

VLR-6/19/73 NRHP-7/27/73

88-137

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| STATE:<br>Virginia      |
| COUNTY:<br>Spotsylvania |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY        |
| ENTRY DATE              |

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Rapidan Dam Canal of the Rappahannock Navigation

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
See Continuation Sheet

CITY OR TOWN:  
Seventh; J. Kenneth Robinson

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
Seventh; J. Kenneth Robinson

|                   |            |                         |             |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| STATE<br>Virginia | CODE<br>51 | COUNTY:<br>Spotsylvania | CODE<br>177 |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY<br>(Check One)   | OWNERSHIP   | STATUS  | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site<br><input type="checkbox"/> Building<br><input type="checkbox"/> Structure<br><input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public<br><input type="checkbox"/> Private<br><input type="checkbox"/> Both | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied<br><input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes: Restricted<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted<br><input type="checkbox"/> No |

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

|  |  |  |  |                                   |
|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural<br><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial<br><input type="checkbox"/> Educational<br><input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government<br><input type="checkbox"/> Industrial<br><input type="checkbox"/> Military<br><input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park<br><input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence<br><input type="checkbox"/> Religious<br><input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)<br>Woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Comments |
|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
City of Fredericksburg

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Fredericksburg

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Municipal Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Fredericksburg

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1968

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN:  
Richmond

STATE:  
Virginia

CODE:  
51

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia

COUNTY: Spotsylvania

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

*(Continuation Sheet)*

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|                  |      |

*(Number all entries)*

2.

The Rapidan Dam Canal boundaries are 500' from each side of the Rappahannock River from the mouth of the Rapidan to a point 1 1/2 miles below where it re-enters the river through three locks.

7. DESCRIPTION

|           |                                    |   |                                |   |                                |                                    |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One)                        |   |                                |   |                                |                                    |
|           | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good      | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair  | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated             | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
|           | (Check One)                        |   |                                | (Check One)                                       |                                |                                    |
|           | <input type="checkbox"/> Altered   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site |                                |                                    |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Rappahannock Navigation consisted of a series of 20 dams, each with a Guard Lock and usually a short canal with one or more lift locks. The Rapidan Dam Canal is the best preserved and most elaborate of these canals and its remains are representative of the whole Rappahannock Navigation.

The Rapidan Dam Canal parallels closely the right (south) bank of the Rappahannock River from the mouth of the Rapidan to a point 1 1/2 miles below where it re-enters the river through three locks. The canal is now dry, but is intact except for river damage to the Guard Lock; a pipeline trench through the towpath below Lock 9; and some silting in the lower end. The silt however, could easily be removed, and the breach in the towpath provides an instructive cross-section illustrating the construction of a towpath embankment, including rip-rap and clay puddling. There are five locks on the canal, all of stone; primarily broken range rubble masonry. The Guard Lock is situated at the head of the canal, at the mouth of the Rapidan; Lock 9 is 3/8 mile below; Lock 8, 1 mile further; Lock 7, 200 feet further, and Lock 6, the outlet lock to the river, 200 feet further. According to the Company's annual report for 1848, the Guard Lock is of stone laid in mortar; Lock 9 of granite laid in cement, with a lift of 9.2'; Lock 8 of flagstone laid in mortar, 6.75' lift; Lock 7 of granite laid in mortar, 6.75' lift; and Lock 6, the Outlet Lock, of flagstone laid in mortar, with a lift of 8.2'. The lift of the Guard Lock, which opened onto the pond formed by the Rapidan Dam, was variable according to the level of the pond, and was designed to protect the canal from floods, rather than to lower or lift boats from one level to another. The latter function was that of the 4 lift locks, which lowered boats from the level of the Rapidan Dam pond, by 4 stages, to that of Scott's Dam pond, about 31 feet below; or raised them the same distance, when traveling upstream.

The Rapidan Dam, of which only iron pins in the river bed remain, was an unusually long (and expensive) Dam, stretching across both the Rappahannock, and the mouth of the Rapidan. Batteaux going down the Rappahannock had to row across the Rapidan to reach the Guard Lock. This lock, exposed to flood debris, has been badly battered, but even with stones dislodged it is still presentable. Below the Guard Lock, to Lock 9, the towpath embankment, closely paralleling the river, is protected by a long and massive stone wall, making this the most impressive stretch of canal on the river, with the possible exception of the deep cuts at Kelly's Ford. Lock 9, built into a bluff, is one of the most unusual on the river, because the one wall is composed of bedrock (John Couty, who built this lock, used this same technique on the rebuilding of the Rivanna Navigation). Below the lock is a power-line clearing, which crosses the river at right angles to the canal, incidentally affording a view of the site of a flight of wooden locks on the other side of the river-perhaps the only place where the original canals of 1829 have remained undisturbed and were not re-constructed in 1847. A cut through the towpath, just below Lock 9, reveals the construction of a towpath embankment. The canal below Lock 9 passes through the U.S. Gold Mine fields, and in fact has two mine adits in the canal bed, leading into the hillside. These were apparently made after the demise of the canal. A few yards below the adits is the old road to the U. S. Ford, and the sluice-gate and foundations of a mill. The road crossed the canal on a bridge with well-preserved, curving stone abutments. A stone spillway or waste is found further along the canal; this regulated

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(Number all entries)

7.  
the water level. At the lower end of the canal are Locks 6, 7 and 8, 200 feet apart, perfectly preserved and picturesque. From this point, batteaux on the way to Fredericksburg poled downriver, and probably rowed across, to the next canal, at Scott's Dam Guard Lock on the opposite side of the river one mile below the outlet of the Rapidan Dam Canal.

