

American Canal Society Canal Index

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| CANAL Archer's Hope Creek to Queen's Creek, Va. | | STATUS Proposed, never constructed - 1772 | | ACS | |
| STATE/PROVINCE: Virginia | | | | HAEP | |
| COUNTIES: James City County to connected the James and York Rivers | | ENLARGEMENTS | L E N G T H | | |
| LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): Headwaters of the two creeks, through Williamsburg, 90 feet above sea level. | | | DATES IN USE | CANAL SLACKWATER TOTAL | LIFT LOCKS No./ SIZE |
| TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: | | | | 10 miles estimated | |
| HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: | | | 1 | | |

One of the nation's earliest proposed canals, 1772. Proposed 1771, in 1772, February, the Virginia colonial House of Burgesses passed "An Act for cutting a navigable canal from Archer's Hope Creek, to Queen's Creek, through or near the city of Williamsburg." The preamble of the act read: "I, WHEREAS the opening a communication between James River and York River, by a canal or cut to be made from Archer's Hope creek, through or near the city of Williamsburg, into Queen's creek, for the navigation of boats and other vessels, with heavy burthens, will be of great advantage to the said city and to the trade carried on the said rivers . . ."

At this time, Archer's Hope Creek (named for Capt. Gabriel Archer), which empties into the James River a few miles below Jamestown, was navigable for small craft to within 3/4 of a mile of Williamsburg. Queen's Creek made a similar approach from the York River.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The cut would have deepened the creek beds and then cut through clay and marl with Williamsburg at 90 feet elevation. Though "necessary bridges" over the canal were mentioned several times in the act, nothing was said about locks or a source of water to operate them. The route was surveyed and the necessary land purchased or condemned. The subscribers formed a company to attempt to raise funds. By Feb. 23, 1772, the "subscription paper . . . now amounts to five thousand pounds." Royal Governor Dunmore gave 500 pounds to start it off.

As the Revolutionary War was approaching, political troubles within the colony of Virginia were increasing and this prevented any further steps to accomplish the plan. And so the canal was never completed and nothing is known of the actual work, beyond surveys, which was done. Though canal building in the new nation received a big impetus from George Washington's keen interest in internal improvements and the James River Company, Potomack Company and Dismal Swamp Canal, following 1785, were authorized, apparently the idea of bisecting the Virginia Peninsula from the James to the York Rivers was never revived. Today the creeks are silted up and there are no visible remains.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:

Hening's Statutes, Vol. 8 (Feb. 1772), pp. 556-565
The Virginia Gazette: various issues from Dec. 19, 1771 to April 23, 1772
Virginia Historical Magazine, I (July 1893), pp. 90-91

UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAEP, HABS, Local or Regional Historical Societies, Libraries, etc.):

EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):
 Recommend an historical marker be placed in the City of Williamsburg.

REPORTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: Alexander C. Brown, 228 James River Dr., Newport News, 23601
 DATE: 20 June 1975

RETURN TO: CANAL INDEX COMMITTEE, c/o P.H. STOTT, HAINES ROAD, MOUNT KISCO, NY 10549