

Transcription of the Petition of Captain George Pointer
September 5th, 1829

No. 1

To the President and Directors of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

Gentlemen –

I pray you to read the memorial and humble petition of an old and Obscure Citizen, I was born in the year A.D. 1773. 11th October in Frederick County Maryland. I was born a slave and continued one for 19 years, a part of which time I had the honor of being with the engineer and directors of the old Potomack Canal Company. during that period, I had the good fortune to get in the good graces of my master the engineer and the Company, having been well recommended by the engineer and directors for the faithful Services rendered them by me, my master Told me that if I would pay him 300\$ In a given time that I should be my Own man, which I did out of the Hard earnings I received from the company; I at that period occupied the place where my Little humble cottage now stands it Being given to me by the Directors and Company in 1787 – the chief engineer as well as I can recollect was Mr. John Smith from Scotland, whom General Washington as I learnt employed to explore the route of the Potomack Canal, it fell to my Lot to be his servant during the period of the Exploration, as well as I can recollect Col. Gilpen of Alexandria was one of the directors Col. Herbert Lawyer Keith and Col. Fitzgerald – Mr. Vanhorn pay master; Yearly in the month of October General Washington would come to view the progress of the work and well I recollect that at every squad of workmen he passed he would give a dollar to, and I also will well recollect that the sections contained Two miles $\frac{3}{4}$ and ten Rods, I continued in that way during Mr. Smiths time, Mr. Harbaugh was chosen Mr. Smith's successor. I then was turned over to him and continued with him untill the Lower canal was finished, and then went on with him to the great falls. I continued with him till Capt Myers took his place as engineer, I was Directed by him to take charge of five Boats that was to run the free stone from Seneca to the great falls From day to day for the use of the locks; which duty it was well known I Executed faithfully and to the Satisfaction of Capt Meyers and the company. after the death of Capt Myers, Mr. Harbaugh Took charge again; at that time the Lower Locks was under way; in the meantime flour came down so plentifully that ware houses was established for the reception of produce. in the meantime a machine was got under way to lower the flour down for the boats to take it down as the Locks was not finished, We then made a way from the falls to Sandy Landing For the purpose of hawling boats down To get them up to the machine to get the flour to convey down; at that time there was a change among the directors, the next Engineer was Col. Dickens, the next Genl. In Mason, next Mr. Templeman and Mr. John Laird; the flour and Other produce came down so profusely, that the company thought it expedient that pilots should be chosen to

