

VLR 12/3/2
NRHP 2/11/4

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION
FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District

other name/site number: VDHR No. 131-5333

2. Location

street & number: Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal not for publication: N/A

city/town: Chesapeake vicinity: _____

state: Virginia county: Chesapeake code: 550 zip code: 23322

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (____ See continuation sheet.)


Signature of Certifying Official

12/23/23
Date

VA. DEPT. OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
State or Federal Agency and Bureau Date

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau Date

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register	<i>Patrick Andrews</i>	<i>2/11/2004</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):		

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
8	4	buildings
0	0	sites
3	4	structures
0	0	objects
11	8	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

Transportation: Water-related
Transportation: Road-related
Defense: Military facility
Defense: Battle site

Current Functions

Transportation: Water-related
Transportation: Road-related
Defense: Military facility
Vacant/Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Other

Materials

Foundation Stone, metal, wood
Walls Wood, metal
Roof Metal
Other

Narrative Description

(See continuation on sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Transportation, Military,
Engineering

Period of Significance

1775-1953

Significant Dates

1775	1859	1913		

Significant Person

(Complete if criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(See continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: US Army Corps of Engineers, 803 Front St. Norfolk, VA 23510

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1,704

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Quad Map Name: Fentress, Pleasant Ridge

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 _____ 3 _____

2 _____ 4 _____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Geoffrey B. Henry, Lead Architectural Historian

Organization: GAI Consultants, Inc. Date: July 2003

Street & Number: 570 Beatty Road Telephone: 412-856-6400

City or Town: Monroeville State: PA Zip: 15146

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

Name: Various, see continuation sheet

Street & Number: Telephone:

City or Town: State: Zip:

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The 1,704-acre Albemarle & Chesapeake (A&C) Canal Historic District is located in the City of Chesapeake in southeastern Tidewater Virginia. The linear district extends from Great Bridge Bridge on the west to the North Landing Bridge and the Virginia Beach City limits on the east. The A&C Canal Historic District contains 11 contributing resources and 1 previously National Register-listed site that also is contributing—3 structures, 8 buildings, and 1 site. The 9.1-mile-long and 90-foot-wide Virginia Cut of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, a man-made waterway constructed in 1859, is a contributing structure. The 600-foot-long Great Bridge Canal Lock, built in 1931-1932, is a contributing structure. The North Landing Bridge, built in 1951, is also a contributing structure. The Great Bridge Army Corps of Engineers Reservation consists of 8 contributing buildings constructed between 1917 and 1948. The Battle of Great Bridge Site is a contributing site and is previously listed in the National Register. The district also contains 4 non-contributing buildings and 4 non-contributing structures.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal is part of the federally authorized and operated Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway and carries heavy commercial traffic as well as some recreational boat traffic. The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Historic District is located in a low-lying area formerly almost entirely composed of swampland that has been drained and filled in since the early nineteenth century. The district's western terminus is at the A&C Canal Locks at Great Bridge where the canal joins the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River. Its eastern terminus is at the canal's junction with the North Landing River, at the North Landing (Route 165) Bridge and the Virginia Beach corporate limits. As a result, the historic district's surroundings vary from the highly developed Great Bridge community adjacent to the district's western end, to large undeveloped stands of deciduous forests and some remaining swampland on either side of much of the canal property. The 1,704-acre linear district extends approximately 100 feet on either side of the canal (with some exceptions) and consists of property acquired by the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Company in 1855 to construct the canal cut. Material from construction of the canal and later dredging was placed along both banks, raising the elevation of the lands in this area. The US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) acquired this property in 1913 after the canal company went bankrupt. In addition, five north-south bridges cross the historic district: four vehicular bridges (carrying from west to east, Battlefield Boulevard, Route 168, Centerville Turnpike, and Route 165) and the Norfolk-Southern railroad bridge.

INVENTORY OF RESOURCES

Contributing and non-contributing resources in the A&C Canal historic district are listed below, running west-to-east, and are shown on the accompanying site map. Each

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Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District

Chesapeake, Virginia

inventory entry includes the resource name, address (if applicable) and/or location, date(s) of construction, VDHR survey number, contributing/non-contributing status, description, and history.

Great Bridge Lock
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0001

1931-1932

1 Contributing Structure

Description The Great Bridge Lock is located approximately 750 yards west of the Great Bridge Bridge, and is the western terminus of the Virginia Cut of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal. This tidal guard lock is a reversible-head, double-gated structure 600 feet long and 72 feet wide, with a depth of 16 feet. Its primary function is to prevent saltwater intrusion from the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River into the freshwater North Landing River and to control tidal currents from these two rivers. There are two sets of metal gates at either end that are used depending on the condition of tides in the Elizabeth River or of wind tides coming from the North Landing River. The locks are operated by the lock-tender from electronic control panels.

History The first Great Bridge Lock was built by the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company in 1859. It was a reversible-head tidal lock built to accommodate varying water levels in the Elizabeth and North Landing Rivers, so preventing currents from surging back and forth through the Canal. With a chamber measuring 220 feet long and 40 feet wide, it was the largest such lock on the East Coast and was considered an engineering marvel. To accommodate the reversible head, the lock was built with two complete sets of solid timber miter gates (8 feet high by 25 feet wide) at each end. The lock itself was made of dressed stone blocks cut and shipped from Port Deposit, Maryland. Metal gates replaced the wooden ones in 1872.

The original 1859 Great Bridge Lock survived until 1917, when the Canal was widened. For fifteen years thereafter there was no lock, causing bitter complaints from shippers and local residents. The Congressional "River and Harbor Act of 1930" authorized and appropriated money for the construction of new locks at Great Bridge. Originally projected to be 500 feet long by 75 feet wide, the lock design was altered to 600 feet shortly thereafter. Maj. G. R. Young, Norfolk District Engineer of the US Army Corps of Engineers between 1930 and 1934, was the project manager and overall designer for the Great Bridge Lock. Contracts were let on March 2, 1931 to Merritt, Chapman & Scott of Baltimore for the lock proper; on March 7, 1931 to the Berkeley Machine Works of Norfolk for the gates; and on May 27 to the Foote Brothers Gear and Machine Company of Chicago for the machinery. The Great Bridge Lock was completed on June 16, 1932.

**Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal
Great Bridge, Chesapeake**

1859

1 Contributing Structure

VDHR No. 131-5333-0002

Description The 9.1-mile-long Virginia Cut of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal connects the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, which empties into the Chesapeake Bay, with the North Landing River, which flows into Currituck Sound and ultimately, into Albemarle Sound, both in North Carolina. The entire inland river-canal route, which connects Norfolk, Virginia with Albemarle Sound, runs along the Southern Branch for 5.2 miles, along the Virginia Cut of the canal for 9.1 miles, and along the North Landing River for 13.7 miles. The route of the canal was dug in 1856-1859 and was widened in 1913-1917. The canal has been dredged periodically since then and was widened along a small portion in 1979-1980. The canal bed consists of a channel 90 feet wide and 12 feet deep. There is no towpath. At its western end is the canal's sole lock, the 600-foot-long, 72-foot-wide, and 16-foot-deep Great Bridge Lock (131-5333-0001). The Army Corps of Engineers' Great Bridge Reservation, a restricted-entry maintenance facility (151-5333-0003 through 00010), also borders the canal on the south. For most of its length, swampland and forests border the canal, most of it owned by the US government. Material from construction of the canal in 1858-1859 and later dredging was placed along both banks, raising the elevation of the lands in this area.

Alterations to the 1859 canal include its widening from 80 to 90 feet after the Corps acquired the canal property in 1913; removal of the canal lock in 1917 and its replacement in 1931-1932; dredging of the channel by the Corps in 1943, 1969, and 1979-1980; and building riprap near the North Landing Bridge in 1990. In addition, the canal has been crossed by several vehicular and railroad bridges since the mid-nineteenth century. Presently, five north-south bridges cross the waterway: four vehicular bridges (carrying from west to east, Battlefield Boulevard, Route 168, Centerville Turnpike, and Route 165) and the Norfolk-Southern Railroad bridge.

History A canal to connect the Southern and Eastern Branches of the Elizabeth River with Albemarle Sound in North Carolina was authorized by the colonial Virginia legislature in 1772. A plan for a canal, lock, and drawbridge was drawn in 1774, but was not realized because of the Revolutionary War. The Dismal Swamp Canal was built in 1805, 8 miles to the west. Its many locks and tortuous river approaches stimulated renewed interest in building an additional canal to the east. In 1840, engineer Claudius Crozet surveyed a route from the Eastern Branch to the Albemarle Sound, but this plan too was abandoned. Marshall Parks, Jr. (1820-1900), was the driving force behind the incorporation of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company in 1856. The canal was one of the first designed for steam-powered vessels and thus had no towpath. It also was the first canal in Virginia to be built entirely by steam dredging, rather than by hand labor. At its completion in 1859, the canal was considered an engineering marvel, with the reversible tidal lock at Great Bridge being the largest such lock on the East Coast. The canal came under Union control during the Civil War but survived mostly intact.

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Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District
Chesapeake, Virginia

doors on the north elevation. A short hyphen joins the building to the paint and vehicle shop building on the east.

Shed 1923 1 Contributing Building
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0005

Description The shed building is located in the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is located near the south entrance to the reservation. The shed is oriented east and is a one-story, gable-roofed frame building built on a T plan. The building is currently covered with corrugated metal siding. Most windows have 6/3 or 4/4 double-hung sash windows with plain board frames. There is an entrance on the east topped by a louvered vent.

Shop (1) 1931 1 Contributing Building
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0006

Description The shop building is located in the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is oriented north-south and is a one-story, two-bay-long, and two-bay-wide gable-roofed frame building. The building is currently covered with vinyl siding. The fixed-sash windows have six lights each. A door with four lights is on the south.

Shop (2) 1940 1 Contributing Building
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0007

Description The shop building is located in the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, near the reservation entrance on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is oriented north-south and is a one-story, three-bay-long, and three-bay-wide gable-roofed frame building. The building is currently covered with corrugated metal siding. The fixed-sash windows have nine lights each. A door with four lights is on the north.

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Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District

Chesapeake, Virginia

Warehouse 1942 1 **Contributing Building**
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0008

Description The warehouse is located near the south end of the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is oriented east and is a one-and one-half-story, nine-bay-long, and two-bay-wide gable-roofed frame building. The building is currently covered with corrugated metal siding. Louvered vent/windows are on the two gable ends.

Auto Storage 1942 1 **Contributing Building**
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0009

Description The auto storage building is located near the south end of the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is oriented east and is a one-story, four-bay-long, and two-bay-wide gable-roofed frame building. The building is currently covered with corrugated metal siding. The building is open on the south, with four vehicle bays. A 6/6 double hung sash window is at each gable end.

Office 1948 1 **Contributing Building**
Great Bridge COE Reservation
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0010

Description The Great Bridge COE Reservation Office is located near the south end of the Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between the Great Bridge Bridge and the Great Bridge Locks. It is a one-story, five-bay-long, and two-bay-wide gable-roofed cinderblock building. There is a wooden pedimented portico on the east above an enclosed entrance vestibule. Most windows have 1/1 double-hung sash. There is an additional entrance on the west.

Great Bridge Bridge 1941-1943 1 **Non-contributing Structure**
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0011

Description The Great Bridge Bridge is located west of the Corps Great Bridge Reservation and the Great Bridge Locks, near the western terminus of the Virginia Cut of the Albemarle & Chesapeake (A&C) Canal. The bridge is a two-lane, 180-foot-long, double-span, metal swing bridge carrying vehicular traffic on Business Route 168

(Battlefield Boulevard) over the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, also the A&C Canal. The decking is reinforced concrete and the solid side walls have riveted sheet metal and plate girders. The two-story masonry bridge-tender's building is located on the west side of the south end. The building is covered with smooth stuccoed concrete block and has a flat roof. The first floor contains the swing bridge mechanism and the second floor houses the control room and tender's observation area with its tall casement windows.

History The date of the first Great Bridge, from which the surrounding community took its name, is not known. A wooden drawbridge built by the A&C Canal Company in 1856 was destroyed during the Civil War and was not replaced until 1868. This second wooden drawbridge is known to have collapsed at least twice during the nineteenth century. Single-lane, metal bascule drawbridges were built for the Corps of Engineers by the Penn Bridge Company of Beaver Falls, PA between 1914 and 1916 at Great Bridge, Coinjock (NC), and North Landing. These bridges were replaced by the present two-lane double-swing spans between 1940 and 1951. Construction of the Great Bridge Bridge was begun in August 1941 and completed in August 1943 at a cost of \$250,000. The present Great Bridge Bridge is in the process of being replaced by a new drawbridge, at which time the present bridge will be demolished.

**Site of Great Bridge Battle
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-12**

1775-1781

1 Contributing Site

Note: The site of the Battle of Great Bridge is previously listed in the National Register.

Description The site of the Battle of Great Bridge is located on both sides of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. Route 168 and the Great Bridge Bridge pass through the area on a north-south axis, as does the site of the colonial-era bridge and causeway for which the battle was named. North of the Great Bridge Bridge is a knoll believed to be the site of Lord Dunmore's 1775 fort, where archeological remains may be intact. To the west of the site of the causeway lay a small island on which the 1781 star-shaped British fort was located, an area mostly destroyed by the construction of the 'A&C Canal in 1859.

