

A Guide to Virginia Transportation from the Colonial to the Civil War Eras

Transportation Basics

Hanes, J.C. **The History of Civil Engineering in Virginia.** VA Ref 624 HAN. Chapters on James River Canal, Alexandria and Georgetown Canal and Little River Turnpike. Basic histories of several different engineering projects. While not the most exciting reading, there are some good histories here.

Hunter, Robert and Edwin Dooley. **Claudius Crozet, French Engineer in America 1790 - 1864.** VA Ref Biography Crozet HUN. Trained under Napoleon, Crozet was the man who built Virginia. A very good general biography. Also Contains some good financial and funding information.

Larson, John. **Internal Improvement; National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States.** VA Ref 338.973 LAR. An excellent overview of the period from the national perspective. Well written and interesting. Answers many questions about what was happening outside Virginia.

Path to Turnpike

Researchers interested in particular counties are encouraged to search the Alexandria Library's [online catalog](#) under the name of the county and the term "Road Orders."

Gage, Charles. **Tobacco, Tobacco Hogsheads and Rolling Roads in Northern Virginia.** VA Ref 338.173 Gag. Tobacco was the life blood of the Virginia economy, a good introduction.

Harrison, Fairfax. **Landmarks of Old Prince William.** VA Ref Prince Wm 975.52 HAR. Chapter 6, "The Highways," is especially descriptive. An older title but well written. Good discussion of the "Potomac Path" and other Northern Virginia roadways.

Hills, Timothy. **The Origins of the West End and the Little River Turnpike: Urbanization and Economic Changes in Northern Virginia 1780 - 1820.** VA Ref Alexandria 975.5296 HIL. A Master's Thesis with excellent coverage of Alexandria's western approaches and economic growth. Also good for ties to the interior.

Hunter, Robert. **The Turnpike Movement in Virginia 1816 - 1860.** VA Ref 388.122 HUN. Very informative about how and why of turnpikes. Good on legislative history.

Kemp, E.L. **A History of the Weston & Gauley Bridge Turnpike.** VA Ref 388.122 KEM. Small local history with some good illustrations.

Stoneburner, Clifton. “**Early Roads of Arlington County.**” *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, October 1969. VA Ref Arlington 975.5295 ARL. Some very basic histories of local roads.

Rivers and Canals

Achenbach, Joel. **The Grand Idea: George Washington’s Potomac and the Race to the West.** VA Ref 975.202 ACH. Well written and informative. A side of George Washington not normally considered. Nice history of “Potomac Fever.”

Callahan, Donald. **The Rappahannock Canal.** VA Ref 627.13 CAL. Basic history of this short lived canal. Not terribly well written, but about the only thing on the subject.

Davis, Julia. **The Shenandoah.** VA Ref 975.59 DAV. Older title from the “American Rivers” series. Social history well told.

Gibson, Langhorne. **Cabell’s Canal: The Story of the James River and Kanawha.** VA Ref 386.48 GIB. Fascinating history of Central Virginia’s greatest engineering project. A very interesting case study on what went wrong. Well sourced and informative.

Gutheim, Frederick. **The Potomac.** VA Ref 975.2 GUT. Another title from the “American Rivers” series. What it lacks in detail it makes up in sweep and story.

Hahn, Thomas. **The Alexandria Canal: Its History & Preservation.** VA Ref Alexandria 627.13 HAH. A detailed engineering history of the canal and restoration of the tide lock in Alexandria.

Kapsch, Robert J. “**The Potomac Canal: A Construction History.**” *Canal History and Technology Proceedings*, Volume 21. VA Ref 386.409 CAN. The story is in the details. A very interesting and well written history of construction difficulties and challenges on the banks of the Potomac.

Perez, L. Jeffrey. “**Bonds of Friendship and Mutual Interest**”: **Virginia’s Waterways Improvement Companies 1784 - 1828.** VA Ref 386.48 PER. A very good, if academic, overview of the canal movement in Virginia.

Royster, Charles. **The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Company; A Story of George Washington’s Times.** VA Ref 975.5523 ROY. A great story well told. A veritable who’s who of Virginia’s Founding Fathers and their land deals in southeast Virginia. Exciting story of boom and bust in early Virginia.

Shaw, Ronald. **Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States 1790 - 1860.** VA Ref 386.46 SHA. A broad overview of the subject; good for comparison and introduction to the topic.

Trout, W.E. **The Slate & Willis's Rivers Atlas**. VA Ref 975.56 TRO. This is one of numerous river atlases done by Mr. Trout and the Virginia Canals & Navigation Society. Search under the author name or canal/river name to find the others. Intended primarily for canoeists, these atlases are a wonderfully detailed resource.

Way, Peter. **Common Labour: Workers & the Digging of North American Canals 1780 - 1860**. VA Ref 331.129 WAY. The many problems of canal construction and the labor market. Insightful.

Railroads

Blake, Nelson. **William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent**. VA Ref B Mahone BLA. Builder, statesman, soldier. Mahone did it all but also insisted everyone should be aware of that fact. Decent biography of this important but flawed figure.

Harwood, Herbert H. **Rails to the Blue Ridge: The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad 1847 - 1968**. VA Ref 385.09755 HAR. Good, fun history of this rail line. Nice pictures.

Johnson, Larry E. **Breakdown From Within: Virginia's Railroads During the Civil War Era**. VA Ref 385.0975 JOH. A good history of Virginia's transportation network during the war years.

Johnston, Angus. **Virginia Railroads in the Civil War**. VA Ref 385.0975 JOH. Covers similar ground as the previous title but in a less demanding style. A good place to start.

Merriken, John E. **Old Dominion Trolley Too: A History of the Mount Vernon Line**. VA Ref Alexandria 388.42 MER. Great history of our favorite local line. Some good photographs and maps.

Mordecai, John B. **A Brief History of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad**. VA Ref 385.0975 MOR. A decent basic history but could use more detail.

Noe, Kenneth. **Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis**. VA Ref 385.0975 NOE. What do railroads and Secession have in common? Read this title and find out. Combines social and rail history well.

Prince, Richard E. **Steam Locomotives and Boats, Southern Railway System**. VA Ref 385.361 PRI. Well documented narrative history of this major rail line. A very good place to start if researching more modern railroads.

Ward, James. **That Man Haupt: A Biography of Herman Haupt**. VA Ref B Haupt WAR. As counterpoint to Johnson above, read about the man who made the U.S.M.R.R. work. An approachable biography.