

Rowing down the Potomac

1800 canal now a parksite

WASHINGTON — When President John Quincy Adams turned the first spadeful of dirt for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in 1828, he envisioned a successful commercial waterway through the Potomac Valley to the Ohio River.

"I regard this event as the most fortunate incident in my life," he remarked in a bit of presidential hyperbole.

Labor troubles, lawsuits, floods and railroads eventually doomed the financial success of the waterway. But for years the canal allowed transport of coal, grain and lumber to the nation's capital. Operations stopped in 1924.

Thanks to retired Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, the 35-mile towpath route through Maryland to Cumberland is now a national park instead of the highway suggested by a newspaper editorial in the 1950s.

Douglas, a seasoned outdoorsman, dared some journalists to backpack the entire distance with him. He wanted them to absorb nature's spring offerings undisturbed by the roar of wheels.

Only a few stuck with Douglas through the entire journey. But the ensuing publicity, maintained by a yearly repeat performance, killed the highway idea and eventually

made the park possible.

For a sesquicentennial celebration, the National Park Service is doing its best to bring back a 19th century flavor. Mule-drawn passenger barges still ply the canal from the Georgetown Visitors Center.

Barge ticket purchasers at the center are treated to a colorful exhibition of watercolors by artist Earl Minderman of Bethesda, Md. Minderman, a former Ohio newspaperman, is fascinated with the canal era in America.

Some of his scenes, peopled with characters in period costumes, show historic buildings such as the Great Falls Tavern, the Abner Cloud House and a block of Georgetown homes built in the 1800s.

Another Minderman canal subject is the Seneca aqueduct, now undergoing restoration, which adjoins Maryland's Seneca State Park.

A building near the canal in Georgetown, the Forrest-Marbury Mansion, is another link to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Minderman decided to paint this building just because "looming against the sky" it interested him. Later he found it was once the home of William Marbury, the justice of the peace who sued President James Madison and precipitated the famous 1803 high court decision that declared its own right to declare acts of

Congress unconstitutional.

Minderman admits he has an unlikely background for an artist. A graduate of Ohio State University journalism school, he worked with various newspapers before entering the public relations field.

He later worked in Washington with the Federal Communications Commission. During all these jobs he maintained an interest in painting, sandwiching in lessons from various artists when time permitted.

His canal exhibit, which will continue through September, is a product of those years.

"I never thought I wanted to be anything but a newspaperman," Minderman said, "but the artist was there too. Finally it came out."

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Officials say GSA still has 'crooks'

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Reciting a long list of cases detailing widespread fraud and corruption, General Services Administration officials told Congress Tuesday there is still a "hard core of crooks" in GSA who must be rooted out.

Appearing before the Senate Federal Spending Practices subcommittee, GSA chief Jay Solomon disclosed major reorganizational changes he has made within the scandal-ridden agency but cautioned that many more abuses remain to be uncovered.

"You've got a hard core of crooks in there and they have to be rooted out," Vincent Alto, GSA's Acting Inspector General, told the panel. "It is going to take a combined federal effort to root out this corruption nationwide."

Calling it an "ugly and disgusting saga," Solomon said disclosures made so far "may represent only the tip of a gigantic iceberg."

The fraud, the corruption, the thievery, the mismanagement and downright abuse of the public trust that have been exposed to this date are only the beginning," he said.

Officials said six cases already have been turned over to the Justice Department and other cases were being pursued in Louisiana, Texas, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Newark, N.J.

Declaring that he has "made a

dramatic turn in the right direction," Solomon outlined sweeping reorganization steps which included tougher guidelines to restrict uncompetitive contract awards, centralization of budget functions, creation of a new office of audits and investigations, and establishment of an Office of Acquisition Policy to develop and control government purchasing policies and procedures.

The panel heard top GSA officials recite several cases of fraudulent use of GSA credit cards which have cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

In one instance, a Department of Education employee gave her GSA supply purchasing credit card to a parking lot attendant in exchange for a free parking space. With the card the attendant bought \$80,000 worth of goods which he sold.

Investigators said the government employee was given a suspended sentence and later "promoted two grades up" in rank.

William Clinkscales, chief of the GSA's office of investigations, said that in the last two weeks they have turned up in excess of \$100,000 in frauds, adding "we have reason to believe there are more throughout the country."

In the Midwest alone, Clinkscales said, the GSA was "closing down thefts of from \$3,000 to \$5,000 a week that have been going on for years."

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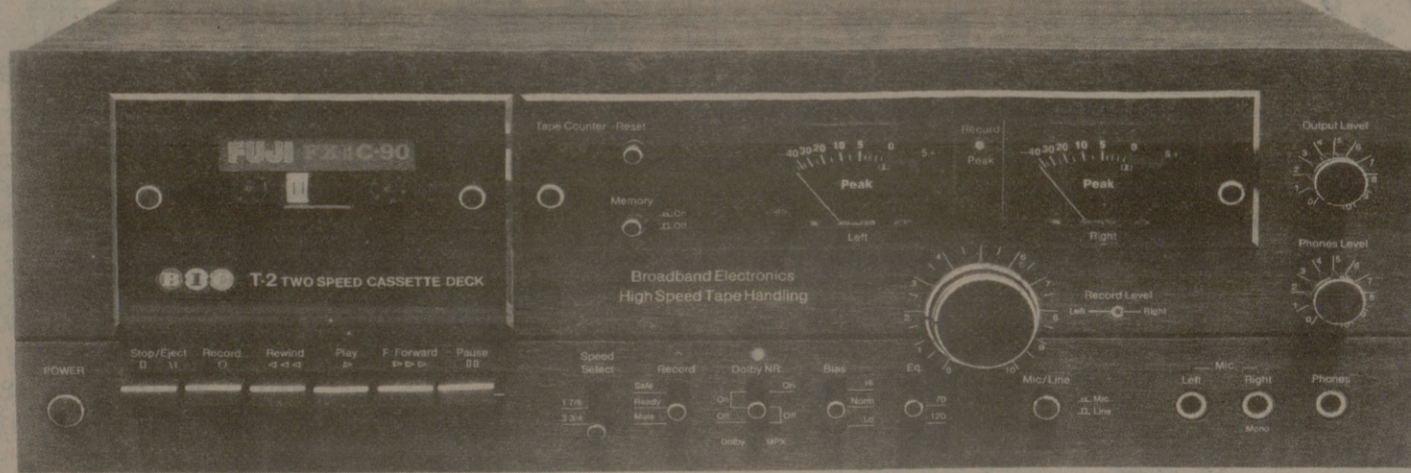


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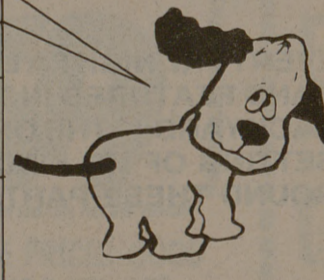
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