

Godey Lime Kilns (Ruins)  
Junction of Rock Creek and  
Potomac Parkway and Whitehurst Freeway  
Washington  
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GODEY LIME KILNS

Location: Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway at the K Street and Whitehurst Freeway exits at the end of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal at the edge of Georgetown in the District of Columbia.

Present Owner: The National Park Service.

Present Use: Historic Exhibit.

Significance: The Godey Lime Kilns are an example of a local mid-19th Century industry. The kilns are being preserved as the oldest surviving relics of this important Georgetown business.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Godey Lime Kilns were an important part of the thriving mid-19th Century commercial life of Georgetown. The manufacture and sale of lime at this site was conducted from 1864 to 1908. At the peak of development the kilns consisted of four oven structures and an assortment of wooden sheds and structures built up around them. The entire operation was perched on the edge of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. By the 1960's the entire location had changed with the end of the Canal's use and its termination several hundred feet from the kilns. All wooden structures disappeared after the 1908 disbanding of operations on the site, and two of the four ovens were removed to make room for highway ramps leading from the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to the Whitehurst Freeway. As a result of this work the grade elevation was raised about five feet and the main fire doors for the two remaining kilns were covered over.

The lime industry can be traced back as far as 1830 in the Washington Area. William H. Godey started his lime business in another location in about 1858 and moved to the present kilns in 1864, the address was then known as 27th and L Streets, N. W. Godey was in partnership with John A. Rheem in 1865 and 1866, and then he was on his own until his death in about 1873. After Godey's death his family continued to operate the kilns. In the 1965 Lewis Report the kilns are thus described:

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"By 1884, the family business seems to have been run by Edward Godey, under the name of the "Washington Lime Kilns". He advertised his business as occupying 500 feet on the east side of 27th Street and 500 feet on L Street. With 25 workers, Edward Godey boasted of producing 2000 barrels of wood-burned lime per week in five patent kilns. The limestone came down the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal from a quarry near Harpers Ferry, and was unloaded, no doubt, on the east shore of Rock Creek beside the Godey Kilns."

In 1897 the kilns were taken over by John McL. Dodson who operated them until 1907, when the kilns were closed.

By 1965 the kilns had fallen into serious disrepair and were in danger of collapse and a combined effort by the National Park Service and the District of Columbia Highway Department was undertaken for their stabilization.

Prepared by: Donald B. Myer  
Architect, NCDC  
National Park Service  
Washington, D. C.  
August 30, 1965

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Godey Lime Kilns are two rubble stone structures about ten by ten on the bases and fifteen feet high. Both are backed up by a matching stone retaining wall. The kilns consist of large circular oven and fire places lined with fire brick. The openings for tending the fires and lime access are red brick arches.

The remains of the lime kilns in 1965 included only two of the original four ovens and these were half buried. Much of the pointing mortar had disintegrated and much stone had fallen out or deteriorated. Some sections of wall were about to collapse. Some of the brick arches above the oven openings were incomplete. The whole was overgrown and covered with vegetation and rubble.

The kilns are located on the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Whitehurst Freeway. The kilns are surrounded by highway and access ramps. As some of the highway building was being completed it was determined that the National Park Service and the District of Columbia Highway Department would stabilize the ruins to prevent further collapse. This was to be done by pointing and repairing the exposed surfaces and capping each kiln with a concrete slab. These structures are to be maintained by the National Park Service in connection with Rock Creek Park and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.

In early photographs four kilns appear on the edge of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, each with a tall narrow metal chimney protruding from the center of each top. A cluster of wooden utility structures was built up and around the masonry kilns. These have a variety of heights, but most had shed roofs and were built up against the kilns and the retaining wall. The yard between the buildings and the canal was littered with wagons and other commercial equipment and materials.

The Godey Lime Kilns were probably of the wood burning, intermittent type. The Lewis Report discusses intermittent lime kilns: "These kilns were fired to burn a charge of limestone at one time, and the kiln was extinguished after the charge was calcinated. The burning of a charge in an intermittent kiln probably took about three days and nights. The lime was piled into the cavity of the kiln over an arch or vault made from chunks of limestone. The fuel was placed beneath the arch. Fire-brick lining often increased the effectiveness of the kilns. The entire charge was heated to red heat, and kept at this temperature until the charge had settled about 1/6 of its volume, and was easily crushable with an iron bar thrust into the kiln."

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Prepared by: Donald B. Myer  
Architect, NCDC  
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Addendum to  
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