

Captain George Pointer

Great Falls Park  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the  
Interior



Junior Ranger Activity Book



Celebrating the  
Story of

Captain George Pointer

This Book Belongs To

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# Tribal Land Acknowledgement



Let us begin by acknowledging that we are in the territory of many Indigenous peoples that have known the Potomac Valley and its lands and waters as their homeland for thousands of years to the present day, including Algonquin, Iroquois, and Siouan peoples.

We continue to build on our engagement with traditionally associated Native American communities to identify all of the different connections with these lands held by many Native Nations. Together we recognize the Native Nations' past, present, and future unbroken and unbreakable connections to these lands. We honor the resilience and perseverance of these Nations even as colonizers claimed this land as their own.



# Who is Captain George Pointer?



Captain George Pointer was one of the many workers on the Patowmack Canal. Over the course of 17 years the Patowmack Canal was built by both enslaved and indentured laborers and hired free workers. George Pointer was one of the many enslaved people who were rented to the Patowmack Canal company.

While being forced to work on the canal, George Pointer was able to save enough money to buy his freedom. Once he was a free person, he continued to work for the Patowmack Canal Company for over 40 years. He eventually became the last Superintendent Engineer for the canal. As superintendent, George Pointer was in charge of the construction of the Wing Dam. Today, the Wing Dam is the only consistently operational structure from the canal at Great Falls Park. This means more than 200 years after it was constructed, George Pointer's creation is still here at Great Falls.

In 1829 George Pointer wrote a twelve-page letter to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company. The letter was a way for George Pointer to change the new canal's construction path. George Pointer wanted the construction path to change because the proposed construction would destroy his home. The letter to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company told the story of George Pointer's life and his significant contributions to the Patowmack Canal.

Today George Pointer's nearly 200-year-old letter is preserved at the National Archives. Also, Park Rangers at Great Falls Park used the letter and worked with the descendants of George Pointer to uplift this untold story.



# Instructions

## Get Ready To

**LEARN** about Captain George Pointer's story and his connection to Great Falls

**EXPLORE** Great Falls Park and its rich history

Learn how the National Park Service works to

**PROTECT** Great Falls park, it's wildlife, and the diverse stories of those who once lived and worked there.

## Activity Book Instructions

1. Before you start this activity book grab a map of Great Falls Park! You will need it for some of the activities.
2. Complete this activity book. Remember to read all of the instructions on each page before you start the activity. If you need help ask a ranger!
3. After you have finished the activity book, review your activities with a Park Ranger. A Park Ranger will sign your certificate and award you the official Junior Ranger badge.



# Unscramble the Words



Great Falls and its surrounding areas served as a major trading place for many indigenous tribes. Unscramble the words below to see what goods indigenous tribes traded.

SMOENL    \_\_\_\_\_

CNOR    \_\_\_\_\_

SAUQHS    \_\_\_\_\_

SENAB    \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you buy these items today?

