-residents (under age 16 none required). Fletcher's has licenses, bait and tackle and more than a century in the trade. Call 202-244-0461 or check <http://www.fletcherscove.com>.

* * *

CASTING CALL: This popular, annual Potomac event will be April 26-27 at Fletcher's, 4940 Canal Rd. NW. Family & Youth Casting Call runs 11 a.m.-4 p.m. on Sunday the 26th, when a section of the C&O Canal is cordoned off and stocked with sunfish for kids to catch. Volunteers are on hand to teach youngsters and adults fishing basics and river stewardship. It's free.

The adult Jim Range National Casting Call, renamed in honor of Range, the influential environmental lobbyist who died Jan. 20 of kidney cancer, is from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday the 27th. The event attracts government pooh-bahs and their minions, who get to fish for awhile and pound each other's backs for a job well done. An array of demonstrations and exhibits is worth a look if you're passing by, but it's not a public event.

LET 'EM GO: I'm no fan of big-money fishing tournaments, which put undue pressure on a resource for somebody's personal gain, but make an exception for the Boatyard Bar & Grill's opening day rockfish tournament. It promotes catch-and-release by awarding prizes for photos of the day's biggest catch measured against an official ruler, and donates proceeds to environmental causes. Opening day in Maryland is April 18; entry fee is \$150 per boat, deadline is April 15. Check <http://www.boatyardbarandgrill.com> for details.

LOCK 'EM UP: Federal officials nailed seven watermen and the owners of a famous Washington seafood store in a sting that involved some 600,000 pounds of illegal rockfish worth millions of dollars. All have reached plea agreements and sentencing is upcoming later this month. The watermen and Robert Moore Sr. and Robert Moore Jr., who own Cannon's Seafood in Georgetown, face up to five-year prison sentences and fines up to \$250,000. Here's hoping the punishment matches the crimes. Too often, wildlife violators get away with a slap on the wrist.

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2015 Shad Report #6

National Capital Chapter Trout Unlimited

2015 Shad Report #6

5-7-15

Abundant Shad

The shad run at Fletcher's Cove has been extraordinary after the late April high water and reached a crescendo last weekend. Hickory shad came back strong as soon as the water cleared, delighting shore-bound anglers just upstream from the dock. When boat rentals resumed a week ago Monday, hickories were still plentiful up and down the river and the countdown for a big push of American shad began. By late last Thursday impressive numbers of these beautiful fish were finally found holding in the mid-cove and the stage was set for several days of great fishing.

First, an important announcement: On Friday morning, representatives from the [Chesapeake Bay Program](#), a regional partnership, will host a press event at Fletcher's Cove to highlight some recent success in [American shad abundance](#) and raise awareness about the restoration work that remains to be done. Jim Cummins, our favorite shad crusader from the [Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin](#), is one of the featured speakers. It turns out that the abundant American shad at Fletcher's reflect the positive trend in the Potomac for measured shad abundance, but abundance is depressingly low elsewhere in the Bay watershed. Local shad anglers are invited to attend the event, share recent experiences and offer observations about the local fishery. It begins at 11:15 and may well end when the World War II Victory Capitol Flyover comes roaring down the Potomac.

The event will take place within view of "the shelf," the ledge that stretches across the river from the point just out from the boat dock. A few days ago, when the river was still high and cool, American shad took a break from their long swim to gather here and celebrate the currents. Not surprisingly, anglers did the same and carried forth the decades long social fishing experience unique to Fletcher's Cove. I've been down there often and took in some of the joy.



On Friday morning I arrived late to find favorite spots taken, but high tide and strong currents made it easy to slip in line. Paul Hagen was close by with first-timer Graham Zorn and they were busy. Paul is a fellow Palisades resident and serves as the Chairman of the Board for Chesapeake Conservancy. I expect him to do well with his fly rod, but Graham couldn't keep shad off his ultra-light spinning outfit. Paul nets one of Graham's many roe shad in the photo above, but the largest one he hooked--a four-pounder, at least--ran toward my boat and escaped by pulling out the clasp on lightweight snap. The unusual (for Fletcher's) rig, featuring an inline shad dart and trailing spoon, came from the Internet. Graham did his homework but the shad delivered the most useful lesson. I couldn't help teasing him a bit..



Many of us learned the Fletcher's way of rigging a spinning rod from the master, Mike Alper, seen above landing a nice one on Friday afternoon. The rig is simple but involves five knots, apparently a turn-off for some. Just tie a small 3-way swivel to a short leader (about 18") and long leader (30-36"), add darts and tie to your line. If one dart is heavier, it should go on the short leader. The long leaders are good for small darts, spoons or even flies. As for the orange float seen in the photo, that's another bit of Alper ingenuity. Mike uses the hand-carved wooden bobber when fishing shallow areas where snags abound.

