



Chapel Island/James River Public Access Enhancement Project

FINAL REPORT

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MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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Introduction



Chapel Island is located in the City of Richmond just east of the Fall Line of the James River and at the headwaters of the Kanawha Canal. The island is immediately south of Libby Hill Park in Church Hill and connects to the Great Ship Lock Park on the north side of the Canal.

Chapel Island has a rich history, documented as a possible first landing site for Captains John Smith and Christopher Newport in 1607, as well as the site of the Trigg Shipbuilding Company in 1898. Two large 15-foot high concrete walls of the Trigg remain today toward the eastern end of the island. Chapel Island is owned by the City's Department of Public Utilities and the western portion of the island is occupied by a 50-million gallon combined sewer overflow (CSO) covered retention basin. Long range plans for expansion of the basin to a point west of the Trigg leaves a small 5.8-acre portion of the island for historic interpretation and river access improvements.





A - A view of the locks connecting Chapel Island to Great Ship Lock Park. Historic warehouses can be seen in the distance.



B - Cornerstone commemorating construction of the Great Ship Lock in 1849.

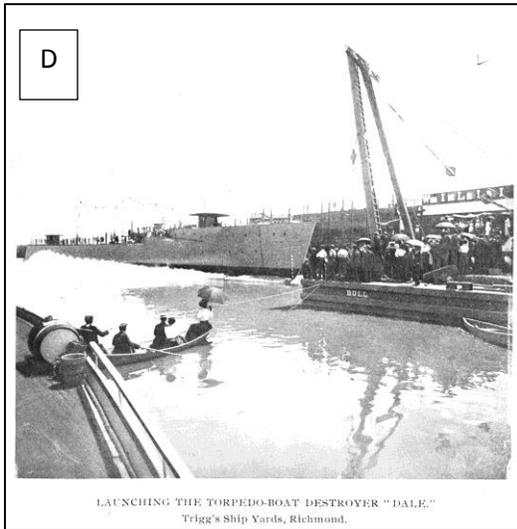


Chapel Island Enhancement Project

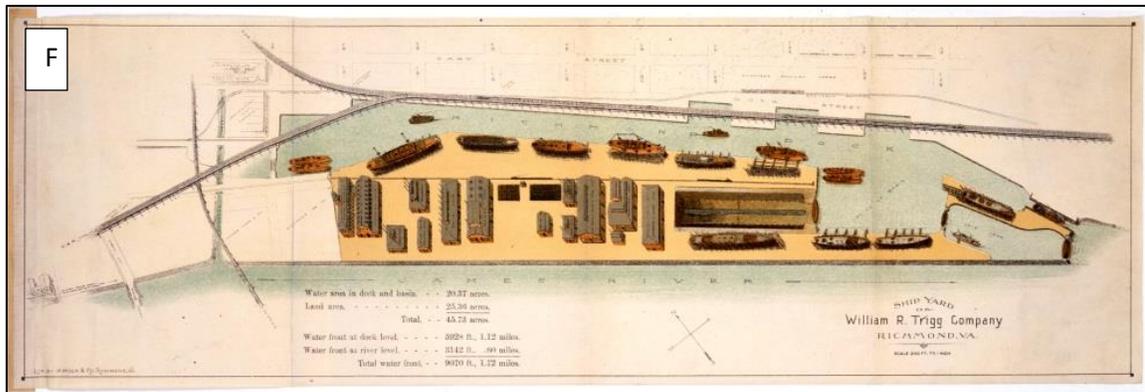


C – Aerial image of current-day Chapel Island with a transparent historic map overlay. The historic map depicts the Trigg Ship Yard facilities from 1902. The historic map can be seen in full on the next page, image F. (Historic map provided by the Library of Virginia.)





LAUNCHING THE TORPEDO-BEAT DESTROYER "DALE."
Trigg's Ship Yards, Richmond.



D - The launching of a steam torpedo boat from the Trigg Ship Yard.

E - Weighted Bascule railbridge (existing but non-operational) raised across the canal. Ca. 1900

F - Layout of the facilities of the Trigg Shipyard in 1902, employing 2000 men.

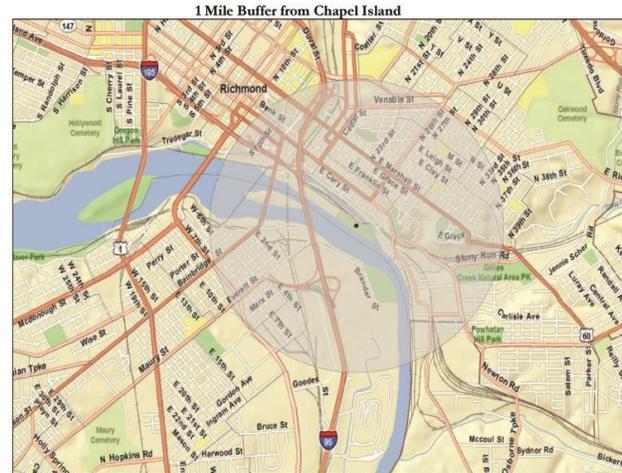
G - USS Decatur and USS Dale under construction in the caisson at Trigg Ship Yard on Chapel Island, 1902.

Images on this page provided by the Library of Virginia.