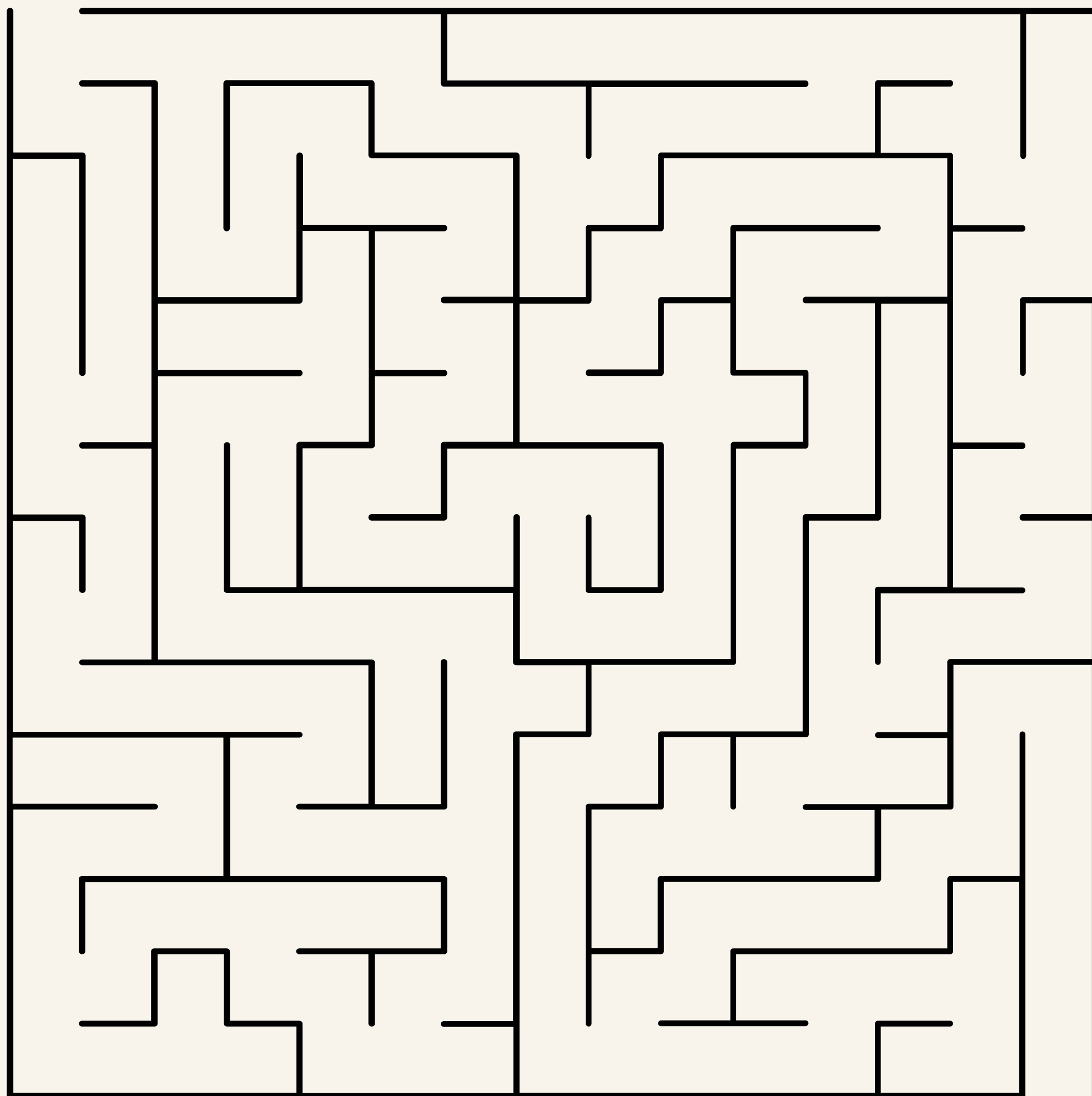


# Navigating the Waters

During the 40 years that George Pointer worked for the canal, he did a variety of jobs. One of those jobs was as a captain. In Washington George Pointer captained the boat that brought materials to build the Capitol building in Washington D.C. Some of the materials Captain Pointer brought included Seneca sandstone for the floors and Potomac marble that was used for the columns in the House and Senate chambers. Now it is your turn to navigate through various twists and turns. Complete the maze below to get from Great Falls to the Capitol.



**End**



**Start**

George Pointer and other boat captains had to quickly overcome obstacles and solve problems while driving the boats. How do you overcome obstacles?

# Working Conditions

When the construction of the canal first began in 1785 most of the workers were indentured servants, people who willingly entered into work contracts. However, harsh working conditions pushed many of them to break their contracts and run away. Because of this, the company turned to renting enslaved people who were forced to work here.

Building a canal is back breaking work. The vast majority of the enslaved people at Great Falls were laborers. They dug the canal ditches using hand tools, they hauled materials around the construction site, and placed the stones for the canal walls and dams. A few enslaved men worked as blacksmiths and carpenters and there was even one shoemaker, Mr. Tom Hope. Without the company exploiting their labor, the canal would never have been built

The picture shown below is of a “Mason Mark” which is a mark that stone masons left on the blocks they cut as a way to keep track of their pay. Use the trail map and go to Lock 1 to see a Mason Mark that one of the masons left at Great Falls. In the space next to the picture create your own Mason Mark.



