

# A Guide to the Minutes (Journals) of the Virginia Board of Public Works, 1816-1905

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## Title Statement

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Virginia Board of Public Works

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## Administrative Information

### Access Restrictions

There are no access restrictions.

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There are no use restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

Accession 27583, Transferred July 7, 1971 from the Virginia State Corporation Commission (These volumes had been retained by the SCC and were transferred together on this date).

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## Biographical Information

In Virginia the government program for public works began on February 5, 1816, when the General Assembly passed an act to establish a "Fund for Internal Improvement." In the words of the preamble of the act, the fund was created for "the purpose of rendering navigable, and uniting by canals, the principal rivers, and of more intimately connecting, by public highways, the different parts of this Commonwealth." (35 Va. Acts 1815-1816) The act further provided that, "for the purpose of preserving and improving this fund, and of disbursing such portions of it ... to be applied to any object of internal improvement," the Board of Public Works was to be established. (35 Va. Acts 1815-1816)

The board was authorized to invest money from the fund in internal improvement companies, provided certain conditions were met: none of the state's money could be invested until three-fifths of the company's stock had been privately subscribed, one-fifth of which actually had to be paid for, or secured by bonds payable to the board. The remaining two-fifths of the stock could then be purchased by the board. From 1816 until 1831 the Board of Public Works consisted of the governor as president and twelve directors: the treasurer and attorney general of Virginia, and ten private citizens chosen annually by the General Assembly. On April 2, 1831, the General Assembly passed an act to reorganize the board. The governor continued to act as president, but the number of directors was reduced to three: the lieutenant governor, the treasurer, and the second auditor. The board was reorganized twice more before mid-century. An act of March 5, 1833, removed the lieutenant governor from the board and added the auditor, and an act of February 28, 1846, added the register of the Land Office.

The composition of the board was changed by the Constitution of 1851. Instead of state governmental officials, private citizens made up the board. The state was divided into three districts, each of which elected one commissioner to serve six years. The first board elected under this system met on July 4, 1853, and was composed of Archibald Graham, president; Thomas J. Boyd; and Edward J. Armstrong. Between 1853 and 1865 Alexander B. Holladay, Zedekiah Kidwell, Odin G. Clay, G. W. Murphy, and J. F. McIlhenny were also members of the board.

The end of the Civil War, when Governor Francis H. Pierpont and the "restored" government of Virginia assumed control, brought another change in the character of the board. On June 3, 1865, the new board met with the governor as president and the auditor and treasurer as directors. The board retained this organization until February 28, 1903, when it met for the last time. In accordance with the Constitution of 1902 the board was dissolved and replaced by the State Corporation Commission, which first convened on March 2, 1903.

Like many organizations the Board of Public Works was most powerful and effective during the early years of its existence and became less so with age. The antebellum period was one of great interest in canals and turnpikes, while railroads were gradually gaining acceptance. Maps were required for these projects and county maps constructed by John Wood and Herman Böye between 1817 and 1825 were used in preparation of the state map published in 1827. After the Civil War the board primarily was concerned with making tax assessments and regulating railroads; before that the board had been deeply involved in the financing and construction of a wide variety of internal improvements.

During the early years the principal engineer was the board's official agent in the field. The principal engineer was responsible for surveys and maps of the routes of improvements, as well as managing his teams of assistant engineers and accounting for surveying expenses. He also bore the brunt of the criticism over his selection of routes. The board was most fortunate that this position was filled by a series of talented men, the most illustrious of whom was Claudius Crozet.

The board's investments of money and talent had to be repaid by the companies by way of reports and accounts. Annual reports were required of each company in which the state had purchased stock, and company expenses chargeable to the board had to be accounted for strictly. The annual reports included a description of the progress of the work, as well as a statement of the company's financial condition. Lists of stockholders, certificates of the amount of money actually paid on private subscriptions, and accounts of

expenditures were sent to the board regularly.

Besides its involvement with internal improvements, the board was responsible for several short-term projects of importance to the state. For example, by an act of the General Assembly passed on March 6, 1835, the board was authorized to appoint a person to make a geological survey of the state, and Professor William Barton Rogers of the University of Virginia faculty was chosen. During the Civil War the board was given the task of ensuring the production and distribution of salt. A state superintendent of the salt works was appointed by an act of March 30, 1863, and the Board of Public Works acted as a board of directors of the salt works for the remainder of the war.