Project Beneficiaries

9,400 residents live within one-mile of Chapel Island, including residents of Church Hill, Tobacco Row, and Rockett's Landing. This population is expected to grow by more than 35% to more than 12,500 by 2035 (RRPDC, 2011 *Richmond Region Socioeconomic Analysis Report*). An estimated 21,518 people work within one-mile of Chapel Island. The Chapel Island trail is directly adjacent to the existing Richmond section of the Virginia Capital Trail, a 54-mile regional trail (Great Ship Lock trailhead completed) which will ultimately extend from the heart of Richmond to Williamsburg.



Map depicting the location of the improved trail system on Chapel Island.
Note: North points toward the bottom of the page.

Project Context

The Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) obtained funding through the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program to work with the City in the design and construction of the Chapel Island/ James River Access Enhancement at Great Ship Lock Park. The project involved the construction of the following elements for greater public access to the James River:

- Improved pedestrian access from Great Ship Lock Park over the lock foot-bridge to Chapel Island
- A 1/2 mile trail oriented from the lock crossing, eastern end of the Island around the historic remnants of the Trigg Shipyard to the river/inlet-outfall of canal and to fishing spots along James River
- Canoe/kayak put-in on Island basin
- Interpretative signage, including an overall trail map, history of Trigg Shipyard, description of the island and river ecology, and the CSO and its function in improving water quality of the James River



A number of plans and capital investments complement the Chapel Island enhancement project, including:

2012 City of Richmond Riverfront Master Plan adopted by the City Council on November 26, 2012. Initial capital improvement priorities for implementation call for the connection of the easternmost Chapel Island trail by way of a trail link along the southern side of the CSO retention basin to the 14th Street boat launch location with ultimate connection to Mayo Island and the canal walk. The Riverfront Plan calls for a series of terraced steps along the southern bank of Chapel Island to allow public interaction with the River at key points along the new trail (see below)



CHAPEL ISLAND: SHORT-TERM

A continuous, publicly accessible trail along the Shockoe Retention Basin would bring more people to Chapel Island and along the James River, from 14th Street to Great Shiplock Park. Selective thinning of existing Chapel Island vegetation would allow for riparian replacement species and the strategic insertion of seating overlooks along the river. A perimeter fence would preclude public access to the roof of the sewage facility, redirecting attention to the river. The existing basin roof is prominently visible from distant towers and homes, and is an open invitation to envision alternate uses. Strategies for reclaiming the 5.5-acre and eventually 7 to 8-acre rooftop range from the purely utilitarian to purely recreational, each with significant costs. A green roof could be configured without public access, utilizing lightweight, pre-planted trays of low-maintenance plants positioned behind a restrictive fence controlling access to the roof. Similarly, a solar panel array of nearly 8-acres positioned on the roof would generate significant power, reducing DPU reliance on conventional power sources.





H, I, J – Excerpted from the Richmond Riverfront Master Plan, maps depicting long term and short term improvements to Chapel Island as well as how Chapel Island fits into the broader plan for the Richmond Riverfront.

The **City of Richmond’s Downtown Master Plan** adopted in July 2009 identified the James River as Richmond’s *great, wet Central Park*, and called for a series of clear connections to the riverfront which laid the groundwork for the 2012 Riverfront Plan, including:

Open Chapel Island to pedestrians and kayakers

Chapel Island, located south of Kanawha Canal, is currently used by the City of Richmond as an overflow storage area for the city’s combined sewer system and a rail siding for freight trains. Only the very eastern tip of the island is publicly accessible, via Great Shiplock Park. A system of loop trails should be created around the island, while still separating the general public from the combined sewer...Other elements of the proposed park should include a small boat launch ...river overlooks, open space for passive recreation, and trail connections to the rest of the proposed riverfront trail system.

Make Great Shiplock Park accessible

Great Shiplock Park has ample parking and provides access to some of the canal’s few remaining historic locks, as well as the only current public access point onto Chapel Island. Beyond the parking lot and locks, the park’s trails and river access have been left relatively wild. With the construction of the Virginia Capital Trail, Great Shiplock Park will become a center of activity. Existing trails should be formalized to provide easier access to the proposed trail system along Chapel Island as well as along Dock Street under the railroad truss.

An earlier **1992 Master Plan for the Great Ship Lock Park at Chapel Island** prepared in conjunction with a development agreement with the Tobacco Row developer describes the rich



