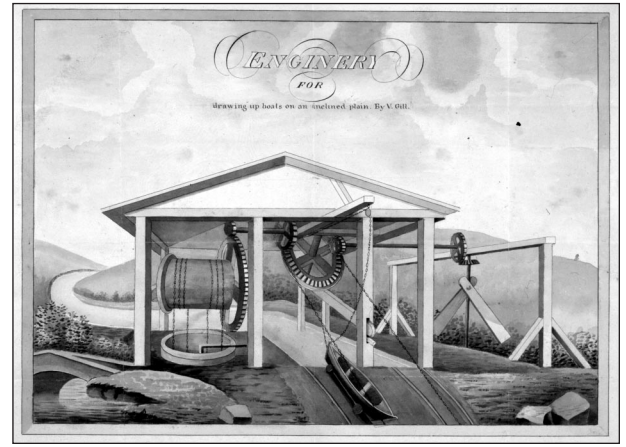


THE INTERNAL IMPROVEMENT MOVEMENT IN VIRGINIA

Early Canals, River Navigations, Roads, Turnpikes, Bridges, and Railroads

RECORDS AND RESOURCES AT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Early internal improvements in Virginia facilitated movement into unsettled lands and provided for the development of existing trade patterns and the establishment of new ones. Geography played a major part in shaping Virginia's internal improvement policies. The projects were often dependent on geography, and each geographical division—Tidewater, Piedmont, Valley, and Trans-Alleghany—required different methods of transportation, as did the areas between the major rivers.



Internal Improvements in Virginia

By 1816, Virginia was ready to implement one of the earliest programs of internal improvements in the United States. Debts incurred during the American Revolution and the War of 1812 were no longer enough of a consideration to put off needed projects, and there developed within the state a sense of urgency to share more lucratively in the commercial wealth of the new country. Since many of Virginia's rivers drain into the Ohio and the Mississippi, and others drain into the Chesapeake Bay, western settlers could deal effectively with Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—if they were not persuaded to keep their trade in Virginia.

Virginia had depended on an extensive river system, flowing from the line of mountains stretching from New York through the Carolinas, to facilitate commercial interests throughout the state. However, navigation inland from the Atlantic was halted at fall lines—those points marked by waterfalls and rapids noting abrupt descents of waterways from upland to lowland areas. This prevented service to the west both in receiving goods or bringing them to markets. The growing movement west after the Revolutionary War, often away from the waterways, necessitated an organized program of canals, river navigations, railroads, turnpikes, and bridges to permit successful settlement and commerce.

The Fund for Internal Improvement, established by an act passed February 5, 1816, was created for “the purpose of rendering navigable, and uniting by canals, the principal rivers, and of more intimately connecting, by public highways, the different parts of the Commonwealth.” This act also provided for a Board of Public Works to administer the funding of projects on a public-private basis and for a principal engineer to oversee the technical and financial aspects. With these projects came the need for good maps on which to plot new roads, canals, and railroads, and an act to that end was passed on February 27, 1816, entitled “An Act to provide an accurate chart of each county and a general map of the territory of the Commonwealth.”

Scope and Content Note

In 1924, the Library of Virginia (then the Virginia State Library) received one of its primary archival collections, the records of the Virginia Board of Public Works, from the State Corporation Commission. The collection includes both textual material and about 500 manuscript maps (ca. 900 sheets) documenting the state's internal improvement program from about 1816 to 1860. Because the costly projects were funded with both public and private monies, the collection includes records of private companies as well as administrative records relating to the Board of Public Works. Attempts in 1924 to break up the collection and send the records to West Virginia for the area that became West Virginia in 1863 were blocked by the State Library Board, and so the collection remains intact. Complementing this collection are other archival resources, maps, and printed articles and books noted in the following bibliography.