History The strategic importance of the Great Bridge across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River led the British to fortify the position in 1775, and again in 1781 when British troops under General Benedict Arnold occupied Norfolk and Portsmouth. The Battle of Great Bridge, the first military engagement of the Revolutionary War in Virginia, was fought on 9 December 1775. The brief battle ended in victory for the Americans and forced the retreat of Lord Dunmore's troops from the area. The bridge area was fortified again in 1781, and the Queen's Rangers under Sir John Graves Simcoe were stationed here, but the site saw no further military action.

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Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District

Chesapeake, Virginia

Building, 116 Reservation Road **1962** **1 Non-contributing Building**
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 5333-13

Description This building stands on the north side of Reservation Road, just east of the entrance to the Army Corps of Engineers Great Bridge Reservation, near the western terminus of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal. It is a one-story, five-bay cinderblock building originally built as a fire station. There are five garage entrances with metal rolling doors on the south. Above the west two bays is a two-bay, gable-roofed frame second story. This has two 1/1 sash windows on the north and south elevations and three 1/1 sash windows on the east and west elevations. There is a one-story, two-bay, shed-roofed frame wing on the west gable end of the building with an entrance on the south.

History Chesapeake City building records indicate this building was constructed in 1962 and served as the Great Bridge Volunteer Fire Station. The present station on Battlefield Boulevard in 1985 replaced it. The building's construction date is outside the period of significance for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District and it is therefore a non-contributing resource.

Atlantic Yacht Basin **1982** **1 Non-contributing Building**
2615 Basin Road
Great Bridge, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-0014

Description The Atlantic Yacht Basin complex is a group of three attached buildings located on the south side of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, to the east of the Great Bridge Bridge. Access is by way of a short road leading from Battlefield Boulevard (Route 168-Business). The largest building is a tall two-story, two-bay, metal clad, gable-roofed boat building facing north. To its west is a one-story, metal-clad, gable-roofed storage building. Closest to the canal is the one-story, flat-roofed brick office building. It is partially clad with metal siding and has an entrance on the north and south.

History Located on one of the few pieces of private property fronting directly on the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, the Atlantic Yacht Basin complex was begun in 1981, with the office building completed in 1982, and the docks, storage building, and boat building added in 1983. The latter two buildings have been altered by the addition of siding in the early 1990s. The complex's construction date is outside the period of significance for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District and it is therefore a non-contributing resource.

screened porch. There is a shed-roofed dormer on the south. The house is trimmed with wooden knee braces. Most windows have 6/6 double-hung sash. The gable-roofed north wing has an entrance at the east beneath the eaves.

History According to Chesapeake City deed and tax records, the house was built in 1919 by Samuel Hodges on land he purchased that year from Ellen Duquesne (Deed Book 201, page 12). The US Army Corps of Engineers currently owns the land, which leases the house.

Although this house's construction date falls within the period of significance for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District, it is historically unrelated to the operation of the canal by the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company between 1859 and 1913 or the operation of the canal by the US Army Corps between 1913 to the present. It is a non-contributing building.

North Landing (Route 165) Bridge 1951 1 Contributing Structure
North Landing, Chesapeake
VDHR No. 131-5333-20

Description The North Landing (Route 165) Bridge (VDOT Bridge No. 1826) is located at the eastern terminus of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District, where the Canal meets the North Landing River. The 85-foot-long, two-lane, triple-span, metal swing bridge carries vehicular traffic on Route 165 (North Landing Road) over the A&C Canal. Swinging guardrails are located at the north and south ends of the bridge. The decking is reinforced concrete and the solid sidewalls have riveted sheet metal and plate girders. The two-story masonry bridge-tender's building is located on the west side of the south end. The tender's building is covered with smooth stuccoed concrete block and has a flat roof. The first floor contains the swing bridge mechanism and the second floor houses the control room and tender's observation area with tall casement windows. There is an entrance on the north from a small parking lot. The bridge and bridge tender's building are in good condition.

History In 1856, the first bridge over the North Landing River at this location was built by the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company. A resident bridge tender operated this single-lane wooden drawbridge. Single-lane, metal bascule drawbridges were built for the Corps of Engineers by the Penn Bridge Company of Beaver Falls, PA between 1914 and 1916 at Great Bridge, Coinjock NC, and North Landing. These bridges were replaced by the present double-swing spans between 1940 and 1951. The present North Landing Bridge was completed on August 15, 1951 at a cost of \$350,000. The bridge was damaged by an empty oil barge on April 16, 1978 and subsequently repaired.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District is significant on the state level in the areas of Transportation, Engineering and Military, with the period of significance being 1775-1953. The beginning date includes the Battle of Great Bridge fought at this site in 1775. The Albemarle & Chesapeake (A&C) Canal, completed in 1859, provided an inland route for maritime traffic between Norfolk and Portsmouth and North Carolina's Albemarle Sound. The A&C Canal is significant for several engineering advances: it was the first Virginia canal built entirely with steam-powered dredging equipment, and the Great Bridge Lock was the largest such lock on the East Coast. In 1913, the A&C Canal was purchased by the Federal government and is currently operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). The A&C Canal remains a major transportation artery for commercial traffic in the Tidewater region. The Corps has made several improvements to the Canal since 1913, including construction of the Great Bridge facility maintenance complex, the 1931-1932 Great Bridge Canal lock that replaced the 1859 lock; the 1943 Great Bridge Bridge, and the 1951 North Landing Bridge.

HISTORY

The history of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal before 1859 was marked by numerous legislative acts, engineering surveys, and failed attempts to construct a canal through the eastern half of the Great Dismal Swamp between Norfolk and Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. William Byrd suggested the need for such a canal as early as 1728¹. In 1772, an amendment to "An Act for Opening the Falls of the James River" claimed that "the opening of a canal from the head of the southern or eastern branch of the Elizabeth River, to the head of the north (Landing) river will greatly increase the commerce of this colony," and to this end authorized a survey of possible canal routes and provision of cost estimates.² Two canal routes eventually were surveyed: the first ran from the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River at Kemp's Landing; the second ran from the Southern Branch at the important colonial-era settlement at Great Bridge. This latter survey (tracing a 6¼-mile-long route eventually followed by the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal) was completed in late 1772 by Josiah Ives.

The strategic importance of the Great Bridge Bridge across the South Branch of the Elizabeth River led the British to fortify the position in 1775. This bridge carried traffic over 360 yards of marshland and was a vital link in the land route to Norfolk. On 9 December 1775, British troops under Governor Dunmore fought Patriot soldiers at Great Bridge, with the British forced to retreat. The position was refortified again in 1781, although there was no more military activity in the Great Bridge area during the Revolutionary War. The site of the Battle of Great Bridge (VDHR 131-5333-12) is listed in the National Register.