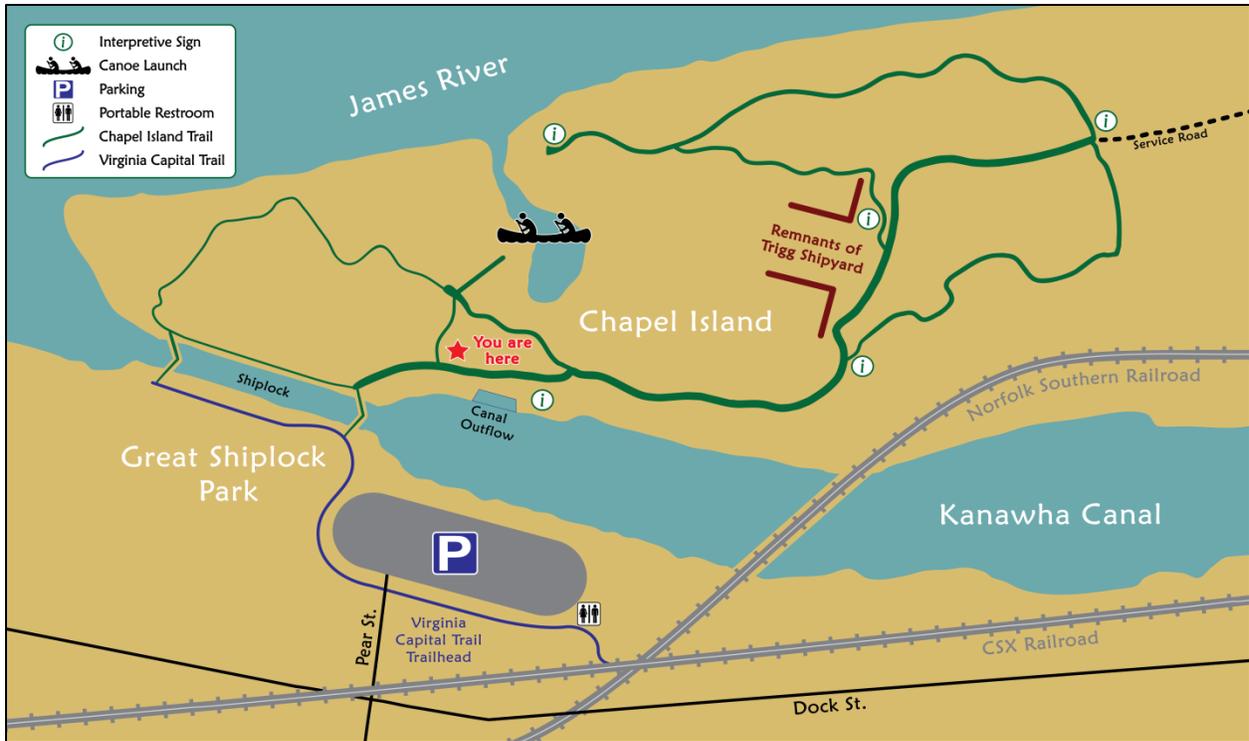
history of Chapel Island and offered recommendations for a trail, small boat launch and basin, along with possible viewsheds for residents of Tobacco Row to be able to see the James River.

The **Great Ship Lock Trailhead** for the **Virginia Capital Trail (VCT)** in Richmond was recently opened, completing a \$500,000 largely privately funded project. The VCT is a 54 mile dedicated bike and pedestrian trail connecting the present-day capital of Richmond with Virginia's past capital of Jamestown. The trail is not yet complete; however, discontinuous portions in the City of Richmond, Charles City County, and James City County are constructed and in use. On October 15, 2013, the Capital Trail Foundation, the City of Richmond, and many other stakeholders celebrated the opening of the trail's western trail head at Great Ship Lock Park, along with acknowledgement of the Chapel Island project.



K – Dignitaries, stakeholders, and fans of the Virginia Capital Trail celebrate the opening of the trailhead at Great Ship Lock Park on October 15, 2013, connection to existing trail as shown below





Map of Chapel Island posted on informational kiosk on Chapel Island. See image W below.

Project Description

The Chapel Island project has enhanced the eastern end of the Island with the addition of walking/biking trails, interpretive signage, and a canoe/kayak put-in ramp. The Chapel Island trail made use of a combination of existing infrastructure and new construction. The existing access road was upgraded with new crusher-run surface; additional trail loops follow existing topography to create a meandering loop around the Trigg Shipyard, along the existing shoreline and through heavily vegetated areas. The trail was laid out not only to take advantage of natural topography but also offer views of the river and showcase the island's unique natural, man-made, and historic features. Vista views required minimal clearing of invasive plants and vines, brush and small limbs, consistent with parks and recreation projects throughout the city.



L- Existing interpretive signage in Great Ship Lock Park

This project promotes increased public access to Chapel Island through the existing Great Ship Lock Park, making the island more accessible, safe and user-friendly. The project will allow Chapel Island to be discovered by the growing number of area residents. The project also compliments the recently completed Great Ship Lock trailhead of the Virginia Capital Trail (see images K and M). Through compatible interpretative signage, this project highlights the history of the island and its place in the City as well as the

James River and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The trail makes the island an extension of the



bicycle and pedestrian network the City is currently expanding, and connects it to the Virginia Capital Trail, the Canal Walk and the James River Park System as well as proposed trails in the Downtown Master Plan.



This project will allow Chapel Island to serve as a destination to promote the City and its history as more tourists take advantage of the Capital Trail. A canoe/kayak put-in further increases access and diminishes the impact that human activity has on the river by providing well-defined access for paddlers. The interpretive signage serves as an educational opportunity to explain various features of the island including the CSO retention basin, the ecology of the James' tidal portion, and the history of the island and the Trigg Shipyard. Informal overlooks accentuate the impression of interaction with the river.

