

James River & Kanawha Canal Locks 1-5
Between 10th and 13th Streets, North of Byrd St.
Richmond
Virginia

HAER No. VA-23

HAER
VA
44-RICH,
100B-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

JAMES RIVER AND KANAWHA CANAL LOCKS 1-5
(KANAWHA CANAL TIDEWATER CONNECTION LOCKS)

HAER
VA
44-RICH
100B-

VA-23

Location: Between 10th and 13th Streets, North of Byrd Street
Present Owner: Richmond Metropolitan Authority
Present Occupant: Not known
Present Use: Not in use

Statement of

Significance: From the late eighteenth century until the 1880s, an important and far-flung canal system gradually emerged on the Richmond scene. Envisioned by George Washington and others, the canal system eventually included over 200 miles of canal as well as a steamboat route on the Kanawha River and a turnpike over the Alleghany Mountains. During the nineteenth century, it was to play an important role in the economic and social life of Virginia. In Richmond, the agricultural produce of the James River valley was brought and unloaded for marketing or was transported to the docks for shipment along the coast or abroad. The canals also carried manufactured goods from Richmond for distribution throughout the state and transported passengers to their homes or to the West.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1784 George Washington and others were working for the formation of a company to "smooth the road and make easy the way" for navigation in the James River.
- 1785 The James River Company was incorporated and General Washington was named its first president.
- 1795 A short canal was opened into Richmond.
- 1820 The James River Company ceased to be a private company and became a public enterprise of the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- 1832 The Commonwealth of Virginia became concerned about the expense of completing the canal system, so the James River and Kanawha Company formed to lessen the financial burden to the state.
- 1835 The James River and Kanawha Company incorporated as a private venture with the Commonwealth of Virginia, withdrawing its public ownership.

1841 James River and Kanawha Company purchased Richmond Dock Company.

1880 Weakened by the stress of war the James River and Kanawha Canal Company was sold to Richmond and Alleghany Railway Company which began to use the tow paths for roadbeds for their railroad tracks. The era of the canal boat was over.

1888-present The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company acquired the Richmond and Alleghany Railroad and held the property until it evolved into the hands of Richmond Metropolitan Authority.

2. Date of erection: Circa 1795 to 1860.
3. Architect: Not known.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Not known.
5. Alterations and additions: See Part II.
6. Important old views: Picture and print collection of The Virginia State Library and the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

As early as 1784 George Washington and others were working for the formation of a company to "smooth the road and make easy the way" for navigation in the James River. Their hopes were realized in 1785 when the James River Company was incorporated and Washington was named its first president. It should be noted that Washington accepted stock in the company only on the condition that he be allowed to use the securities for some public purpose and later gave his share in the company to Liberty Hall Academy in Lexington, the future Washington and Lee University.

The first efforts of the Company turned towards clearing obstacles to navigation in the James and to building canals around the falls. Ten years later, in 1795, a short canal which began at the present location of Byrd Park Pumphouse was opened and boats were entering Richmond to load and unload their cargoes.

By 1800 the Richmond Basin, covering almost three city blocks, was finished and in use. As the terminus of the James River and Kanawha Canal system, eventually including over 200 miles of canal as well as a steamboat route on the Kanawha River and a turnpike over the

Alleghany Mountains, the Richmond Basin was certainly the most active place on the canal.

While the James River and Kanawha Company expanded its canal system, the Richmond Dock Company was established and began working on facilities for large vessels at Rocketts, Richmond's dock area at the head of tidewater navigation on the James. It was situated on the left bank below the falls. In 1841 the James River and Kanawha Company bought the Richmond Dock Company and launched into a building program that produced the present stone locks of the Tidewater Connection. By 1854 the Tidewater Connection was essentially complete and consisted of five great stone locks which formed a flight of water stairs down the hill from the upper basin.