No further action on this proposed canal was taken until after the end of the Revolution. In 1783, an "Act for Cutting a Navigable Canal" was passed by the General Assembly,

with much of the same language contained in the 1772 Act. An important milestone was reached in 1786, when representatives from Virginia and North Carolina agreed that the two states would not impose tolls on their sections of the proposed canal route.³

A proposal for a competing canal, the Dismal Swamp Canal, was contained in a 1787 act to connect the Elizabeth River with the Pasquotank River and Elizabeth City in North Carolina.⁴ This north-south canal was to be located west of the two earlier proposed canal routes. Work on this canal commenced in 1793, but was not completed until 1805. The nearly 21-mile-long Dismal Swamp Canal was considered inadequate almost from its beginning, as it required major lift locks at either end in addition to several supplementary locks along its routes. It also was too narrow and shallow for many vessels, and contained several curves in its route.⁵ These deficiencies increased calls for reviving the proposal for an east-west canal running from Great Bridge to Albemarle Sound.

Proposals for the incorporation of canal companies peaked in Virginia in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In 1809 and again in 1815, the "Great Coastwise Canal and River Navigation Company" was incorporated to construct a six-foot-deep canal running from the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River.⁶ Despite being endorsed in an 1815 report by the U. S. Topographical Engineers, this proposed eastern route was abandoned soon thereafter. In 1840, engineer Claudius Crozet surveyed a route running from the Southern Branch, but construction of this canal route languished as well.⁷

Credit for finally building the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal is usually given to Norfolk native Marshall J. Parks, Jr. (1820-1900), the son of a former Chief Engineer of the Dismal Swamp Canal.⁸ Parks worked to revive two 1850 legislative acts that had authorized the Great Bridge Lumber & Canal Company in Virginia and the Albemarle & Currituck Canal Company in North Carolina.⁹ The 1854 act reauthorizing the Great Bridge Lumber and Canal Company permitted the company to construct the "Virginia Cut" of the canal, and to own land 100 yards on both sides of the canal. A similar act in North Carolina authorized construction of the six-mile-long "North Carolina Cut." At the company's first meeting in 1855, Parks was elected its vice-president; one year later he became president.¹⁰ On 28 February 1856, the two companies were united and the name was changed to the Albemarle & Chesapeake (A&C) Canal Company.

As conceived by the canal company, the entire 70-mile-long waterway between Norfolk and Albemarle Sound consists of both natural and man-made segments. The Elizabeth River runs between Norfolk and the Chesapeake Bay on the west end and the head of its southern branch at Great Bridge. The approximately nine-mile-long, man-made Virginia Cut of the canal connects Great Bridge to the head of the North Landing River just south of Princess Anne County (now the City of Virginia Beach). The North Landing River flows in a southeasterly direction from the eastern end of the canal, and empties into Currituck Sound in North Carolina. From there the canal follows a route through Currituck Sound to the entrance of the man-made North Carolina Cut at Coinjock Bay.

The 5½-mile-long North Carolina Cut (constructed simultaneously with the Virginia Cut) connects with the North River, which flows southward into Albemarle Sound, the canal's eastern terminus.

In April 1855, Parks hired the New York engineering firm of Courtright, Barton & Co. to survey and construct the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal at an estimated cost of \$800,000.¹¹ The canal specifications included a depth of 6 feet and a 61-foot width. Construction began at several points along the canal route in October 1855. Nine steam-powered dredges were used to excavate the canal bed beginning in February 1856, marking one of the first instances such machinery had been used in a major engineering construction project in the United States.¹² These dredges made possible the excavation of the petrified tree stumps that remained after timbering operations along the canal route were completed.

In late 1856, construction began on the only lock required on the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, the tidal lock located at Great Bridge, at the Virginia Cut's western end. This tidal lock was necessary to equalize the water depths throughout the canal and to prevent tides from either the North Landing or the Elizabeth River from affecting the other river's salinity. This double-gated, reversible-head, masonry guard lock, completed in 1859, was the first such lock built in the United States. Measuring 220 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 8 feet deep, it was the largest such lock on the East Coast until replaced by the present Great Bridge Lock in 1931-1932.¹³ Each of the gates was built of solid timber and measured 8 feet high by 25 feet wide. The canal company also undertook the replacement of the two wooden bridges at Great Bridge and over the North Landing River in Virginia and at Coinjock in North Carolina. The new wooden draw bridges allowed for unimpeded passage along the canal route and were completed by 1859.

Commercial and passenger service was inaugurated on the completed Virginia Cut of the canal in late 1859 and along the North Carolina Cut in January 1860. The 1860 financial statement of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company claimed that goods shipped via the canal included lumber, shingles, corn, cotton, tobacco, and naval stores, among others.¹⁴ Service on the canal was disrupted with the onset of the Civil War in 1861, causing toll-paying commercial traffic to decline sharply. Confederate forces attempted to block the canal, but it was captured by Union forces in 1862 and reopened to both commercial and passenger traffic in May 1863.¹⁵

The 20-year period between 1866 and 1886 was the A&C Canal Company's most prosperous. In 1866, 3,640 vessels, paying more than \$41,000 in tolls, passed through the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal. Passenger traffic carried on steamboats between Norfolk and North Carolina towns increased sharply during these years. By 1873, toll receipts had increased to \$84,839, with 6,283 steam vessels (both commercial and passenger) passing through the A&C Canal.¹⁶ Several improvements were made to the three bridges along the canal between 1868 and 1869 and to the Great Bridge lock in

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1880-1881. In 1879 the Centerville Turnpike Company constructed a drawbridge over the canal between Great Bridge and North Landing.¹⁷

Along with the Dismal Swamp Canal, the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal was a critical component of the lower Tidewater transportation system after 1859. Goods from the North Carolina coast and near inland counties were transported safely to Norfolk and Portsmouth without risking passage around the treacherous waters off Cape Hatteras, thereby benefiting the economies of both North Carolina and the two Virginia port cities. Passenger steamboats from Baltimore and Norfolk traveled through the canal, bringing summer visitors to the growing North Carolina communities of Nags Head and Ocracoke.

Beginning in the 1880s, increased competition from several sources led to declining profitability for the A&C Canal Company. The Elizabeth City & Norfolk Railroad (later renamed the Norfolk Southern Railroad), chartered in 1870, constructed a swing drawbridge on its right-of-way over the canal in 1880.¹⁸ The railroad's route ran between Norfolk and Edenton, North Carolina. Numerous independent steamboat lines, carrying both passenger and commercial traffic, became affiliated with and/or synchronized with the railroad line, with boats serving as feeders for the trains. In 1892, the Lake Drummond Canal & Water Company took over the nearly bankrupt Dismal Swamp Canal and initiated several important physical improvements to the canal between 1896 and 1899, increasing economic pressure on the A&C Canal.¹⁹ In 1890, the A&C Canal carried 403,017 tons of freight; by 1906, the canal carried only 95,169 tons, with the Dismal Swamp Canal carrying 340,135 tons.²⁰

Faced with a serious decline in toll receipts, the A&C Canal Company defaulted on its debts and its assets were sold at auction in November 1910.²¹ The company reorganized itself as the Chesapeake & Albemarle Canal Company. Among the company's assets listed for sale were the canal, with a right-of-way extending 150 feet on both sides (although encroached upon by several later transactions), 3 bridge tender's houses, 2 lockkeeper's houses, and an office. (None of these buildings is still standing).