Process for Design, Permits and Construction

The planning and review approval process for the Chapel Island project actually began a full year before the contract for VCZM funding was executed on November 28, 2012:

- The conceptual plan for “location, character and extent” was prepared and reviewed for approval by the City’s Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission in November 2011.
- As the design and permit investigation proceeded from this point, the original team who had volunteered their services decided the project would require more time than they could donate. Additional funds for design services were obtained from the City Department of Parks & Recreation, and a contract with TIMMONS was secured.
- Coordination and agreement with the property owner (City Department of Public Utilities-DPU) also required additional time, forestalling the completion of the 306A submission. DPU reached agreement as the property owner on July 18, 2012 that the planned expansion and improvement of the existing Shockoe Retention Basin would be compatible with the Chapel Island enhancement project.
- Final review and approval of the June 6, 2012 design documents was reviewed and approved by the City’s Urban Design Committee and Planning Commission in September 2012.
- The final 306A was submitted on September 11, 2012 upon receipt of the SHPO approval.



- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concurrence with the finding that the proposed Chapel Island project satisfied the requirements of a non-reporting Nationwide 36 Permit was received November 11, 2012
- The City of Richmond issued a Land Disturbing Permit on November 15, 2012, and preconstruction site visit was held on December 18, 2012.
- Construction began on the Chapel Island project in early January 2013 with very cold temperatures and the benefit of a large group of volunteers from the James River Hikers. A total of 1,022 volunteer hours (Friends of the James River Parks, Hands On Greater Richmond, Altria, Department of Environmental Quality, boy scouts, etc.) and 1,089 City crew hours were committed to the Chapel Island project through June 2013. (See photos of work in progress below)



N, O, P, Q – City of Richmond Parks Department staff and volunteers construct the Chapel Island trails.





R, S, T, U – Volunteers assist City of Richmond staff constructing the trails on Chapel Island.

The City of Richmond Department of Parks and Recreation/James River Park System (DPR) exceeded their commitment of 200 staff hours by at least five-times (980 hours as of June 2013) to design, provide construction oversight of volunteers, and install park improvements. Available equipment, supplemental equipment rental and material procurement was also be handled by DPR staff. The Chapel Island/James River Public Access Enhancement Project is similar in scope to other projects DPR has accomplished.



A Walk on Chapel Island



V – New steps and ramp improving access over the lock and Chapel Island, removable to allow future lock operation.

W – Informational kiosk installed on Chapel Island. Stairs down to the boat put-in, ramp down slope to the right.



FLORA and FAUNA of CHAPEL ISLAND

BIRDS OF PREY

Specialize in flight along the James River or Backcountry and fly to take to eat one or more of these important birds of prey. They are not going to be above the water looking for falling prey and wing gradually with a lift in the air.

Great blue herons, egrets and cormorants along the river banks on the backcountry nearby, especially in their long legs, looking better. In the spring the large numbers of the great blue herons, egrets and cormorants offer a great view to see the early arrivals of these magnificent birds.

If you are lucky you may also see a bald eagle with its distinctive white top, perched on a tree or looking over the water.

TREES

A. Live Oak
This tree has a long life span and can live for several hundred years. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

B. American Sycamore
This tree is a very important tree in the James River Park System. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

C. Live Oak
This tree is a very important tree in the James River Park System. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

D. Live Oak
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E. Live Oak
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J. Live Oak
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K. Live Oak
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L. Live Oak
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M. Live Oak
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Q. Live Oak
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R. Live Oak
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S. Live Oak
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T. Live Oak
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U. Live Oak
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V. Live Oak
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W. Live Oak
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X. Live Oak
This tree is a very important tree in the James River Park System. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

Y. Live Oak
This tree is a very important tree in the James River Park System. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

Z. Live Oak
This tree is a very important tree in the James River Park System. It is a very hardy tree and can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions. It is a very important tree in the James River Park System.

AQUATIC LIFE

This area is home to a wide variety of aquatic life, including fish, crabs, and turtles. The water is clear and the fish are healthy. The crabs are also very active and the turtles are seen swimming in the water.

MIGRATORY ANIMALS

The area is home to a wide variety of migratory animals, including birds, fish, and crabs. The water is clear and the animals are healthy. The birds are also very active and the fish and crabs are seen swimming in the water.

VINES

The area is home to a wide variety of vines, including live oak, American sycamore, and live oak. The vines are healthy and the trees are seen growing in the water.

MAP of the JAMES RIVER PARK SYSTEM

Informational Signage posted on the opposite side of the kiosk pictured above in image W.



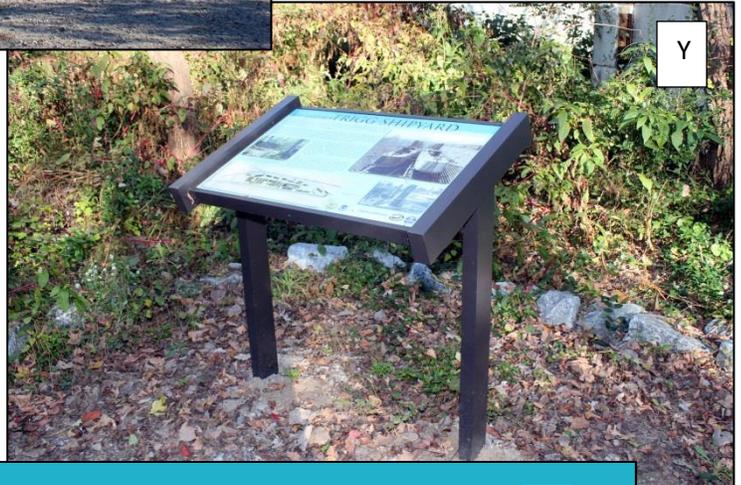


X

X – Canal overflow creates Trigg Cove inlet for boat put-in to the south.