What should the Canal Company have done after the indentured servants left instead of forcing enslaved people to work under back breaking conditions?

# Saving the Home

In 1787, the directors of the Patowmack Canal Company provided a then enslaved, teenage George Pointer with a small cottage. It was located on the Maryland side of the river near the Little Falls bypass. George and his wife, Elizabeth “Betty” Pointer, lived there for over forty years where they raised their three children Mary, Elizabeth, and William Pointer.

In 1829 George Pointer wrote a twelve-page letter to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company. The letter was a way for George Pointer to change the new canal's construction path because the construction would destroy his home. The letter to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company told the story of George Pointer's life and his significant contributions to the Patowmack Canal.

Even though no reply from the C&O Canal directors has been found, Captain George Pointer's letter appears to have had an effect. According to the 1830 census, the Pointer household was still living in the same location after canal construction near Little Falls was completed.

This was not the only time that the Pointer family had to fight to keep their home. In the 1840's George Pointer's granddaughter, Mary Ann Plummer Harris built their family's home, Dry Meadows, on a two-acre farm along what is now Georgia Avenue in Washington DC. However, by 1928, Joseph Harris, Mary Harris' son, was forced to sell Dry Meadows so that a school that only served an all white housing development could be built.

In the end the descendants of Captain Pointer were forced to sell or move from their homes four different times due to discriminatory real estate laws and regulations.

In the space below draw what you think George Pointer's home looked like when he was living there. Be sure to draw the river beside the home and the trees surrounding the home.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick black border, intended for a drawing of George Pointer's home and its surroundings.

George Pointer's home was very important to him, and he fought hard in order to save it. What does home mean to you?



# Writing for a Cause

Before the Civil War, black people who were free people, which means they were not enslaved, had to prove their status as free people.

In 1838, Captain Pointer's granddaughter, Mary Ann Plummer Harris, had her freedom threatened. She and two witnesses had to testify at the Washington District Courthouse to prove her status as a free person. After court she was given a Certificate of Freedom on November 24, 1838. But, even with the status of a free person, the long shadow of racism never went away.

Proving her status as a free person was a cause that was extremely important to Mary Ann Harris because having the status of a free person helped to protect Mary from the inhumane conditions and treatment that enslaved people were forced to suffer.

Answer the questions in the spaces below about a cause that is important to you.