Mike returned on Monday with Richard Leininger, another shad beginner and the lucky winner of Mike's silent auction trip offered at our Shad Night meeting back in March. Richard went the distance with Mike, over eight hours, and apparently aced the seminar. The two of them boated 41 Americans and had to pull the net out for the last one, a huge roe that got a few nearby anglers talking. For Richard, this was the good timing we all dream about. He came back the next two days to try his luck from shore and continue his new passion. His wife noticed the change—Richard said she practically pushed him out the door on Wednesday.



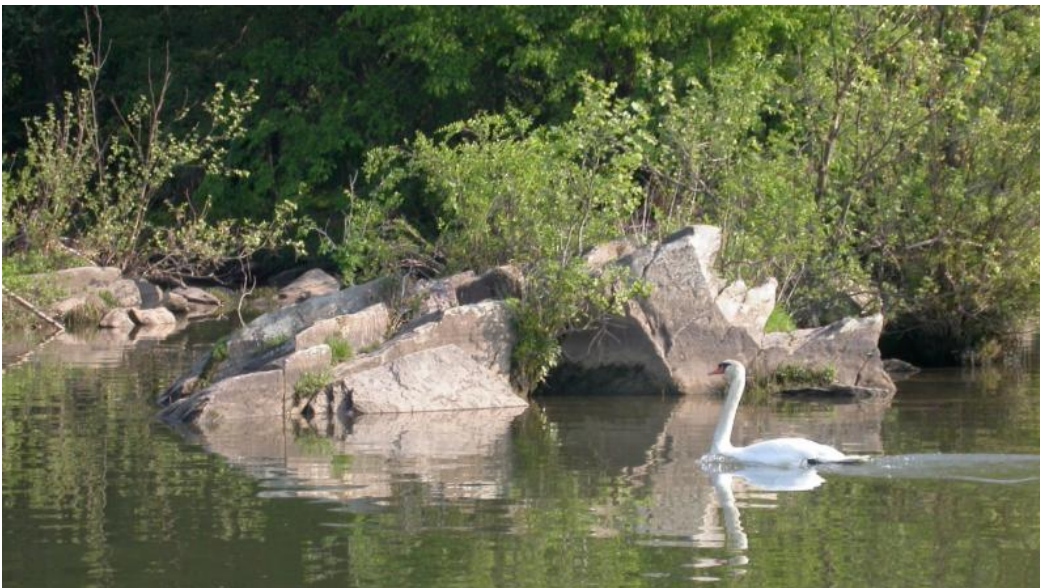
There were plenty of other repeaters over the last week. We've been seeing a lot of Chris Wood, President and CEO of TU. He brought the kids on Friday when they were off school for staff training, and they found hickories aplenty in the slack water near the dock. I also kept seeing Tony Ogden out there with his fly rod and wondered if he was sleeping on the boat. Brian Cassidy came down nearly every afternoon with his dog Legend, just like last year. When our own Sandy Burk wasn't fishing for American shad at Fletcher's, she was harvesting them with Cummins for the Shad in the Schools program, or releasing the fry days later with the kids at Mather Gorge and Mason Neck State Park. On Tuesday, Drew Koslow found his friend Sandy fighting shad on the river, tied up to her boat and promptly landed an American double-header.



First time shadders was a recurring theme. Jeff Brust from New Jersey came down to the Cove with Geoff White to see what all the fuss was about and argue about the proper way to spell their first names. He watched his friend land two nice American shad and came away very impressed. However, nothing topped the sheer giddiness of Joe Witte as he attempted to land shad on a Tenkara rod. On Friday he anchored next to me and promptly hooked what may well have been the first American shad ever fought on a Tenkara anywhere. You'd think Joe would start with hickories but he really didn't know the difference and had only just learned of the shad run. That first fish made short work of the reel-less rod and escaped with a splash, seen in the photo above. Soon Joe was on to another, this time a small buck, and the fish circled his boat, never tiring. Bob Smith had to net the pesky shad one boat over and take him off the leash.

Lest we forget hickory shad, the same period produced massive catches up and down the Cove. John Kuriawa and Phil Kerchner had a great day in the lower end when the river was still up and the big school of Americans had not yet arrived. Even so, his last cast that day, one of many he typically has on each trip, produced a "last cast lunger" after he had called upon "just one more American to bite." Then on Monday John and his brother upped the ratio considerably when half of their eighty shad were Americans, mostly bucks. Thomas Perkins and Scott Stankus had similar success just a little further up the Cove and found hickories deep in the morning, then higher in the water column as the day progressed. More recent news from the lower Cove indicates a sharp drop in activity as the river warms and water levels drop.