At the same time, the Federal government initiated steps to purchase the A&C Canal and incorporate it into a proposed inland waterway system, eventually known as the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. This system of canals, channels, rivers, and bays made it possible for small craft to travel the Atlantic Coast safely via a protected inland route.²² The 1910 River and Harbor Act authorized the Department of the Army to purchase both the A&C and Dismal Swamp Canals (the latter was not taken over by the Army until 1929).²³ In 1913, the Virginia Cut of the Canal was sold to the Federal Government for \$375,000.²⁴ Excluded from the sale were the A&C's lands located on either side of the canal property that had been leased to timber companies since the 1870s, but were otherwise unconnected with canal operations.

Federal ownership increased the A&C Canal's importance to the transportation system of lower Tidewater, while integrating it with the national system of canals and waterways of

the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. One of the most important acts was the removal of tolls on the A&C Canal after 1913, which made the canal competitive with the railroad and the still-private Dismal Swamp Canal. Beginning in 1914, the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) undertook improvements and enlargements to the canal, increasing its efficiency, its accessibility, and its ability to handle increased maritime traffic.

Under the direction of Norfolk District Engineer Lt. E. Eveleth Winslow, the Corps undertook the dredging and widening of the canal during 1914, resulting in a 9-foot depth and 50-foot width. In 1914, the Corps signed a contract with the Penn Bridge Company of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania to replace the three existing Corps-owned bridges at Great Bridge, North Landing, and Coinjock with longer steel bascule draw bridges.²⁵ The tidal lock at Great Bridge was removed entirely in April 1917 due to the mistaken belief that the newly widened canal was no longer affected by the tidal currents from the North Landing and Elizabeth Rivers. The Norfolk Southern railroad replaced its 1880 bridge across the canal with the present metal bascule drawbridge in 1928.

Beginning in 1917, the Corps began construction of a small facilities maintenance complex at Great Bridge. This complex serves as operations center for both the A&C and Dismal Swamp Canals and contributes to the transportation history of the A&C Canal during its period of Corps ownership. These buildings house maintenance and repair facilities for Corps-owned vessels, administrative offices, and storage facilities.

Under pressure from local landowners, the Corps initiated a study in 1926 on the necessity of building a new lock at Great Bridge. The study concluded that a new lock was required. Funds for its construction were appropriated as part of the 1930 Rivers and Harbors Act and construction commenced in 1931 under the supervision of Norfolk District Engineer Maj. G. R. Young.²⁶ The present Great Bridge lock was completed in 1932 at a cost of \$500,000; it is 600 feet long, 72 feet wide, and has four sets of double-miter steel gates with reversible heads.

Traffic through the canal increased steadily during the 1930s. During World War II, much commercial traffic was diverted to the A&C Canal due to threats from German U-boats operating off the coast of North Carolina; freight tonnage increased from 823,000 to over 1 million between 1940 and 1943.²⁷ The Corps replaced its two single-lane drawbridges over the canal in Virginia with the present two-lane swing bridges beginning in 1943. The Great Bridge Bridge dates from 1943 and the North Landing Bridge from 1951.²⁸ Two additional bridges—the Centerville Turnpike (1955) and the 65-foot high, fixed-span Route 168 Bridge (1982)—have been built to carry vehicular traffic over the canal.

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Chesapeake, Virginia

Endnotes:

- ¹ Brown, Alexander Crosby, *Juniper Waterway* (1981), page 10.
- ² Kuhlmann, Karl B. "Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal" (1973), page 8.1.
- ³ Brown (1981), page 19.
- ⁴ Kuhlmann, Karl B., "Dismal Swamp Canal" (1987), page 7.1.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, page 8.1.
- ⁶ Brown, (1981), page 24.
- ⁷ US Army Corps of Engineers, *Cultural Resource Management Plan for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, Virginia*, (1995), page 16.
- ⁸ Brown, (1981), page 26.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, page 32.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, page 36.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, page 40.
- ¹² US Army Corps of Engineers, page 17.
- ¹³ Brown, Alexander Crosby, "Virginia's Watergate: Canal Locks at Great Bridge Control Tides," (1971), page 1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, page 63.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, page 75.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, page 98.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, page 123.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, page 124-125
- ¹⁹ Kuhlmann (1987), page 8.6.
- ²⁰ Brown (1981), page 158.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, page 159.
- ²² Culhane, Kerri, "Great Bridge Bridge and Tender's House" (1998), page 4.
- ²³ Brown (1981), page 161.
- ²⁴ Chesapeake City Deed Book 451, page 173.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, page 170.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, page 184.
- ²⁷ US Army Corps of Engineers, *Cultural Resources Management Plan for the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal* (1995), page 12.
- ²⁸ Culhane (1998), pages 4-5.

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Chesapeake, Virginia

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1982 "Virginia Canal Structures Inventory." Alexandria VA

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

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Wingo, Elizabeth B.

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Chesapeake, Virginia

UTM REFERENCES

A	180401742E	4063987N
B	180401651E	4063712N
C	180400858E	4064238N
D	180392200E	4064150N
E	180392200E	4064160N
F	180391054E	4064160N
G	180391050E	4064150N
H	180390240E	4064040N
I	180390240E	4064109N
J	180389210E	4064100N
K	180389152E	4064040N
L	180389152E	4064109N
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O	180389309E	4064246N
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V	180389771E	4064619N
W	180389789E	4064554N
X	180394016E	4064819N
Y	180393996E	4065045N
Z	180400957E	4064866N

PROPERTY OWNERS

US Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk
District
803 Front Street
Norfolk Virginia 23510

Mr. Lloyd Clingenpeel
Senior Real Estate Manager
Norfolk Southern Corp.
110 Franklin Road, SE
Roanoke, Virginia 24042-0059

Atlantic Yacht Basin, Inc.
2615 Basin Road
Chesapeake, Virginia 23322-4012

Norman and Sandra Dean
240 Bridgeview Avenue
Chesapeake, Virginia 23322

LC Mercers
c/o Caroline Nasworthy
PO Box 94676
Las Vegas Nevada 89193

Norfolk Dredging Company
PO Box 1706
Chesapeake Virginia 23327-1706

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District is shown on the accompanying map labeled "Boundary-Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District." Source for the boundary map is City of Chesapeake Assessor's Office, Tax Maps 48, 49, 50, 50A, and 51. The linear district contains 1,704 acres and extends 9.1 miles long and is 300 feet wide. The west and east termini of the district; i.e., the Great Bridge Lock and the North Landing (Route 165) Bridge respectively, mark the ends of the man-made portion of the Virginia Cut of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal where they meet the headwaters of the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River and the North Landing River.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary for the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District is drawn to include the 9.1-mile-long, 90-foot-wide canal and adjacent property of approximately 100 feet on either side acquired by the United States government from the Chesapeake & Albemarle Canal Company (formerly the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Company) in 1913. The nominated boundaries include the canal and other contributing resources directly associated with the operation of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal between 1859 and 1913 and/or with its operation by the United States government as part of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway between 1913 and the present.