The Register nomination boundaries are 500' from each side of the canal remains.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian;       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | losophy  | <u>Park Planning</u>                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                   | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                 | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | Architecture                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | itarian  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                   | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rappahannock Navigation is the best remaining example of a batteau lock-and-dam navigation in the U. S., and the Rapidan Dam Canal is the best part of that navigation.

A batteau lock-and-dam navigation represents a compromise, typical in the South, between an expensive continuous canal for horse-drawn canal boats, and an inexpensive but unreliable riverbed sluice navigation for batteaux. Batteaux, sturdy river boats requiring shallow water, were poled and rowed so they needed no towpath, and could use small locks and narrow canals. The lock and dam system, consisting of a series of dams, each with a lock and usually a short canal, bypassed rapids and created ponds of still water. Most of the inland navigations in the South, penetrating the piedmont by way of the river valleys, were for batteaux. These systems involved various proportions of channeled riverbed (sluice navigation), lock-and-dam navigation, and continuous canal.

The next best remaining batteau navigation in the U. S. is the Wateree-Catawba, in South Carolina, but much of that navigation has been inundated by recent water control projects. At the time of its construction (1847-49) the first half of the Rappahannock navigation was judged superior to the other two similar navigations in Virginia, the Appomattox and Rivanna Navigations primarily because most of the locks on that part of the Rappahannock were of stone (the Rivanna navigation was later rebuilt for canal boats, this time with stone locks). Interestingly enough, the engineer of the lower (first) half of the Rappahannock Navigation, John Couty, was then in charge of the Rivanna rebuilding, and was also involved with the construction of the Landsford Canal.

The Rappahannock Navigation was a local project to draw trade to Fredericksburg and to provide the farmers of the region with an economical outlet to market. Construction began in 1829 in Fredericksburg, with an elaborate parade and ceremony. A great deal of money and effort was expended by Fredericksburg and at times by the local farmers, but even with the help of funds from the state Board of Public Works, progress was so slow that the 50-mile navigation was not successfully completed until a complete rebuilding took place in 1847-49, just in time for railway competition to make it useless. This rebuilding was carried out in two phases. The lower half of the navigation, below Kelly's Ford, was constructed first and received the most money and effort; this part of the navigation, which includes the Rapidan Dam Canal, was the most substantial, and had almost all locks of fine cut-stone. The civil engineer John Couty was in charge of this part of the navigation. The upper half of the navigation, under Bazil Gordon, was constructed more economically; most of

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8.  
the locks were of wood, "of the best heart pine or white oak that a country abounding in these materials could afford", but these have rotted away aboveground. Altogether, there were 26 stone locks, 54 wooden locks, 15 miles of canal and 20 dams. At least 20 of the stone locks are extant.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

The Rappahannock Canal, by Donald S. Callaham, M. A. thesis, American University, Washington, D. C., 1967, 95 pp.

Map of the Rappahannock Navigation, 1848, Map and Profile of the Rappahannock Navigation and its improvement, 1848. Virginia State Library M S 755.2 H9.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES<br>DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY |          |         |         | O<br>R  | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES<br>DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY<br>OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES |         |         |         |         |
|--|----------|---------|---------|---------|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| CORNER   | LATITUDE |         |         |         | LONGITUDE   |         |         |         |         |
|  | Degrees  | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes   | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds |
| NW   | 38°      | 22'     | 07"     | 77°     | 37'   | 16"     |         |         |         |
| NE   | 38°      | 22'     | 07"     | 77°     | 36'   | 05"     |         |         |         |
| SE   | 38°      | 20'     | 52"     | 77°     | 36'   | 05"     |         |         |         |
| SW   | 38°      | 20'     | 52"     | 77°     | 37'   | 16"     |         |         |         |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 200 acres.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE:   | CODE | COUNTY   | CODE |
|----------|------|----------|------|
| Virginia | 51   | Culpeper | 047  |
| STATE:   | CODE | COUNTY:  | CODE |
| STATE:   | CODE | COUNTY:  | CODE |
| STATE:   | CODE | COUNTY:  | CODE |

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE: June, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond, STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

543 1 NW  
RICHARDSVILLE

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

77°37'30"  
38°22'30"

771000m E

772

773

774

35'

Rapidan Dam Canal:

4250000m N.

Rapidan Dam

Guard Lock

Lock 9

Retaining Wall

Bridge Abutments  
and Mill

Spillway

Locks 6, 7 & 8