Y - Interpretive signage is located strategically along the Chapel Island trail.

Z - The welcome interpretive sign greets visitors to Chapel Island. It is located just out of view of image X above.



Y

Z

welcome to CHAPEL ISLAND

THE ISLAND ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING HAS A RICH AND VARIED HISTORY. The first record of what is now Chapel Island - a peninsula of land running from 14th Street to Pear Street - may well have been the first record of Richmond. When Captains John Smith and Christopher Newport sailed up the James River, Smith's diary described "mountains" to the right (Church Hill), "plains" on the left (Manchester) and the "ocean" (the Fall Line rapids) before them. It is possible the name "Chapel" could have originated at this time for on May 24, 1607, Newport erected a cross around the present day location of 14th and Cary Streets.

In 1816, the Richmond Dock Company built three basins forming a ship harbor and a series of wooden locks to serve as the City's primary shipping terminal. The James River Company purchased and improved the lock system to complete the "tidewater connection" in 1854. It consisted of five stone locks, the improved Richmond dock, and the Great Ship Lock, over which you walked to get here.

Shows the USS Monitor being towed at the Trigg Shipyards, 1866.
Courtesy of the Naval Historical Center.

Boat on Trigg covering the western tip of the island. Courtesy of NPS/DC.

THE CANAL ERA ENDED IN 1880 DUE TO COMPETITION FROM RAIL TRANSPORT, but the area around you continued to serve as an industrial site. From 1898 to 1903, great ships were built here at the Trigg Shipyards, which produced vessels of war such as steam torpedo boats and destroyers. As you walk around the island's trails, you will come across the only remnants of the Trigg Shipyards - the large concrete walls just southwest of the canal bridge.

TODAY, FIVE ACRES OF THE ISLAND'S 25 ACRES ARE NATURAL AND ACCESSIBLE FOR RECREATION. A major portion of the island is covered by the retention basin for the City's Combined Sewer System (CSS) as shown in the aerial image above.

Thanks to a grant from the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program and the help of many volunteers, the City of Richmond, and the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC), there is a half-mile gravel trail winding around the island with interpretive signs like this one. The grant also funded a kayak/canoe launch just down the path to the left, which gives access to the tidal section of the James River. The island is accessed by a now immovable 1929 bascule bridge leading to a Norfolk Southern railway siding.

Keep an eye out for poison ivy, a climbing vine with clusters of three leaves. The sap of this plant can cause a rash on your skin, even from a light brush from the leaves. If you come in contact with the leaves or sap, you have about half an hour to wash with cool soapy water.



AA



AA –Northern, canal-side loop trail allows visitors to forget that downtown Richmond is just blocks away. Wildflowers were planted along edges.

AB – Interpretive signage about water quality is located at intersection of the main Chapel Island Trail and River loop.

AC - Water Quality signage as pictured in Image AB.



AB

AC

WATER QUALITY *in the* JAMES

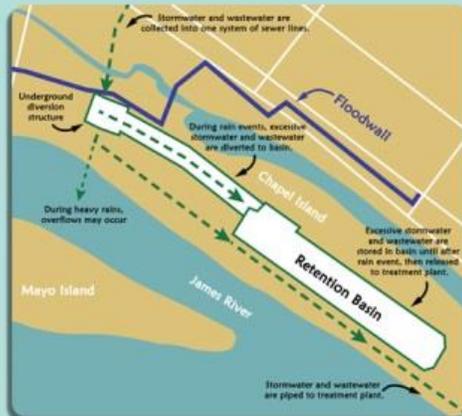
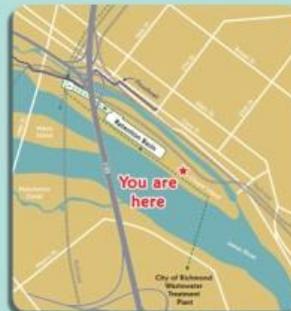
FOR MUCH OF THE 20TH CENTURY, the James River became extremely contaminated with acids used in metal production, bases and dyes used in paper manufacturing, and untreated sanitary wastewater. As was common practice in most cities, the James River was used to dilute wastewater and carry it away from populated areas. Sewers constructed before 1950 delivered wastewater directly to the river without treatment. Illness and disease were common occurrences for people who came in contact with the river. In 1954, the City began construction of its wastewater treatment plant, which provided solids removal, also known as primary treatment of wastewater.

THE 1972 CLEAN WATER ACT, one of the most important and successful Federal laws impacting public health, restricted the release of industrial wastes into water bodies and required the construction of wastewater treatment plants meeting secondary treatment requirements. Richmond's existing wastewater treatment plant, located on the other side of the river just downstream from here, was upgraded to meet the requirements for removing solids and organic material prior to discharge in the James River. Additional regulations such as the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act continue to require water quality protection measures that result in the removal of nitrogen and phosphorus to protect the James River and Chesapeake Bay ecosystems.

YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT MAKES ALL THIS POSSIBLE. Miles of sewers are necessary to collect wastewater and convey it to the treatment plant. Richmond's original sewer system, some of it dating back to the late 1800s, was comprised of pipes that carried a combination of sanitary wastewater and stormwater runoff. No longer constructed, this type of Combined Sewer System (CSS) may be overwhelmed by large rain fall events. In these events, the CSS is designed to overflow at designated locations called combined sewer outfalls (CSO). The original CSS still serves over one-third of the area within the City of Richmond, although only separate sanitary wastewater and stormwater sewer systems have been constructed since the 1950s. The City has invested a large amount of resources to reduce overflows and close outfalls where possible.

THE DIAGRAM AT THE RIGHT shows how the Shockoe Retention Basin works. During dry weather, wastewater flows from the Shockoe Creek CSS area through the large Shockoe Arch Sewer and the Shockoe Diversion Structures to the 96-inch Shockoe Creek Interceptor and ultimately to the wastewater treatment plant across the river for full treatment. During rain fall events, combined wastewater and stormwater flows through the Shockoe Arch Sewer and is diverted into the Shockoe Retention Basin. At the same time, the wastewater treatment plant increases its pumping and treatment capacity to maximize the treatment of combined wastewater and stormwater, up to its wet-weather capacity of 75 million gallons per day. The contents of the Shockoe Retention Basin are held here until it can be pumped through large pipes to Richmond's wastewater treatment plant for full treatment.

DESPITE THESE MAJOR ADVANCES, water quality in the James River is far from perfect. The brown color of the water indicates that silt and sediment are flowing off of farm fields, construction sites, and other disturbed lands upstream. Occasionally, due to extremely heavy rain fall events, combined sewer overflows containing untreated stormwater may discharge into the river, though these events have been greatly reduced due to the construction of the Shockoe Retention Basin and other structures. It is advised that you do not swim in the river after heavy rain fall events due to increased exposure to bacteria from untreated runoff.





AD – Newly installed stair lead from the Informational Kiosk to the boat put-in at the inlet.

AE – A view of the boat put-in ramp from across the inlet.

AF – In summer months the inlet Trigg cove is refreshing swimming spot.





AG

AG – Look-out point at the end of Chapel Island River loop with views to Rocketts Landing. In the foreground is seen interpretive signage on the tidal James River.

AH – The interpretive sign, trash and recycling facilities, and a bench are seen as improvements to the look-out.

AI – The interpretive sign on the tidal James River.



AH

AI

the TIDAL JAMES

THE VIEW BEFORE YOU is the westernmost section of the tidal James River. The James stretches from headwaters in the Appalachian Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay, and is one of the United States' six longest rivers whose watershed lies entirely in one state.

In the middle of the city, the James reaches the Fall Line, where the state's geography transitions from the Piedmont to the Coastal Plain. Below this point, the river widens and begins to flow more slowly and deeply, and is affected by the tides. The water level fluctuates a few feet every six hours, rising about 0.5 feet at low tide to 2.5 feet at high tide. Although tides do affect the river here, it is not saline (salty).

The map at the right shows the James River as it flows through Virginia from the mountains in the west to the Chesapeake Bay in the east. The areas highlighted in light blue are the main James River watershed. Every rain drop that falls within the approximately 10,000 square miles of the watershed eventually flows into the James, and now passes Chapel Island. East of Richmond, the James is joined by the Appomattox and then the Chickahominy rivers (whose watersheds are shown in light and dark green), bringing all the rain and runoff from their watersheds.

HUMAN ACTIVITIES IN THESE WATERSHEDS AFFECT THE RIVER AND THE CHESAPEAKE BAY. Rain washes chemicals and debris into the rivers, which eventually find their way to the Bay. Litter on the ground, chemicals on roadways, parking lots, and lawns, and nutrients and bacteria from agricultural facilities all have negative effects on water quality.

THE CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN AND THE BAY, as well as deep waters with few obstructions, allow several species to migrate up to the Fall Line, including Atlantic Sturgeon, Shad and Blue Crab, American and Hickory Shad come up the river to spawn in the spring. For a couple of months each spring, large concentrations of shad are present in the tidal James, bringing many sport fishermen to the river.

The **Striped Bass**, or **Rockfish**, is another fish which migrates up the James, from the Bay to Richmond. Though present in small numbers all year, they are most plentiful in the spring.

Atlantic Sturgeon

The tidal reaches of the James River support the last viable population of the iconic Atlantic Sturgeon in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Listed recently as a federally endangered species, the Atlantic Sturgeon is the largest, oldest, and arguably the most interesting inhabitant of Virginia's coastal rivers, which historically supported a major fishery for meat and caviar. Construction of dams, sediment pollution, and overfishing almost eradicated this migratory species from Virginia waters, but ambitious efforts are underway to restore critical habitat and support the species' recovery.

Many common James River fishes, including Largemouth Bass and Channel Catfish, are not native to coastal Virginia, but were introduced here to provide enhanced fishing for recreational anglers. Two of these species, the Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish, were stocked in the James River several decades ago and have since expanded into many coastal and estuarine habitats. As adults, both species are top predators and may be responsible for unintended impacts on native fish and fisheries throughout much of Chesapeake Bay.

Other fish found in this section of the river are the Common Carp and the Bluegill Sunfish, both non-native, invasive species.