Photographs

**All photographs are of the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District,
Chesapeake, Virginia**

Photographer: Geoffrey B. Henry, GAI Consultants, Inc. 28 August 2002

(Negatives located at Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA under
Negative Number 20313)

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Photograph 1 | View of Great Bridge Locks, looking southwest |
| Photograph 2 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Paint and vehicle shop (left) and carpenter and machine shop (right), looking southwest |
| Photograph 3 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Paint and vehicle shop (left) and carpenter and machine shop (right), looking southwest |
| Photograph 4 | Great Bridge Bridge, looking southeast |
| Photograph 5 | Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal, looking west from Great Bridge |
| Photograph 6 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Shed, looking west |
| Photograph 7 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Shop, looking east |
| Photograph 8 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Shop, looking south |
| Photograph 9 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Warehouse, looking west. |
| Photograph 10 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Auto storage, looking west |
| Photograph 11 | Great Bridge COE Reservation. Office, looking southwest |
| Photograph 12 | Centerville Marina, looking southwest |
| Photograph 13 | A&C Canal. Looking west from Centerville Turnpike Bridge |
| Photograph 14 | Centerville Turnpike Bridge, looking southeast |
| Photograph 15 | Atlantic Yacht Basin, looking east |
| Photograph 16 | A&C Canal, looking east toward Route 168. |
| Photograph 17 | 116 Reservation Road, looking northeast. |

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PHOTOGRAPHS Page 23 **Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District**
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- Photograph 18 House, Route 165 (3001 Mt. Pleasant Rd), looking north
- Photograph 19 A&C Canal, looking west from North Landing Bridge
- Photograph 20 North Landing Bridge, looking south
- Photograph 21 East terminus of canal, looking east from North Landing Bridge
- Photograph 22 Norfolk-Southern Railroad Bridge, looking south.
- Photograph 23 A&C Canal, looking west from Norfolk-Southern Railroad Bridge

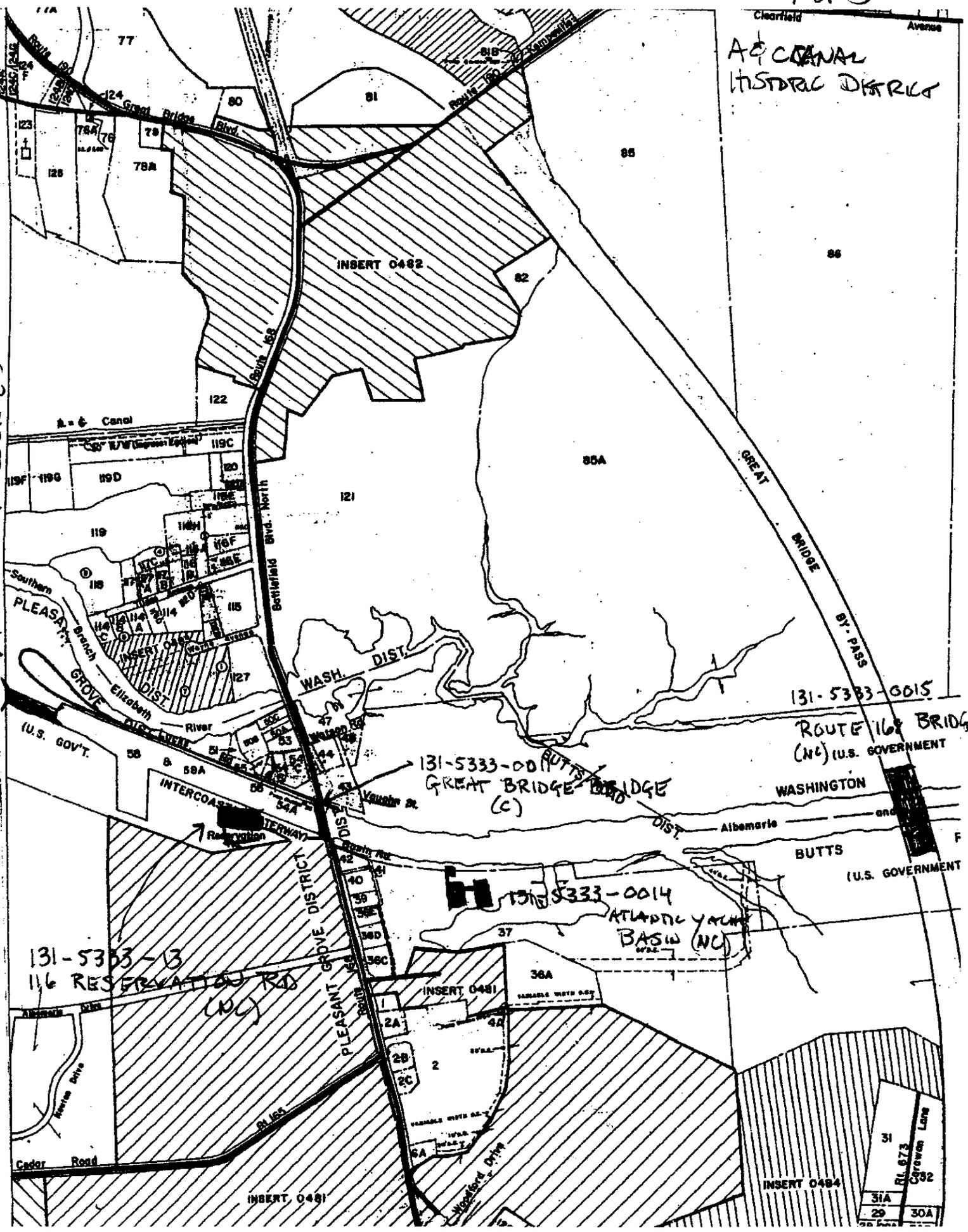
**Color Slide Photographs
Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal Historic District
(Submitted to VDHR for slide presentation)
Photographer: Geoffrey Henry 6-2003**

1. A&C Canal looking west from North Landing Bridge
2. North Landing River where it meets the A&C Canal at North Landing, looking east.
3. North Landing Bridge, looking west.
4. North Landing Bridge, looking south.
5. Centerville Turnpike Bridge (non-contributing), looking southeast.
6. A&C Canal. Looking west from Centerville Turnpike Bridge
7. Great Bridge Bridge swing apparatus in motion, looking east.
8. 1943 Great Bridge (front), new bridge under construction (back).
9. A&C Canal, basin at Great Bridge, looking south.
10. Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, looking south.
11. Great Bridge Corps of Engineers Reservation, looking northwest.
12. Great Bridge Lock, east end, looking southwest.
13. Great Bridge Lock, west end, looking east.
14. South branch of Elizabeth River where it meets the A&C Canal at Great Bridge, looking west.

