



REYNOLDS NORTH / CANAL WALK HISTORY

View south from the Gallego Mill, 1905 | SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES, VCU LIBRARIES

The construction of the James River and Kanawha Canal (started in 1785) and the Haxall Mill Canal (started in 1790) began the long and complicated industrial and transportation history of this area. The last thirty years have witnessed post-industrial redevelopment centered on the improvement of the Richmond Canal Walk.

GREAT TURNING BASIN SITE Between 1785 and 1800, the James River and Kanawha Canal Company successfully constructed a canal around the Falls of the James that provided a means of navigation to the turning basin. Until the construction of the Tidewater Connection Locks, the basin marked the eastern terminus of the canal. After the closing of the canal in 1877, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad filled the basin and for almost 100 years used the basin site as a rail yard. The construction of the Downtown Expressway in 1972 and the subsequent construction of the James Center obliterated most of the basin, leaving Basin Bank Street and some granite blocks as the remaining fragments of this massive structure.

TIDEWATER CONNECTION LOCKS In 1854, the James River and Kanawha Canal Company completed the Tidewater Connection Locks, an engineering marvel of five locks and a canal extension that allowed canal boats to move between the south side of the basin and the Richmond Dock (ship canal) east of 14th Street. Falling into disuse after the closing of the canal, three of the five locks were demolished to make room for the Downtown Expressway. Two of the original locks remain east of 12th Street.

13TH STREET BRIDGE This antebellum stone arch bridge crosses the canal east of the Tidewater Locks, and is an impressive artifact of the canal system.

GALLEGO MILLS Following the completion of the turning basin in 1800, the first Gallego Mills rose at the eastern end of the turning basin, powering waterwheels from the overflow of the basin. By 1860, the Gallego was the largest building in Richmond and possibly the largest flour mill in the world. Destroyed by the 1865 evacuation fire, the ruins of the mill formed a ghostly landmark in Richmond's Burnt District. Subsequently rebuilt, the mill survived until 1930.

HAXALL CANAL AND MILLS David Ross constructed a mill canal in 1790 to power his gristmill at the foot of 12th Street. The Haxall Mills succeeded Ross's Mill, replacing it with larger buildings on the same site. The output of Haxall and Gallego Mills made Richmond the flour milling leader of the United States in 1860. Only partially rebuilt after the Civil War, the Haxall struggled and finally closed around 1900.

POWER PLANT The Virginia Railway and Power Company demolished the Haxall Mill in 1904 and constructed a coal fired plant that used water from the Haxall Canal to generate steam to turn electrical turbines that generated power for electric streetcars. The shell of this building still stands on the Haxall Canal.

REYNOLDS FOIL PLANT After 1926, the Reynolds Metals Company began the manufacture of Reynolds Wrap aluminum foil and other products in older industrial buildings along the Haxall Canal. The plant expanded over the years and finally closed in 2008.



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REYNOLDS NORTH CANAL WALK

“URBAN CANAL”

The Canal Walk is a 1.25-mile long public pedestrian landscape that follows portions of both the Haxall and James River & Kanawha, both 18th century canals. The City of Richmond completed the \$52 million Canal Walk in 1999, with the objective of catalyzing redevelopment of residential, entertainment and commercial uses. Pedestrian walks follow both sides of each canal between 11th and 16th streets with some interruptions, with multiple stair and ramp connections to the City street grid above. The Canal Walk incorporates substantial quantities of cut stone from the historic canals, and integrates interpretive markers. The interpretive elements describe various industrial, cultural people and events. The Richmond Slave Trail intersects with the Canal Walk at 14th Street, and the East Coast Greenway at 10th Street.

Redevelopment has incrementally gravitated to the Canal Walk, with several residential towers, offices, and entertainment projects completed, and several more on the way. Activity along the Canal Walk appears lower than one would expect, due in part to the relative absence of adequate ground level retail, food and drinking opportunities. In the summer, the absence of shade, vendors, restrooms, and variety of establishments to shop and linger at works against the Canal Walk as a destination.

The City of Richmond continues to work with private developers to shape prospective new construction and adaptive reuse of existing structures to incorporate ground level retail beneath upper floors of residential and commercial office space. Achieving a true mixed-use will be instrumental in activating the Canal Walk eighteen hours a day, balanced with residents attracted to the Riverfront living. Efforts are underway to expose more of the James River & Kanawha Canal to daylight near 13th Street, as well as reconfiguration of the Haxall Canal edge near 12th Street to increase access to the water sheet, and expand universal-access connections to the City street grid above. A public elevator is currently planned to link the 10th Street sidewalk to the Canal Walk behind the Italianate Building. The Riverfront Plan supports efforts to expand access along and across canals to make visits easier to navigate on foot. One significant reconnection is to restore the 13th Street right of way through to Shockoe Slip, in the process making the little visited 13th Street stone bridge once again a vibrant cobble stone covered span. Less cost intensive but no less important is the need to establish one or more restrooms available to public users. The City will continue to work with private developers to incorporate privately operated, maintained and secured restrooms in the ground floor of one or more buildings, with all recognizing that this amenity is key to accommodating and attracting visitors and customers.

The Haxall Canal water depth fluctuates between three and five feet, whereas the James River & Kanawha Canal is shallower at a depth of two to three feet. Venture Richmond operates canal boat rides along the James River & Kanawha Canal, and manages outdoor concerts and events. As noted elsewhere in the Plan, adjusting the current prohibition on all personal, non-motorized recreational watercraft on the Haxall Canal is a significant move to encourage residents to use the water sheet, thereby activating this urban space, and in turn attracting more visitors who enjoy people watching. Similarly, the currently posted prohibition on bikes along the Canal Walk works against activity levels in this area. Properly revised signs should favor pedestrian right of way throughout the Canal Walk, while encouraging responsible bicycle operation within this shared space.



10TH ST DOMINION RAMP

The Dominion electrical transmission substation lies immediately downriver of the Manchester Bridge, constricting the Canal Walk to one of the narrowest passages along the Haxall Canal. The 10th Street Bridge connects to the substation, offering a stair down to the Canal Walk. The stair is the East Coast Greenway link to the Canal Walk, and can be reconfigured to incorporate a universal access ramp. The blank concrete wall can be transformed with a combination of architectural detailing, a green wall, or lighting to make this environment less coarse. This is a prime example of fusing art-driven interventions with infrastructure improvements to enhance the Riverfront experience.

URBAN CONNECTIONS
HISTORIC COBBLESTONE
DOWNTOWN ACCESS TO CANAL + RIVERFRONT
PEDESTRIAN ONLY



EXISTING

13TH STREET TUNNEL

An historic stone arch bridge paved in cobblestones sits disconnected and hidden behind the Reynolds North buildings. With the anticipated redevelopment of Reynolds North, including one strategic building removal, this bridge will be newly visible from the Canal Walk. The tunnel has the potential to connect Shockoe Slip with the Canal Walk, greatly improving two key visitor destinations. The Expressway embankment currently renders the bridge a dead end. Preliminary assessment confirms that a pedestrian tunnel could be built under the Expressway embankment, reconnecting to downtown and the street life of Cary Street.