

# A Guide to the Alexandria Canal Company Survey Book and Account of Tolls Collected, 1831-1853

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1112985 and 1112996

Library of Virginia

2008

**Author:** Bari Helms

## History

**Processed by:** Bari Helms

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Alexandria Canal Company Survey Book and Account of Tolls Collected, 1831-1853

**Subtitle:** Alexandria Canal Company Survey Book and Account of Tolls Collected, 1831-1853

**Collection:** 1112985 and 1112996

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## Publication Statement

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from being created directly into EAD, created by Bari Helms, 2 October 2009

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

### Barcode numbers

1112985 and 1112996

### Language

English

### Collector

Alexandria (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

2 v.

**Location**

State Records Center - Archives Annex, Library of Virginia

**Repository**

The Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions**

There are no restrictions.

**Use Restrictions**

There are no restrictions.

**Acquisition Information**

These items came to the Library of Virginia in shipments of court papers from Alexandria under the accession number 24665d.

**Preferred Citation**

Alexandria Canal Company Survey Book and Account of Tolls Collected, 1831-1853. Local government records collection, Alexandria (Va.) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

## Historical Information

The Alexandria Canal played a brief, but significant, part in the history of commercial navigation on the Potomac River. After the charter of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, which ran from Cumberland, Maryland, to Washington, D.C., Alexandria merchants proposed in 1830 that a canal be constructed linking their city to Georgetown. Congress granted a charter to the Alexandria Canal Company on 26 May 1830. Construction on the aqueduct bridge and canal began in 1833 and was completed a decade later. The Potomac Aqueduct Bridge, which spanned a 1000 feet between Georgetown and Rosslyn, allowed boats to cross the Potomac without first unloading in Georgetown. Boats would then continue their trips downstream on the seven mile canal leading to Alexandria's seaport. The canal officially opened on 2 December 1843 with the arrival of the first canal boat in Alexandria. In 1850, when the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was completed to Cumberland, Maryland, coal from Maryland's mines became the most important commodity shipped to Alexandria along with wheat, corn, whiskey, corn meal, and flour. Important exports from Alexandria included fish, salt, plaster, and lumber.

The only interruption in service on the Alexandria Canal came during the Civil War when the canal was used to transfer Federal troops and supplies. But in 1886, a break in the aqueduct coincided with the demand for a toll-free bridge across the Potomac River and service on the canal came to an end. The canal structure was abandoned, and, finally, in 1923, the aqueduct bridge was removed. During the 1980s, Alexandria archaeologists discovered and restored the tidal basin and lift lock in Alexandria.

## Scope and Content

Alexandria Canal Company Survey Book, 1831-1834, contains surveys of lands taken along the Potomac for the Alexandria Canal Company as it began its plans for canal construction. Included in the volume are surveys for land acquisitions for temporary and permanent use and levels taken of the Alexandria and Washington Turnpike Road. The surveys were conducted by Wilson M. C. Fairfax, an assistant engineer with the Alexandria Canal Company. Also included in the volume are land maps and drawings of canal structures.

Account of Tolls Collected, 1845-1853, records the tolls received at Alexandria and Washington, D.C. for both ascending and descending trade. Information found in each entry includes the number and date of the way bill, name of the boat master, boat name, name and quantity of items on board, total amount of freight, amount of weekly receipts, and the total toll received. Items shipped on the descending trade included wood, wheat, flour, corn, seed, apples, whiskey, lime, pork, coal, and iron. Fish, salt, plaster, and lumber were among the exports shipped out of Alexandria on the ascending trade.

## Index Terms

**Corporate Names:**

Alexandria Canal Company (Alexandria, Va.).

**Subjects:**

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Alexandria Canal (Va.).  
Canals--Design and construction.  
Canals--Rates and tolls.  
Canals--Virginia.  
Leveling--Virginia.  
Surveying--Virginia.

**Geographical Names:**

Alexandria (Va.)--History--19th century.

**Genre and Form Terms:**

Business records--Virginia--Alexandria.  
Land surveys--Virginia.  
Ledgers (account books)--Virginia--Alexandria.  
Local government records--Virginia--Alexandria.

**Added Entry - Personal Name:**

Fairfax, Wilson M. C.