Clearfield Avenue

AC CANAL
HISTORIC DISTRICT

131-5333-0001 GREAT BRIDGE LOCK (C)



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ROUTE 166 BRIDGE
(NC) (U.S. GOVERNMENT)

131-5333-0001 GREAT BRIDGE LOCK (C)

WASHINGTON
BUTTS
(U.S. GOVERNMENT)

131-5333-13
166 RESERVATION RD
(NC)

131-5333-0014
ATLANTIC YACHT
BASIN (NC)

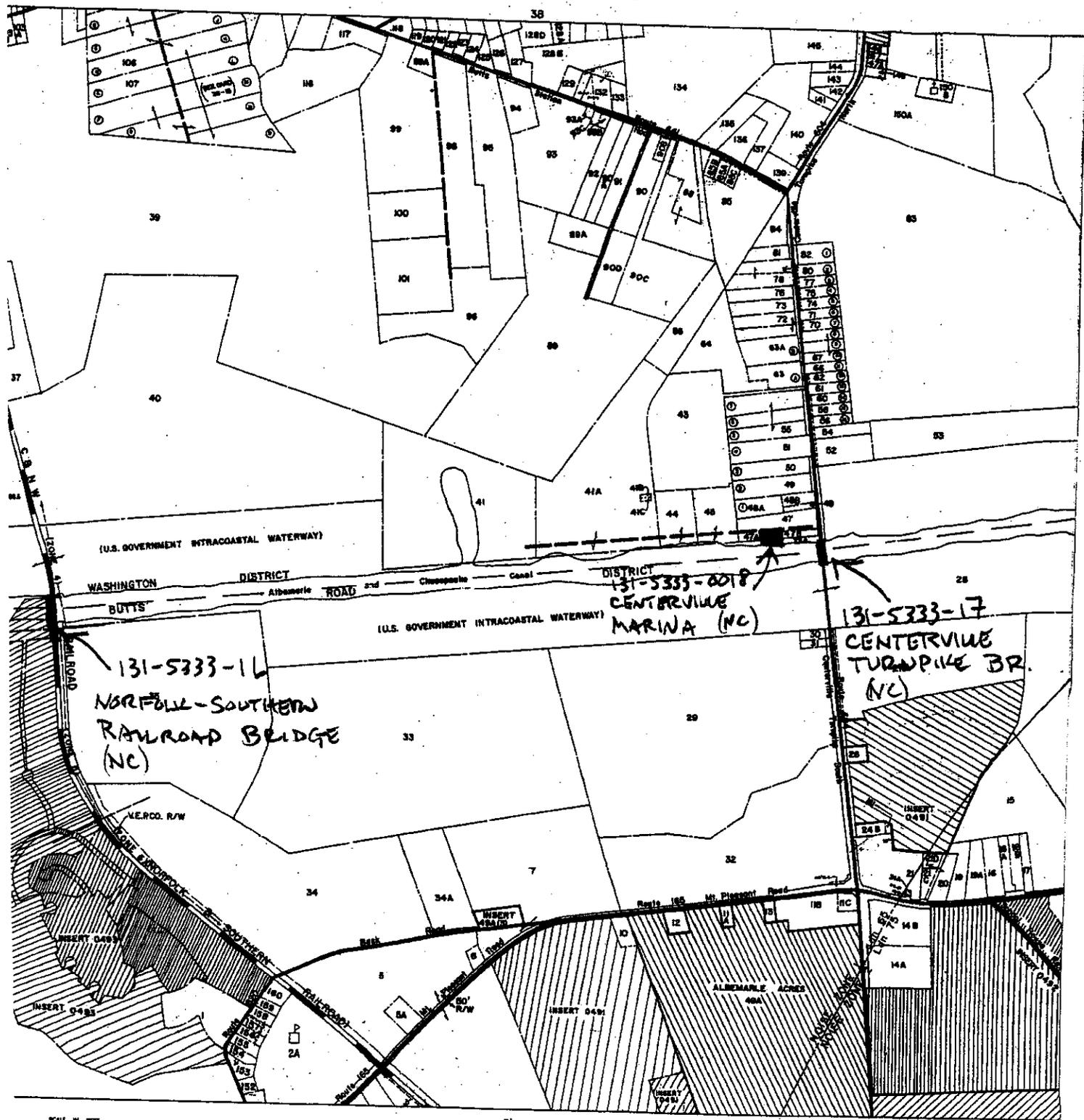
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31A
29
30A