Shortly before the Civil War the state began to divest itself of its stock in internal improvement companies. This process accelerated after the war. Turnpikes were abandoned or taken over by the counties through which they passed. Canals yielded to the railroads, which now ran from state to state, and were now controlled by ever more powerful and complex corporations. After the war the board took a passive rather than active role, concerning itself primarily with tax assessments.

As evidence of the board's new role, the office of railroad commissioner was created on March 31, 1877, by an act of the General Assembly. The commissioner saw to it that the railroad companies did not violate their charters--a responsibility that the board had assumed in earlier years. He also recommended changes in procedure to the companies and reported violations to the Board of Public Works for possible legal actions. Railroad and internal improvement companies made annual reports of their real and personal property in Virginia to the auditor, who sent the reports to the board for assessment of taxes.

Because of the increasing complexity of public and private business in the late nineteenth century and the press of other duties upon the officers of the board, its membership was changed once again. The state Constitution of 1902 created the State Corporation Commission, whose duty it was to regulate all corporations (including those concerned with transportation) that did business in Virginia. The constitution also provided that "... upon the organization of the State Corporation Commission, the Board of Public Works and the Office of Railroad Commissioner, shall cease to exist; and all books, papers and documents pertaining thereto, shall be transferred to, and become part of the records of, the office of the State Corporation Commission." (37 Va. Acts 1902-1904).

## Scope and Content

Minutes of the Virginia Board of Public Works, 1816-1905 (16 v.), documenting the meetings, activities, discussions, policy decisions, and recommendations of the Board. Consists of minutes, as well as supporting documentation including correspondence, agreements, contracts, exhibits, orders, regulations, resolutions, speeches, annual reports and other reports (committee, financial, project, etc.).

Dates are consecutive with no breaks. Please note that there is no Journal J.

Minutes, 1903-1905 (Journal Q), are part of the Record Group 112, State Corporation Commission, but are part of this sequence, so are included in this finding aid.

Includes the following volumes:

Journal A, June 10, 1816-Sept 26, 1818. Indexed, 260 p. Includes president's addresses, annual reports to the legislature, correspondence and survey reports.

Journal B, Nov 2, 1818-Apr 14, 1820. Indexed, 355 p. Includes annual reports, correspondence and survey reports.

Journal C, Dec 11, 1820-July 1, 1822. Indexed, 355 p. Includes 4th Annual Report (continued from Journal B, signed Jan 15, 1820), and the beginning of the 6th Annual Report.

Journal D, July 9, 1822-Dec 3, 1825. Indexed, 349 p. Includes continuation of the 6th Annual Report, correspondence and as well as other reports.

Journal E, Jan 9, 1826-Sept 25, 1834. Indexed, 435 p. Does not include annual reports for 1826-1831. Includes 16th Annual Report(1832) and 17th Annual Report (1833), but these do not contain any accompanying documents.

Journal F, Oct 2, 1843-July 17, 1839. Indexed, 435 p. Includes 19th-23rd Annual Reports, but no accompanying documents.

Journal G, July 24, 1839-Apr 12, 1843. Indexed, 402 p. Includes 24th-27th Annual Reports.

Journal H, Apr 22, 1843-June 12, 1848. Indexed, 562 p. Includes 28th-32nd Annual Reports.

Journal I, June 15, 1848-Oct 2, 1851. Indexed, 561 p. Includes 33rd-35th Annual Reports.

Journal K, Oct 3, 1851-July 6, 1853. Indexed, 289 p. No annual reports included.

Journal L, July 4, 1853-June 7, 1855. Indexed, 510 p. No annual reports included.

Journal M, July 2, 1855-Jan 26, 1861. Indexed, 633 p. No annual reports included.

Journal N, Feb 18, 1861-Dec 1, 1883. Indexed, 645 p. No annual reports included.

Journal O, Feb 2, 1884-Oct 11, 1892. Indexed, 400 p. No annual reports included. Includes agreements, contracts and inserted copies of printed tax statements.

Journal P, Oct 19, 1892-Feb 28, 1903. Indexed, 499 p. Includes agreements, contracts, inserted copies of printed statements of assessments, and an Annual Report, 1893.

Journal Q, Mar 2, 1903-Mar 14, 1905. Indexed, 496 p. Minutes begin with the organization meeting of the State Corporation Commission. Includes records of judicial sessions of the State Corporation Commission.

## **Arrangement**

Arranged in chronological order.

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#### **Journal E, 1826-1834.**

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