



MORRIS CANAL

LIFE ON THE CANAL

In a hot summer morning in 1904, local photographer, Olin Vought, captured a typical day on the Morris Canal. In the picture to the right, canal boat 762, has just entered Wharton's Lock 2 East, the gates are closed and in the distance we see the locktender cranking open the wicket valves to let water fill the lock. A lanyard at the bow is hooked over a peg on the drop gate to hold the boat steady while tons of water pour in from below.



The boat will only be here for a few minutes but while it rises in the lock the crew knows just what needs to be done. Only the mules get to stand in the shade, still attached to the towrope, while the mulentender changes their collars. The captain has come forward from the tiller to the feed boxes located amidships. He will fill the feed bags so the mules can eat after a short pull through the next level to Inclined Plane 4 East.



Since the boatmen had to buy provisions every day, locktenders often ran a store to supplement their income. To help out, the two girls have run ahead along the tow-path and have done the shopping. Now they stand with the day's provisions in hand ready to step aboard as the boat comes even with the top of the lock. Not a moment is wasted.



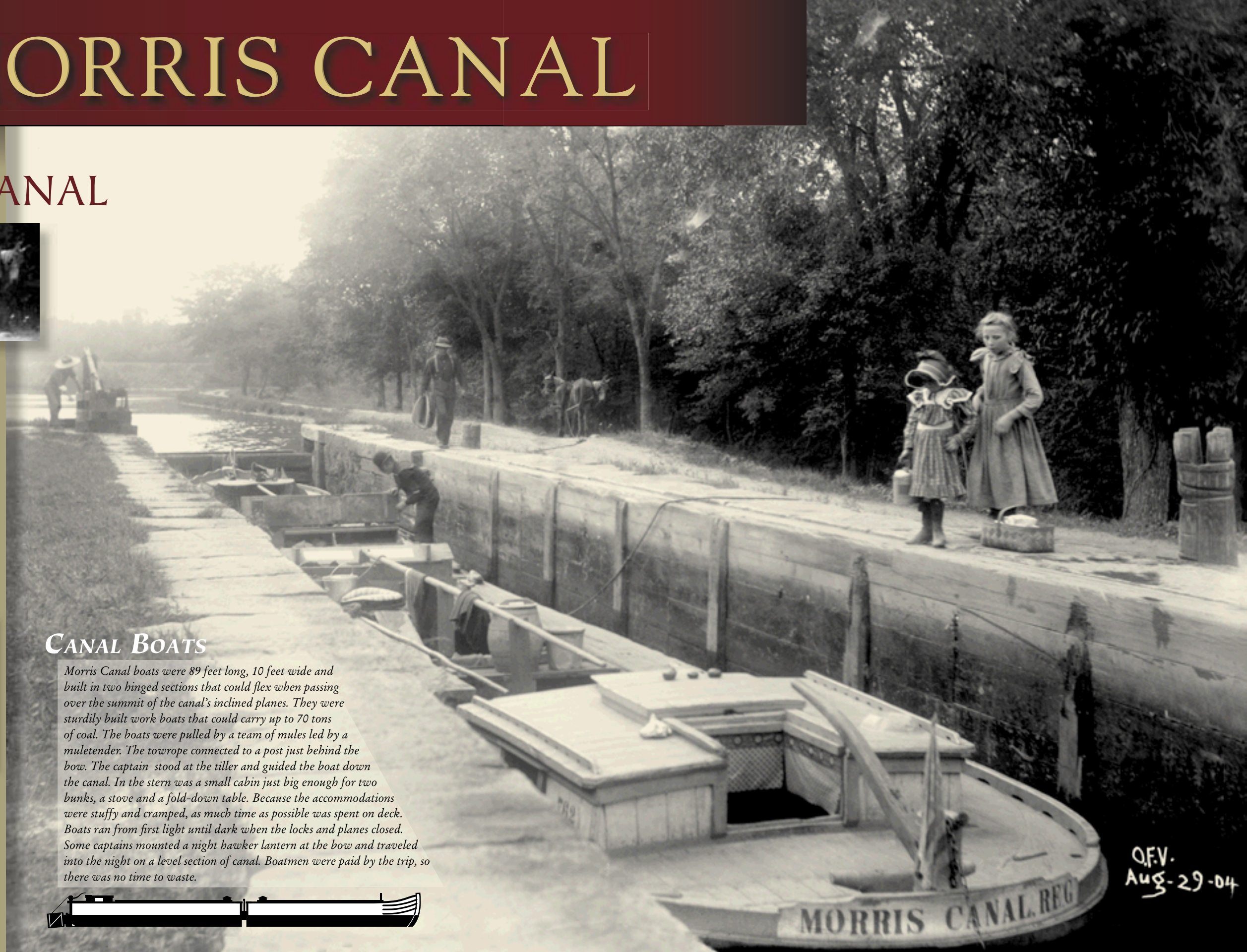
Aboard the boat we see homey touches in the curtains hung in the companionway to shade the cabin from the sun. On the roof are three tomatoes ripening while the caption's conch shell horn sits nearby.

Moments later, with the drop gate down, the mulentender would grip the harness and, with a smart step out, the towrope would tighten and the boat would be off, traveling at three miles an hour. Miles to go before they sleep.



CANAL BOATS

Morris Canal boats were 89 feet long, 10 feet wide and built in two hinged sections that could flex when passing over the summit of the canal's inclined planes. They were sturdily built work boats that could carry up to 70 tons of coal. The boats were pulled by a team of mules led by a mulentender. The towrope connected to a post just behind the bow. The captain stood at the tiller and guided the boat down the canal. In the stern was a small cabin just big enough for two bunks, a stove and a fold-down table. Because the accommodations were stuffy and cramped, as much time as possible was spent on deck. Boats ran from first light until dark when the locks and planes closed. Some captains mounted a night hawker lantern at the bow and traveled into the night on a level section of canal. Boatmen were paid by the trip, so there was no time to waste.



O.F.V.
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