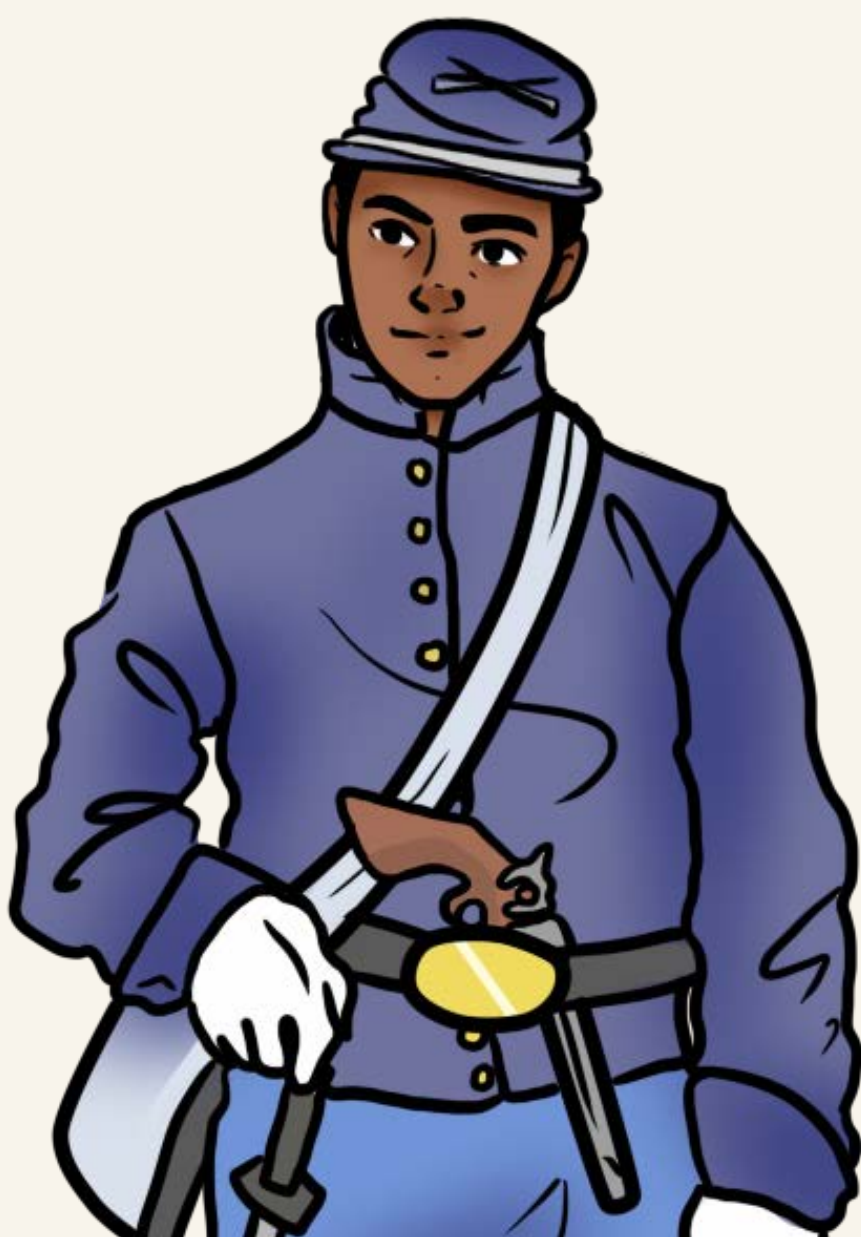
What is a cause that is important to you?

Why is this cause important to you?

Write 2-3 sentences explaining why other people should care about your cause too.



# The U.S. Colored Troops



Even though Captain George Pointer lived long before the start of the Civil War, George Pointer and his legacy is still connected to this significant piece of American history. This is because two of his grandsons, John and Joseph Harris were a part of the U.S. Colored Troops. Complete the word search below and try to find the grandson’s names in the word search

F	J	O	S	E	P	H	A	N	F
R	R	A	C	G	K	I	N	A	O
E	F	R	R	P	S	G	W	F	R
E	U	N	I	O	N	E	S	B	T
D	N	Y	T	I	C	A	N	A	L
O	J	O	H	N	I	E	F	T	B
M	E	A	X	T	A	R	A	T	A
E	L	F	T	E	L	A	L	L	T
R	M	H	Z	R	B	L	L	E	A
S	O	L	D	I	E	R	S	E	S

