

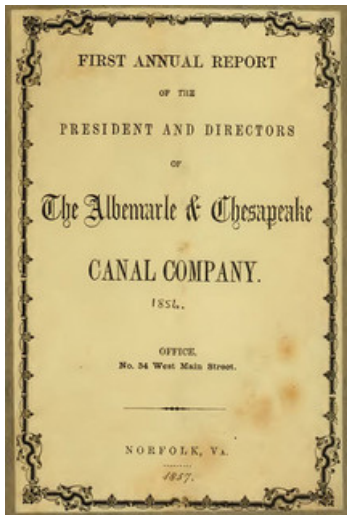
Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal ^[1]

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Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal

by Michael Hill, 2006



Title page of the First Annual report of the President and Directors of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company, 1857.

^[2]The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, a man-made waterway connecting Albemarle Sound with the Chesapeake Bay, was proposed initially by William Byrd II in 1728. Surveys were made, but engineering complications held up the project until the 1850s. Upon its opening on 9 Jan. 1859, the canal provided an economic link between North Carolina and Virginia. The full canal was 75 miles long, but only 14 miles cut through land. Of those, 5 miles were in North Carolina, essentially bisecting Currituck County ^[3] at Coinjock. The rest of the canal followed natural channels and dredged rivers.

Construction was authorized by bills introduced in the North Carolina and Virginia legislatures in 1854. Bonds to pay for the project, totaling just over \$1 million, were sold in the two states. Whereas 50 years before, the nearby Dismal Swamp Canal ^[4] had been dug by hand, newly invented steam dredges (known as "Iron Titans") were used to cut through massive stumps, roots, and buried logs. During the Civil War ^[5] the canal was the site of partisan action, with ships sunk at its mouths to block entry.

After the war, commercial use of the canal increased, especially by steamship ^[6] lines. By 1892, 7,717 vessels (including 4,061 steamers) used the waterway. On 30 Apr. 1913 the canal's operation—a private venture until that point—was taken over by the federal government. In 1988 a new high-level bridge replaced the old swing span at Coinjock. By the early 2000s the canal was used largely by pleasure craft as part of the Intracoastal Waterway ^[7].

References:

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Clifford Reginald Hinshaw Jr., "North Carolina Canals before 1860," *NCHR* 25 (January 1948).

David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina, 1584-1958* (1958).

Additional Resources:

"ALBEMARLE AND CHESAPEAKE CANAL" North Carolina Historical Highway Marker Program.

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=A-76> ^[8]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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