Along the same line, the popular Gordon's Rock shoreline just upstream from the Boathouse produced huge numbers of hickory shad up until about Monday. Steve Kim held court there day after day and kept me posted about the great action while the river was still high. A week ago Tuesday he caught 50 hickories in eight hours. Most "were caught by a fast/aggressive retrieve and exaggerated twitches. Fish hit from everywhere though a lot were almost right next to shore. The last hour was almost every cast, even the bad casts that didn't go far and it was the kind of day a fisherman dreams about." Boaters anchored off of this area continued to find the kind of success we featured in our last report. The action has slowed with the lower river but American shad catches were good there today.



The hickory shad season may be on the wane but you might find big schools holding up toward Chain Bridge. There's no reason to give up on the American shad; in fact, it seems like everyone that shows up comes away with at least a few. Some patience is required but these are hard charging fish and never fail to impress. The action may yet peak again when seasonable weather returns and new schools arrive. If you come down to try for "white shad," be sure to look out for our new, very white visitor to Fletcher's Cove, the beautiful swan shown above. Yet more proof that shad fishing at Fletcher's Cove is never dull.

[Mark Binsted](#)
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Report from Fletcher's Cove - November 22, 2010

The oars and paddles are gathering dust, the bicycle wheels have stilled. The boats are in their various stages of repair and repainting. While the river reflects the final palette of a beautiful fall, all that is left of the 2010 season at Fletcher's Cove are the memories. It's that melancholy time of year when we look back with satisfaction and gratitude for a job well done while looking forward with newborn hope and happy anticipation.

On the last day of the year that the boats were in the water I took a little row across the river to an old favorite fishing spot called "The Parlor." That same day the weathered and well-used boats would be yanked from the cove to be scrubbed and prepped for painting. Ray Fletcher and I have spent so much time in close personal contact with these wooden boats that they are like a part of us. To row them is a trinity... the oarsman, the boat and the water. Done properly, patiently and gracefully, moving the boat over the water is a bit primal, even spiritual. It was a peaceful row... a hundred strokes across to what is known as Lowell Rock. The leaves were ablaze, the water like glass and above on the palisade, an Osprey circled in a hunt for breakfast. In my youth I spent many a chilly dawn anchored in The Parlor waiting for a fishing reel to scream with the run of a rockfish that had found my cut herring. Now, I don't get over to that spot very often, so I was moved to be there for a few quiet moments of reflection. I hope many of you can also find a place of peace. It can do wonders for your state of mind.

2010 had its challenges. Mountains of snow and moderate flooding to start off the year, then summer heat so intense one would think we resided on Mercury rather than Earth. And even though the economy remains fragile, many people sensed that Fletcher's is a close-by, value-rich recreational resource. Kayaking was ever more popular and truly can be called the water sport of the decade.

In the angling arena, the perch and shad fishing were great in the spring, but the striper season was cut short by the rising water temperatures and the lack of herring in the Potomac. I thought this would be the "summer of snakeheads" at Fletcher's, but it was not to be. After many were caught early-on, they vanished to still waters down stream. As expected, the big blue catfish, which are reaching behemoth proportions of late, were the fish of the season in 2010. Look back to previous reports for some of the monsters.

At the boathouse, we love visitors from an earlier era. It reminds us of how enduring this place is and how it has touched so many in highly personal ways. As Ray Fletcher and I painted boats one day a couple of weeks back, up walked a lovely woman who had been poking around the place for a bit. Her face had that uniquely human and indescribable look of seeing something soothing to her soul and familiar to her mind's eye. Her name was Chris. As tears welled up in her eyes, she told us about her dad, Joseph Tisinger, who taught her to fish at Fletcher's back in the early 1960's. Joseph as a boy, fished at Fletcher's in the 1930's and knew all the river-rat regulars. As Chris spoke of her happy days at the boathouse, I could see the little girl in the tile-red boat learning to unhook the silvery perch she and Dad were catching and then dropping into a bucket. White perch, as she recalled, were the most delicious of fish. She spoke of beautiful memories and how the perch used to "run like crazy here."

A visit like this is precious. It reminds me that truly, the weight of our lives is in simple things and



The view looking downstream from The Parlor



A blaze of fall color surrounds the tackle shack and bike shed

personal connections. Thank you, Chris, for your visit and the memories.

It is also time to say thank you to those who made "Fletcher's 2010" possible: To our hard working employees and corporate support personnel. To the staff of the C&O Canal National Historic Park, in which we are located. To the ever vigilant but friendly officers of the U.S. Park Police. To our suppliers of everything from paint for the boats, to ice-cream for the little ones, to worms for the fish. And last, but not least, to our customers. I hope our smiles have let you all know what you mean to us! We look forward to seeing you again in March 2011.

Dan



A happy young angler, Merrick Edgerton of Reston,
with a prized catch
(photos by Dan Ward)

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