SOLDIER

UNION

FREEDOM

CANAL

BATTLE

FORT

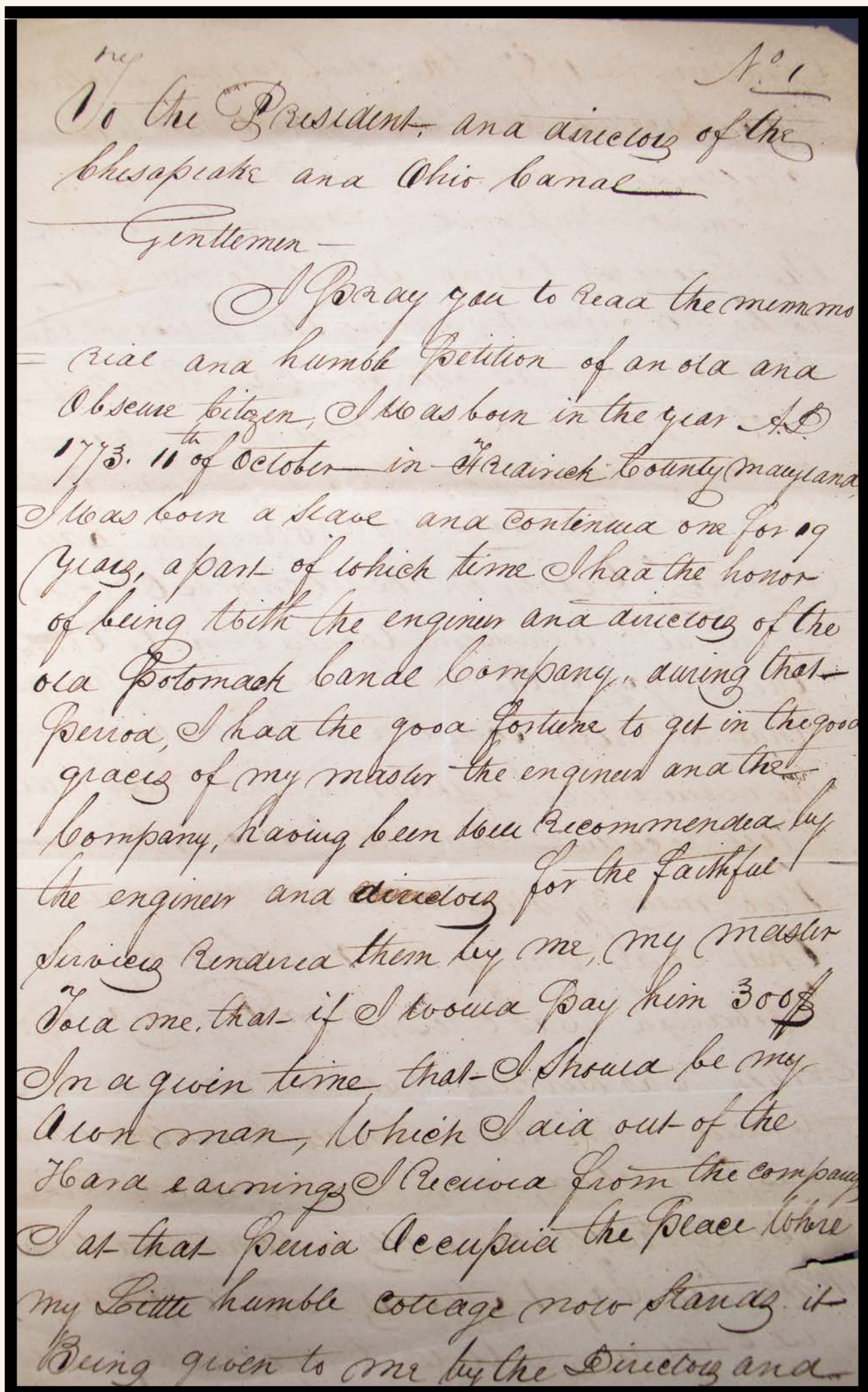
POINTER

FALLS



# George Pointer's Letter

Go to the Visitor Center and find the exhibit about Captain George Pointer. Look through the exhibit and learn more details about George Pointer's life and his legacy. Find the transcribed copy of his letter (if you can't find it ask a ranger!). Read the first page of his letter and fill in the blanks below.



Gentlemen -

I pray you to read the memorial and humble \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_ of being with the engineer and directors of the old \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_ and directors for the faithful services rendered them by me, my master told me that if I would pay him \_\_\_\_\_ in a given time that I should be my \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_ now stands.



# What's Your Legacy?

George Pointer's twelve-page letter to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company is the only reason we know any details about his life. This letter was the story of George Pointer's life, his accomplishments, and is now a part of his legacy. In the space below write your own life story like George Pointer's. Include things like what you want other people to know about you, and what you want people to remember about you 200 years from now.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





# CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

This certificate is proudly presented to

\_\_\_\_\_

For completing the Captain George Pointer Junior

Ranger Activity Book!

\_\_\_\_\_

RANGER SIGNATURE



Place Stamp Here