In order to provide a more comprehensive document, this bibliography contains primary and secondary sources as well as a few resources outside of the Library of Virginia. Some modern editions of the papers of prominent individuals also relate to Virginia's internal improvement program, e.g., the Benjamin Henry Latrobe papers, especially volume 3, and the papers of John Marshall, especially volume 7. Some documents transcribed therein are from Library of Virginia archival materials. The annotations in these volumes can be very helpful as well. Printed annual reports of the Board of Public Works contain progress reports of particular companies and are also valuable sources of information. The several theses mentioned have useful bibliographies that should be consulted and, although dated, will point to other sources.

PRIMARY RESOURCES

Primary source material relating to Virginia's internal improvement program can be found in a variety of archival resources, from state records to private papers. The funding system for projects, using both state and private monies, promoted a cooperative arrangement between the state and the involved companies in the development of internal improvement projects.

State Records

Auditor of Public Accounts (RG 48)

Prior to 1816 and the establishment of the Internal Improvement Fund and the Board of Public Works, expenditures for public works projects were funded with monies provided by the General Assembly. Entries 157–167 in the published *Auditor of Public Accounts Inventory* relate to public works before 1816 and to the funding of some later projects.

Treasurer's Office (RG 12)

The state treasurer served as a director on the Board of Public Works. In the published *Treasurer's Office Inventory*, entries 47–60 under Special Funds and entries 85–103 under the Internal Improvement Fund relate to financial aspects of public works in Virginia.

Office of the Second Auditor (RG 50)

Beginning in 1823 the second auditor oversaw the Fund for Internal Improvements and served as secretary to the Board of Public Works. Entries 67–101 in the published *Office of the Second Auditor Inventory* relate to the Internal Improvement Fund and the companies involved in various projects.

Board of Public Works (RG 57)

Includes approximately 500 maps (900 sheets) of primarily manuscript maps relating to projects from ca. 1816 to ca. 1860. Most of the maps have been reproduced on microfiche and are also on the Library's Web site, along with the published *Board of Public Works Inventory*. Records include:

- Administrative Records, 1812; 1816–1903, 42 ft. and 77 vols.

- Records relating to Internal Improvement Companies. 1794–1795; 1801–1812; 1814; 1816–1903, 63 ft. and 23 vols.

- Field Notes, Maps, Plans, Drawings. 1793, 1802; 1816–1883, 153 vols. and 506 items.

Geological Survey of Virginia (RG 51)

William Barton Rogers was selected to head this first geological survey of Virginia, and these records consist primarily of correspondence of the students working for Rogers during the survey. An unpublished calendar of the letters and drawings is available in the Map Room as a guide to the collection. Additional material can be found in the records of the Board of Public Works, entry 21.

Office of the Governor (RG 3)

Letters received and executive letter books of governors often have correspondence relating to internal improvement projects and maps.

House of Delegates (RG 79)

Executive communications, those documents transferred to the House of Delegates by the governor, also can reference internal improvement projects and maps.

General Assembly (RG 78)

Legislative Petitions. 1776–1865. 189 feet. Available on microfilm. Petitions for roads and bridges and other similar projects can be often be located here.

County and Municipal Records

Check for holdings concerning internal improvements under business records, road and bridge papers, and miscellaneous.

Business Records

Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company, Corporate Record Collection at the Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Society, 177 reels of microfilm, Accession 35711 (Miscellaneous Reels 1653–1828). See also the published *Guide to the Corporate Record Collection of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company at the Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Society, Inc.* (1997).

Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad Records, 1834–1997. 106.5 cubic feet of files and 530 volumes; 347 boxes and 2 map case drawers. Accession 36460. Minute books available on microfilm (Miscellaneous reels 2161–2177). A finding aid is available on the Library's Web site and in the Archives Research Room.

Maps

Maps relating to internal improvements can be found in the Map Collection, which includes the maps and plans of the Board of Public Works, Chesapeake and Ohio Railway maps, and maps in the General Historical Collection.

SELECTED PRINTED SOURCES

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Compiled by Marianne M. McKee
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Cover illustration: A drawing by Valentine Gill, which accompanied his 1822 request for employment as principal engineer for the Virginia Board of Public Works (Library of Virginia).