#10 2003–Remembering Isabel *(Spring 05)*

#9 1970–Annexation *(Summer 05)*

#8 1912–When (Gun) Cotton Was King *(Fall 05)*

#7 1864–Bermuda Hundred Campaign *(Jan/Feb 06)*

#6 1815–Bellona Foundry. Cast in War *(May/Jun 06)*

#5 est.1782 –Shunpiking, Coal Hauling and Gravity Railways: National Transportation in Chesterfield

By Dennis Farmer, historic specialist for Chesterfield Parks & Recreation

The written history of Chesterfield County begins, in part, as that of a history of transportation. On Friday, May 8, 1607, a party of Englishmen in a shallop, a small rowing vessel fitted with sails, common then for inland explorations, came into what is today, Chesterfield County. Both basic forms of transportation in use then and for thousands of years before were in practice within the area we know as Chesterfield. You could walk, or use the water. From dug out canoes to sailing vessels, the James and Appomattox rivers and numerous small streams allowed effective, if limited, transportation. This was subject to wind and tide, drought and flood. It was affected by rain, snow and after storms, floating debris.

Virginia Indians, first used animal game trails, expanded them into trading and warpaths, with little or no improvements and markings. Early English colonial setters used these and created a few new ones, improving them in width and with limited removal of stumps and grading, but otherwise very little different from native efforts. Horses were introduced into Virginia in 1610, and over time, became the main means of long-distance travel in Virginia. By 1633, some efforts from the general assembly directed "highways" to be built, then meant to run along the high ground to avoid lowland water, if possible, joining a slowly growing network of private roads from plantations and other settlements.

Over time, a more formal system was needed, and in 1658, surveyors of roads were appointed. In 1662, church vestries were empowered to use the adult male labor from the tithables nearest the road for six days of service each year. Within Chesterfield County at that time, several roads had been established, such as Coxendale, Bermuda Hundred and Osborne, as well as the "rolling roads" serving each plantation, leading to the wharf site to load tobacco. Around 1735, the King's Highway ran from Boston, Mass, to Charleston, S.C. some 1,300 miles and ran through Chesterfield. With the coming of the Revolutionary War, 1775-83, Chesterfield would see invading armies and defending soldiers badly damage the roads and bridges. In 1782 a special levy was made within the county to replace the war-damaged bridges. Those mentioned were Pocahontas at Petersburg, Cary's Mill at Falling Creek, Randolph's Mill at Swift Creek, and Goode's, Lockett's, and Forcie's bridges crossing the Appomattox.

With this, the new nation and Chesterfield began a major series of internal transportation improvements. The new commonwealth capital at Richmond, at the falls of the James River, was linked to the south only by ferries, and on Oct. 26, 1785, Mayo Bridge was built, crossing the James, by Colonel John Mayo Jr. Mayo expected the tolls charged to recoup his private investment, but on Dec. 29, an ice storm, destroyed the wooden structure. Mayo would rebuild, and in 1788, that bridge was destroyed. The 1789 bridge did provide some "handsome revenue" accounting to Jedediah Morse, but Mayo slid further and further into debt, as a total of four bridges were lost. Public transportation over land was needed, and in 1786, the Southern Stage Co. opened a route from Richmond to Wilmington, N.C., at three pence a mile, cutting through Chesterfield at Osborne's ferry and using the new "Stage Road". The following year, John Woolfolk and Richard Townes started a Richmond-to-Norfolk stage via Petersburg, three times a week. Both these lines used four-wheel wagons with benches and no springs. For comfort, a canvas roof protected the passengers and leather side curtains could be used during the rain. The James River, the Kanawha Canal and the Appomattox Canal (both with George Washington's influent in construction) allowed better use of river transport until the early 20th century ended their use. While important to the coal hauling of the expanding mine interests in the county, these water-borne resources had a limited effect in Chesterfield due to the harsh nature of both rivers, west of the fall line.

While the James River and its Kanawha Canal made an impact of the expanding coal-mining interests in Chesterfield, the only road to haul the coal to market was the Buckingham Road, and under pressure from the heavy coal wagons, its surface gave way into a sea of mud, ruts and dust. The

coal mine developers became active at both local and state levels for road improvements within the county. On Jan. 20, 1802, after years of lobbying, a charter was granted for the Manchester Turnpike Co. to build the first surfaced road in Virginia, known today as Midlothian Turnpike. The new road, the Midlothian Turnpike, was to roughly follow the old Buckingham Road, be not less then 30 feet wide and had its capital set at $40,000.