It may still surprise some people to know that Blue Crabs are caught on Chapel Island. The crabs don't travel to spawn, but rather travel up river in the summer when water levels are low in search of food or higher oxygen levels. In the right conditions, crabs can be found in the James up to the Mayo Bridge.

Common Carp

Flathead Catfish

Bluegill Sunfish

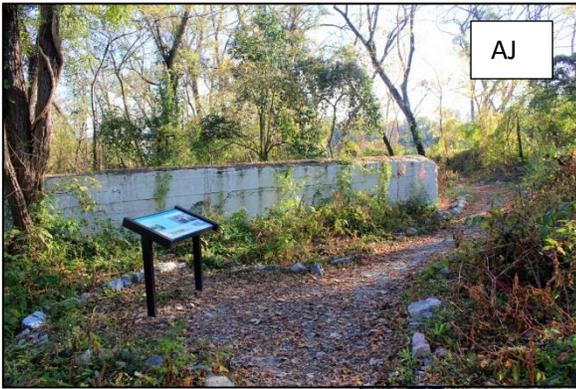
American Shad

Striped Bass (Rockfish)

Blue Crab

KEEP IT CLEAN!

Help protect our river by picking up after yourself and your pets during your visit to Chapel Island. Even a small amount of litter, fishing line, or pet waste can be devastating to wildlife living on the island and in the river.

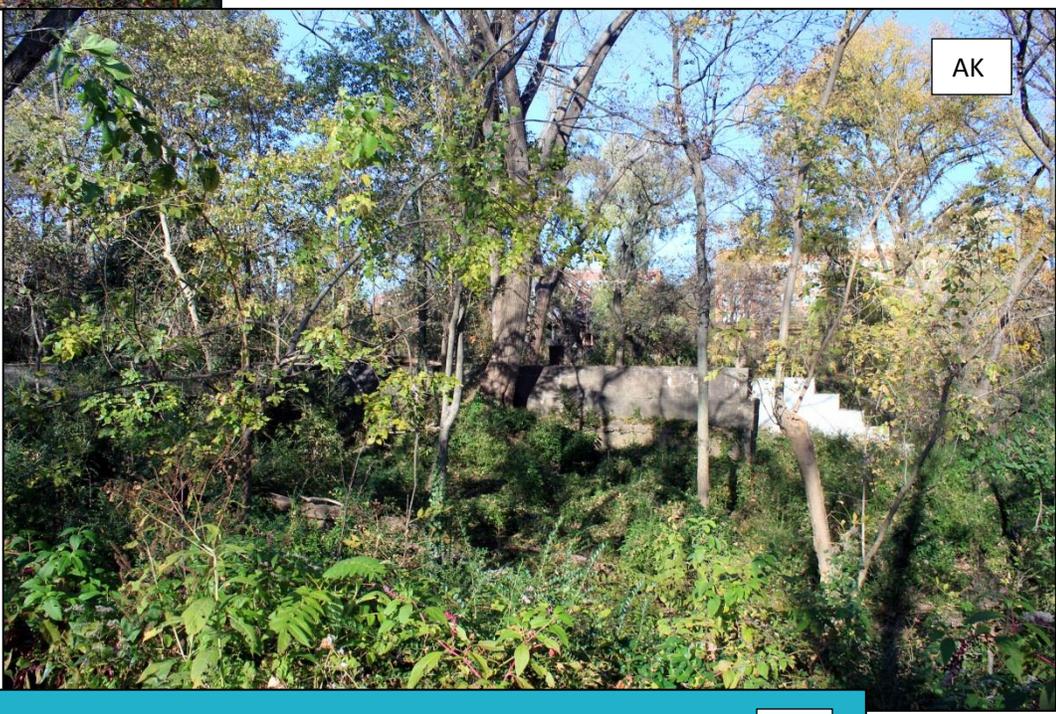


AJ

AJ – Interpretive signage located near former ship lock wall remnants of the Trigg Ship Yard originally located south below the Great Ship Lock.

AK – A view of the Trigg Ship Yard wall remnants.

AL – Interpretive signage details the history of the Trigg Ship Yard.



AK

AL

here stood the TRIGG SHIPYARD

THE CONCRETE WALLS IN FRONT OF YOU are all that is left of the once-bustling Trigg Shipyard. The yard employed 2,000 men and was comprised of 16 large industrial buildings on a 25-acre site with 20 acres in water, dock, and boat basin. In 1898, Richmond business man William R. Trigg, already a successful and well-known fabricator of locomotives, announced several contracts for steam torpedo boats and destroyers for the U.S. Navy.

Torpedo boats were those used to attack larger ships, first introduced in the Civil War. Destroyers, short for "Torpedo Boat Destroyers", were introduced shortly thereafter to attack the torpedo boats. On October 31, 1899, President William McKinley, his cabinet, and 30,000 observers attended the launch of the first boat, the USS Shubrick. The yard built torpedo boats, destroyers, steamers, cruisers, tugboats, dredges, and cutters until 1903 when William Trigg declared bankruptcy. The last ship to be built, the USS Galveston, was unfinished and eventually transported to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for completion.

Above: The remaining walls at ship yard today, from east side firing position. (Courtesy of BHP&C)
Below: Trigg Shipyard, circa 1900. (Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)

SHIPS WERE LAID DOWN IN A DRY DOCK OR "CAISSON". The photo on the right (looking west) shows two of the largest and well-known ships, the USS Decatur and the USS Dale, being fitted out in 1900. The stadium-like structure could be emptied of water to create a protected area for construction. Opening the gate filled the caisson with water to allow ship launching into the canal. The buildings in the background supported the ship-building operations.