2 of 3
ALBEMARLE &
CHESAPEAKE CANAL

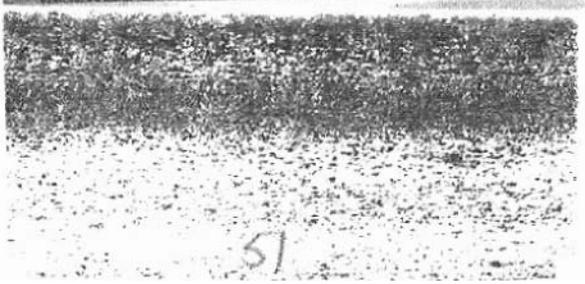
CITY OF CHESAPEAKE



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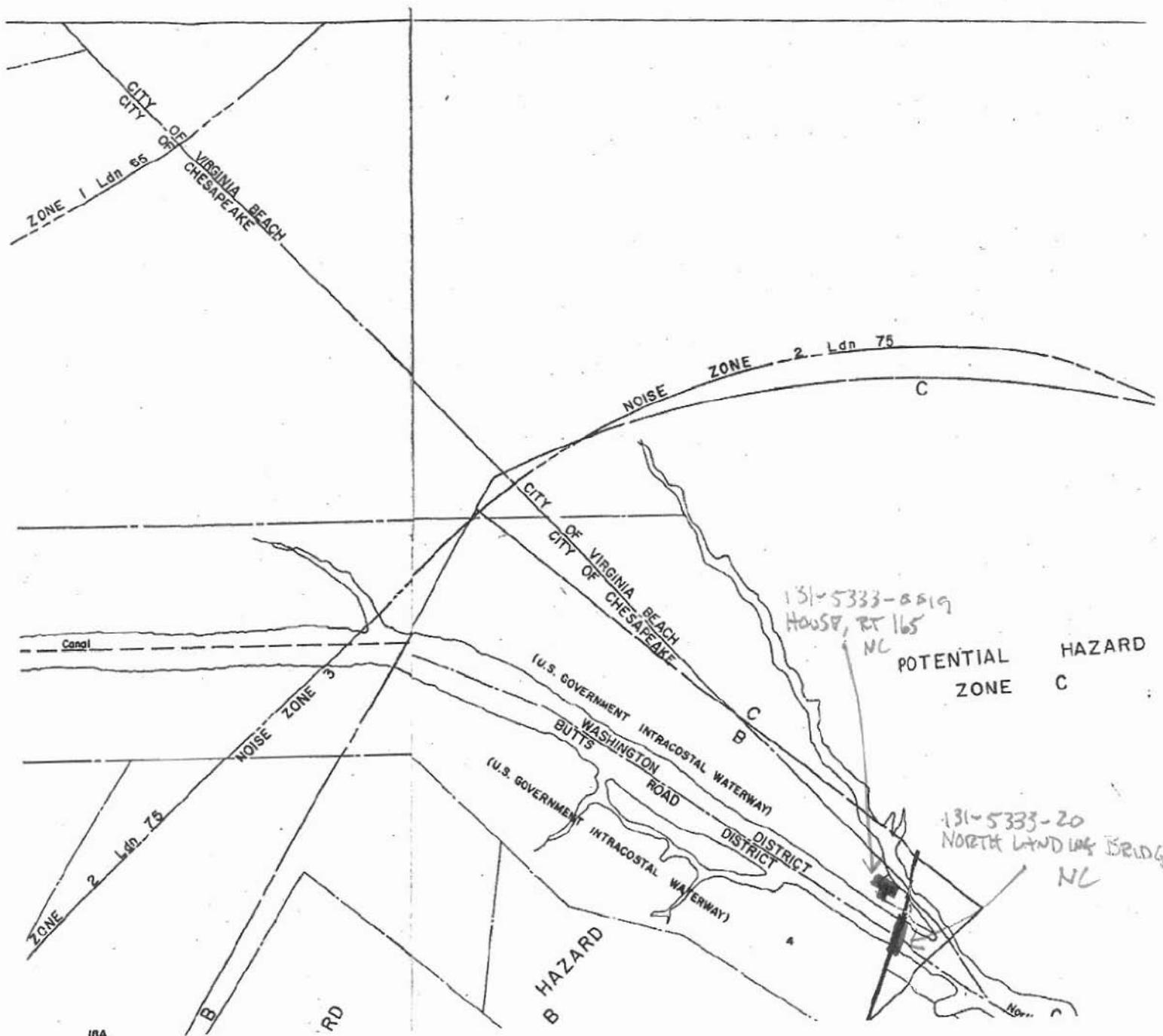
WASHINGTON DISTRICT

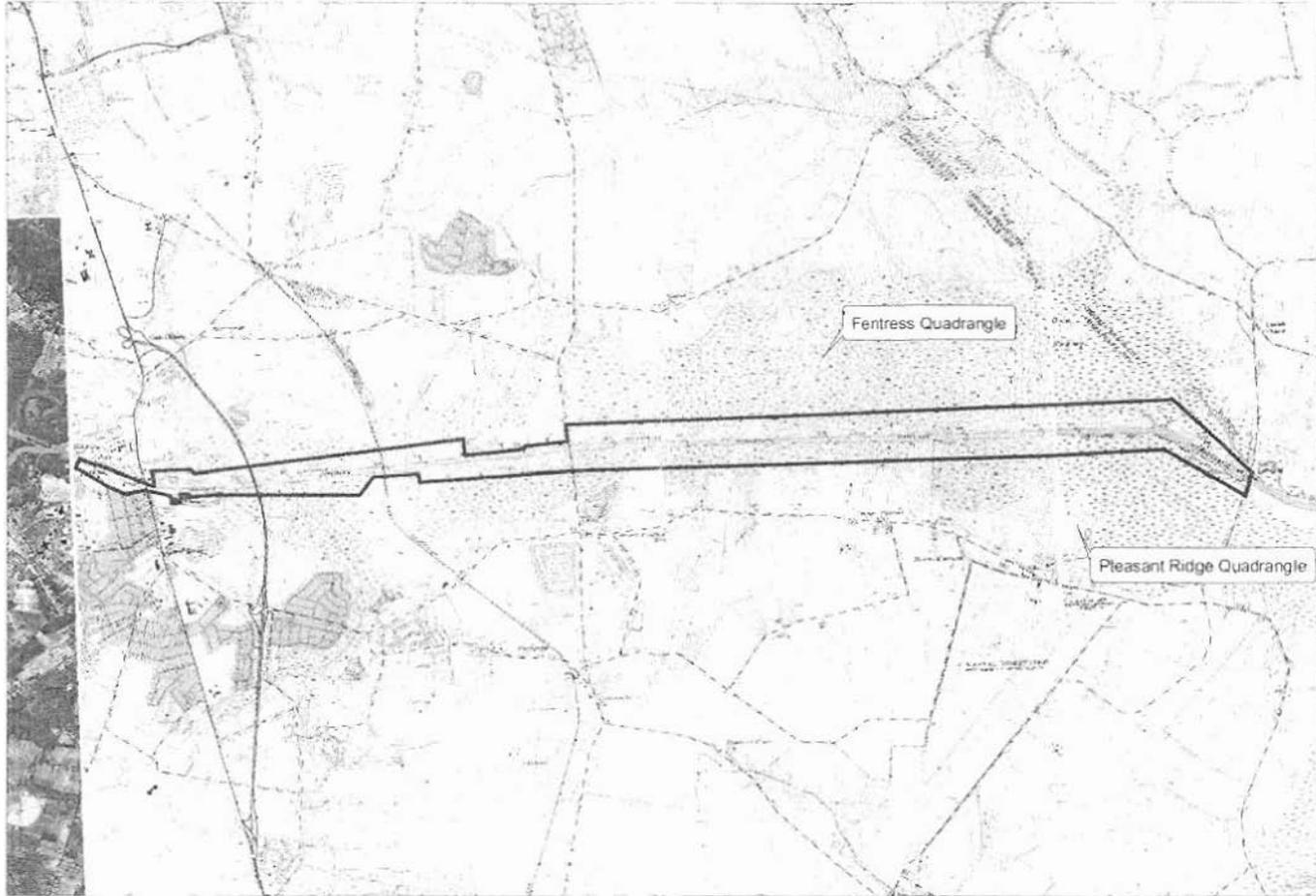
PREPARED BY: REAL ESTATE APPRAISING OFFICE - CITY OF CHESAPEAKE



3 OF 3
 A&C CANAL HISTORIC
 DISTRICT
 SITE LOCATIONS

CITY OF C





131-5333 Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Historic District
Chesapeake County, VA
Fentress and Pleasant Ridge USGS Quadrangles