The company named, James Clark as contractor, and he soon advertised for 50 Negro laborers and allowed use of the adult male labor from the tithables nearest the road for four days of service a year within the town limits of Midlothian. Clark graded the road to have a crowned profile and gravel was used for the first time in a road within Virginia. Heavy coal traffic broke the surface down in four years and a second resurfacing was done in 1807. Two tollgates collected the fee from loaded wagons, with empty vehicles having to yield the right of way to the coal wagons but not having to pay the toll for use of the road. Soon, "shunpiking," taking side roads to avoid tolls or traffic on a turnpike, began as people would take side trails around the toll gates, which, over time, lead to new private roads in Midlothian and the county. In 1816, the Manchester and Petersburg Turnpike also came into the county and, as Route 1/301, is still in use today. In 1826-28, the bridge crossing Falling Creek was designed and managed by Claudius Crozet and remained in use until 1933. The site became the first wayside park in Virginia.

Courtesy of the Chesterfield Historical Society. The Grove Shaft mine in Midlothian is shown on this map depicting property belonging to the Virginia Coal and Coke Co. in 1895.

Steamships came to Chesterfield's James River sites in 1813 with the Richmond running from Washington, D.C., to Richmond and the Eagle in 1815, from Richmond to Baltimore. Regular steamers would provide a great benefit to Chesterfieldians along the James for decades to come, however, the use of steam along the Appomattox was very limited due to the poor navigation and depth of that river. Early steam ships were designed for these inland waterways and were very effective at landing and loading at the plantation wharfs just as the early sailing vessels had done. That factor, alone, continued the economic use in river trade. In 1864, the Union Army of the James, under Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler was established at Bermuda Hundred and nearby Dutch Gap. Butler came up with a plan to dig a canal around Confederate defenses and bypass them. While the Dutch Gap canal failed during the war, in September 1871, it was open to river traffic. A second canal completed in the 1930s provided a direct route to Richmond's Deep Water Terminal, which was built at the site of the 18th-century village of Warwick and remains a vital link in the Richmond area's 21st-century transportation system, with billions of dollars of materials annually making use of "Butler's Folly."

Very early in the history of the United States, Chesterfield became a pioneer location for railroads. A horse-drawn tramway, about one mile long, was built in 1811 at Arbor Spring Branch, near today's Meadowbrook golf course, to move gunpowder made by the Brown, Page and Burr Powder Mill. Designed by George Magers of Chesterfield, it remained in use as late as 1823, though, its formal use closed in 1819. The second commercial railroad in the United States was chartered on Feb. 28, 1829, under the leadership of Nicholas Mills, Beverly Randolph and Abraham S. Wooldridge. Moncure Robinson was selected as engineer, and work was begun. Using a survey route selected during the winter of 1827 by Claudius Crozet, Robinson finished in June 1831, and the mule-powered gravity railroad with some 160 cars is successful almost from its start. By 1836, the Chesterfield Railroad was said to be the most profitable in the world. That year, its report stated that some $83,409 were made with 25,903 carloads shipped and some 84,976 tons of coal transported. That came to more than three tons of coal per car, all done with gravity and mules compared to about 140 tons per load that coal train cars crossing Chesterfield County average today. By 1844, the chartered company had returned its investors capital, provided dividends of more than 6 percent a year, and was reduced to a commonwealth mandated fixed return of percent a year. The cost of transporting a bushel of coal dropped from 6 cents to only 3 cents. It was, in fact, too successful, as it was never upgraded to use steam locomotives and was sold in 1851 after falling to the new Richmond and Danville Railroad.

The county obtained its first steam driven system, the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, in 1836 with the Clover Hill Railroad coming in 1844. It was with the 1848 Richmond and Danville Railroad that Chesterfield reached its national zenith. In less then three years, 167 miles of track were laid and opened with many place names added to the county, such as Robious Crossing and Coalfield (station) Road. With these systems of transportation, the county found itself on the eve of the Civil War, and until the coming of the internal combustion engine, a plateau of national transportation. ■

Note: This article was to have been done by the late Daniel K. Weiskotton Jr., assistant director of the Chesterfield Historical Society. It was my privilege to hire Dan and work with him until his sudden death in 2005. This article is dictated to the memory of a friend and coworker with all my respect. We miss you, Dan.