carry the western boats down, four was chosen and among them was your petitioners humble Servant, – in that capacity we continued for two seasons. after which time they could with little help make out for themselves, at the same time the company knowing that the boats would be laden with a return cargo I was ordered to take some hands on the Bed of the river for the purpose of making walls etc. for boats to return, at that time Mr. Harbaugh was about finishing the Lower Locks; after they were finished I went To Boating for myself and continued in that capacity untill new directors were appointed and an engineer also, who was Mr. Josias Thompson. The directors were then Genl. Jn. Mason Mr. Jonah Thompson Col. Elie Williams and Mr. Jn Laird; I then entered with Mr. Thompson in the Erection of the New Locks at the Little Falls, Mr. Thompson went after that to Explore the River Antietum in order to ascertain whether it was navigable for Boats to come down in the Potomack; after that the directors thought it expedient that the Potomack should be explored as there was a number of obstructions that hindered the passage of boats up and down also; I was chosen by Mr. Thompson to Superintend the hands in removing the obstructions and making a good way For the passage of Boats. Which was Executed diligently and to the satisfaction of him by me. I next went with the Directors and engineer to the Shenandoah River. I was left by Mr. Thompson to Superintend the navigation of that river such as removing dams and fish potts and many time run the risk of Loosing my Life by the inhabitants in the absinence of the company for having removed the Same for the passage of boats agreeable to the direction of the engineers and Directors. We finished there and returned Back; after that was completed. Col Williams and Mr. Thompson Left this place for the relocation of the Cumberland Road to Wheeling; before they started they called on me to meet the board that had assembled at the Union tavern, they then told the board that they thought Inexpedient to employ any engineer on the Potomack, as I had had experience enough to Superintend any work on the Potomack that they might want done, Consequently I was named by Mr. Henry Foxall to Superintend any work that might be wanting done, and upon his adoption I was appointed to Superintend a parcel of hands for the purpose at that time of building a wall to throw the water in the canal in the great falls for boats to Come down in Low water; it was finished to the utmost satisfaction of the Board, I next was ordered to Seneca with 30 hands and made a wall to throw the water into Seneca Canal; I then commenced running free Stone from Seneca to the Little Locks that were then building; in running the Stone above mentioned on a certain day – there was a parcel of boats fast in Seneca Falls with marble for the Capitol; I could not get by. consequently I had to run Out Side. Unfortunately my boat struck, I was precipitated out of her, and a broken Leg was the issue of it. I Laid in that Situation four days without medical aid, I However Saved the cargo and got it down Safe to the Little falls its place of destination; Next there was a complaint lodged by the Inhabitants of Cumberland, specifying that the Inhabitants on the margin of the river had Obstructed in a great measure the passage of Boats both down and up by building fish Potts; I was ordered by the company to get hands, go up, and Tear all down that in any manner damed the water so as to obstruct the passage of boats. I went with hands and out of 73 fish potts I pulled down 44. the rest I conceived a benefit as they backed the water; I came down and was summoned before the board to give an account of what I had done, after my Statement was given in It was approved by the board. At that Time I asked Leave of the board to build me some fish potts out side of the navigation of the Potomack near the spout of the Little falls, they thought it was

wrong to grant me that Liberty in as much as I had been employed by the company to tear down a number that had been established above on the Potomack, but they being informed and Knowing at the same time that if they granted me the Liberty that it could not effect the navigation in no respect; Immediately granted me the Liberty of doing so, which I completed after Eight hard years Labour, it was not Known at that time that the spout of the Little falls could Be run by boats and if it could my dam would not of been any obstruction. I Commenced building and as I have said Before completed them in 8 years. Your Petitioner has had the use of them for only 3 years the cost of building them Was at Least 400\$ the fish that was Taken in them was carried to the markets of Geo Town and Washington—and they have not paid him he only having the use of them for three years One half what they cost him—the foregoing fish potts I built, that cost me So much Labour and money have been Taken down by Mr. McCord & workmen and the Stone of which has been put in his Wall: I spoke to Mr. McCord about Destroying me in that manner, and his answer to me was that I was Injured considerably by it but he could not help it, and that the company ought to compensate me for it indeed, and that my only course to pursue was to apply to the company for redress, and I do hope that in the plentitude of their wealth that they will remunerate me for the same, as they would of added in equal degree to the support of my self and an aged and distressed Family; also the Shap Spring Island which is no more for me as the wall that was built opposite Mr. D. Bussards section Shuts me out entirely from it —

I made on the same Island yearly from 12 to 14 Barrells of corn, but alas it is for me no more at all; For gods sake remunerate me for the Loss I have sustained By it Which was almost our all—

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is drawing near my Little Cottage that I have occupied for 43 years, unmolested with an aged Wife and some offspring but alas none left to assist us—

I do trust in God, the giver of all things, that if the new Company does Dispossess us of our Little Humble Cottage, that hitherto has not not been a detriment to the old Canal Company nor anybody Living, and which was given to me, that they will give me Some Little place adjacent to the new Canal, that they may upon it support themselves for the few days that they have to breathe upon this earth – Which is but few God has prospered the old Canal that the father of his his Country First brought into existence and may he favour the new one, My well wishes the Company has for its future prosperity—

Gentlemen, I have the honor to be, with the greatest obligation to you all, your very humble and obedent Servant

Capt. George Pointer

Sept. 5th 1829