With the completion of the stone locks in 1854 the Tidewater Connection was at its peak. The James River and Kanawha Canal finally had a reliable water route to the lower James. However, with the development of a railroad system, the canal began to suffer from competition. In 1880 the canal system was sold to the Alleghany Railroad Company, the predecessor of the "C and O", and tracks were laid on the towpath, thus blocking canal-boat traffic. With the disappearance of the canal traffic, an important and colorful means of transport vanished from the Virginia scene.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: William Trout, "A Short History of the Tidewater Connection", unpublished mss. (May 1968); Eighteenth Annual Report of the James River and Kanawha Company (1852), p. 448.
2. Secondary and published sources: Virginius Dabney, "George Washington's Railroad", Virginia Cavalcade, vol. 10 (Summer, 1960), 11-18; Wayland Fuller Dunnaway, History of the James River and Kanawha Company (New York, 1922); Samuel Mordecai, Richmond in By-Gone Days (Richmond, 1946); J. E. Teal and Laura E. Armitage, "Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company", The James River Valley (Richmond, 1950), pp. 715-733; George W. Bagby, "Canal Reminiscences--Recollections of Travel on the J. R. & K. Canal", The Old Virginia Gentleman and Other Sketches (New York, 1910).

Prepared by J. R. Fishburne
Research Historian
9 May 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The canals represent more of an engineering feat with great historical value than an architecturally valuable structure. Still, the care taken by the stonemason in chiseling the rough finish of the stone blocks of the walls and the precise fit of the fine ashlar stonework do justify the canal company's reference to the locks as "works of art." The effect of the canals as open space on Richmond's downtown area is still somewhat evident as the old turning basin between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets is retained as a parking lot and the Great Basin now serves as a Chesapeake and Ohio railyard. These reminders are fast disappearing mainly due to the Richmond Metropolitan Authority's expressway which is scheduled to remove the upper three of the five original Tidewater connection locks.
2. Condition of fabric: Most of the stonework still exists for the five connection locks although portions of the walls have been buried under dirt and trash. Presumably, the wooden planks which served as the floor of the canal still exist. Fragments of a wooden gate lock remain at the lower portion of the fifth lock near Thirteenth and Byrd Streets. Two of the three arches of the bridge over the canal at Thirteenth Street have been buried. The first, second and part of the third locks have been covered by a railroad trestle.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The five locks and turning basin cover three-and-a-half city blocks; each lock is approximately fifteen feet wide and one hundred feet long; the turning basin is approximately one hundred and ninety feet by one hundred feet.
2. Foundations: The wooden planking of the floor of the canal is mortised into the wooden sills upon which the stone walls rest.
3. Wall construction: The canal is composed mainly of granite ashlar with a low relief chiseled surface, the blocks generally measuring sixteen inches high and range up to seventy-nine inches in length. The capping ranges greatly in length but is usually twelve inches high and thirty-six inches in depth. The blocks are cut in an ogive curve at the gate recesses in order to hold the gates in place against the water pressure, and the curving corners of the wall at the juncture of the locks and the turning basin are semi-circular blocks used to ease the boats in and out of the narrow passages safely. The arched bridge at Thirteenth Street (1860) is much less precise in the stonework consisting of rough hewn blocks and voussoirs set somewhat unevenly in the mortar.

JAMES RIVER AND KANAWHA CANAL
CONNECTION LOCKS

HAER No. VA-23 (Page 5)

C. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The canal runs uphill, southeast to northwest with a lift of 13.8 feet at each of the five locks. The area continues to be commercially oriented, but most of the structures contemporary to the Tidewater connection have disappeared, a significant exception being the Haxall Mill which survives on Byrd Street between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets.

Prepared by Tucker H. Hill
Architectural Historian
Virginia Historic Landmarks
Commission
9 May 1969
Ninth Street State Office
Building
Richmond, Virginia

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

ADDENDUM TO:
JAMES RIVER & KANAWHA CANAL, LOCKS 1-5
(Tidewater Connection Locks)
Tenth to Thirteenth Streets, north of Canal Street
Richmond
Independent City
Virginia

HAER VA-23
HAER VA, 44-RICH, 100B-

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001