THE PLACE IN WHICH YOU ARE NOW STANDING was once under water in a "laying up basin," an area for ships to move in and out of the caisson. The wall remnants before you (photo left) formed the ship lock shown on the map below. In the woods west of where you are standing is a long, vertical depression which may be the only remaining evidence of the huge caisson.

Map of the caisson area with 'You are here' marker.

Above: USS Decatur and USS Dale being fitted out circa 1900. (Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)

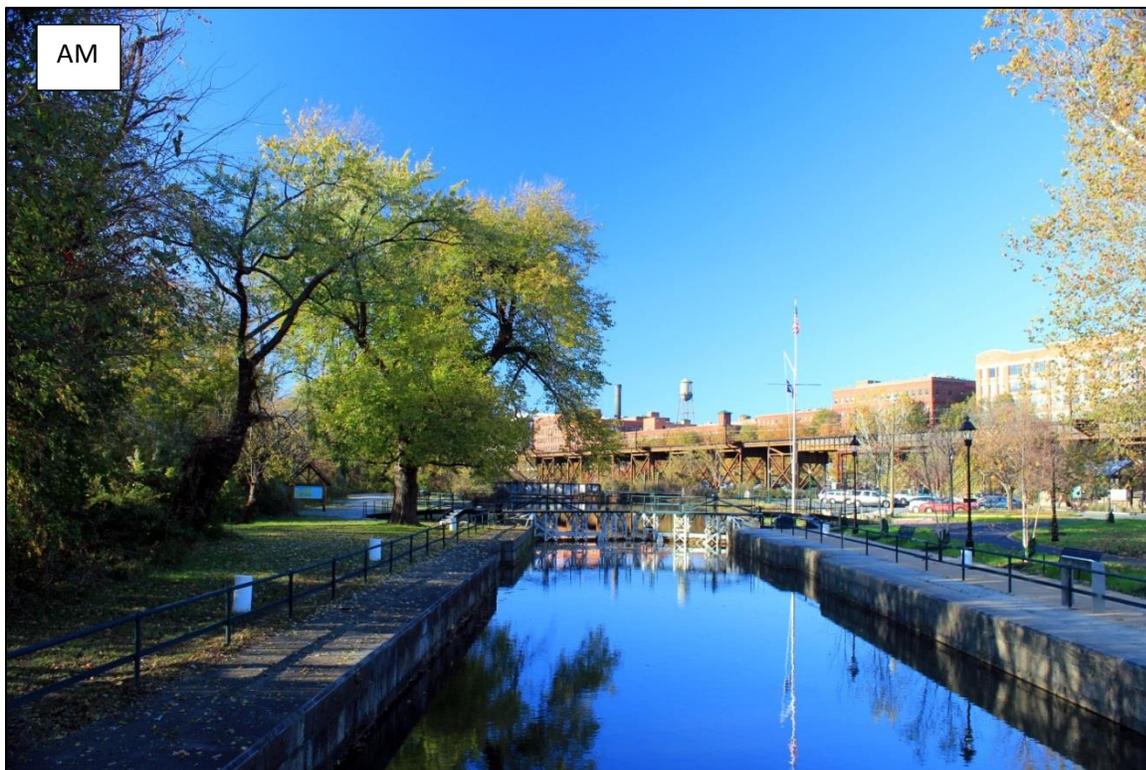
Above: USS Dale in 1900. (Courtesy of Steamship.org)

Closure

The Chapel Island enhancement project addresses one central objective of the Virginia CZM Program in undertaking a “small construction enhancement project on public lands” and at the same time makes a vital contribution to the quality of life by serving as a catalyst for an ecologically vital link to the City’s history. The project makes the remaining wild portion of Chapel Island available for recreational access to the James River. Expanded use of Chapel Island not only benefits the population in the East End of Richmond, but serves as a resource for the entire region.

The project has been a truly collaborative effort of the RRPDC, the Commonwealth of Virginia through the VCZM program, the City of Richmond, non-profit partners, and local volunteers. The value of increase exposure and visibility of the area through the work effort cannot be underestimated. Connection of Chapel Island to the Virginia Capital Trail at Great Shiplock Park along with future plans to incorporate these improvements to the west along the southern edge of Chapel Island to the James River Park System is exciting!

In summary, this project is vital to the preservation and full appreciation of Chapel Island as an evolving historic site and public recreational access to the James River. It can serve as a unique educational opportunity through interpretive signage that describes the site’s historic use, the tidal James, flora and fauna of the site, and the water quality function of the Combined Sewer Overflow system of the City of Richmond. Chapel Island can readily serve as an outdoor laboratory to foster a greater appreciation for the precious coastal habitats along Virginia’s waterways and act as an invaluable tool in the effort to protect coastal resources.



[previous page] AM – A view looking west up the canal from the eastern most lock, including Chapel Island to the left and Great Ship Lock Park on the right of the photograph.

AN – A view across the inlet to the canoe/kayak put-in ramp at low tide.

AO – View from the *Welcome to Chapel Island* sign looking north to historic Tobacco Row

