



The Patowmack Company was organized to construct a canal system making the Potomac River navigable for trade from Georgetown to Harpers Ferry. Canals were to be built at Great Falls, Little Falls, Seneca, Shenandoah, and House Falls. Only at Little Falls and Great Falls were locks required. During this period canals with locks were uncommon in the United States, and thus represented a significant engineering achievement.

The Patowmack Canal at The Great Falls of the Potomac was the largest of the five skirting canals on the Potomac. To re-enter the river below The Great Falls, a channel had to be blasted through solid rock. Holes were bored by hand into the rock and filled with blasting powder, and fired. This constituted one of the first uses of explosives in an American engineering project.

Work on the canal began in 1785 and was completed in 1802, under the direction of several canal engineers. The Patowmack Canal at The Great Falls survives today as an example of the Patowmack Company's pioneering canal venture in the United States. Although it, and the various structures associated with it, are in ruins, they still constitute significant remains of early canal technology and represent commercial speculation by individuals and states that marked much of the nation's growth.



Potomac (Patowmack) Canal Historic District

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places October 18, 1979

