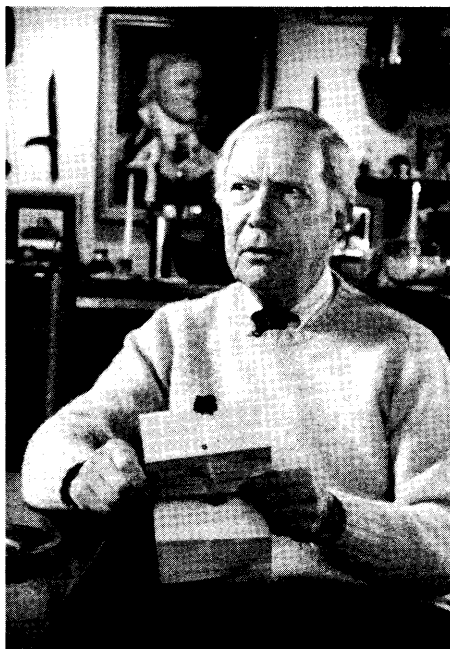


Santee Canal: America's First Superhighway

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Mason Adams, host of Santee Canal: America's First Superhighway

Before superhighways, or even dirt roads, this planet's waterways were the only rapid means of transporting both people and goods from one place to another. Eventually, necessity dictated improvement in Mother Nature and manmade canals were constructed between two existing waterways, thus expanding both the creator's range and influence.

Santee Canal: America's First Superhighway traces the history of canal use, both foreign and domestic, and follows its progress to the waterways of South Carolina, home of America's first true canal system—the Santee Canal.

Beginning with canals in the Mideast and Asia, host Mason Adams takes the viewer through various methods of early canal construction, including drawings of European techniques by Leonardo DeVinci.

As more and more Europeans immigrated to the New World, so did the desire to improve this country's existing water systems. America was growing economically and so was her need for efficient and safe transportation of goods. The settlement of land to the west would surely be stifled if means could not be found to transport the settler's products to the eastern port cities. Within a few years of American independence, at the urging of George Washington, the young United States began to look into building her own canals.

The first of these was designed to by-pass the dangerous stretches of the Potomac River with canals and thus open up a new water route to the Ohio River. Standing in the bed of what is left of the Old Patowmack Canal, Mason Adams shows the viewer the need for this early by-pass canal, explains its demise, and reveals its rebirth in the form of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, still in use as a national park in Maryland.

But as brave an endeavor as the Patowmack Canal was, purists contend it was not a "true canal." A true canal connects two bodies of water. The Patowmack, like many of the waterways built in 18th-century America, consisted of short by-pass channels around river falls and rapids. The first true, full-fledged canal in this country was the Santee Canal in South Carolina.

Through dramatic re-enactment, the viewer is taken on an informative tour of the events that led to the building of the Santee Canal—how a group of bold investors



chartered the project despite the ongoing increased expenses and delays, and how 1,000 men toiled seven years to complete this incredible task.

Particular emphasis is placed on exploring the trials and tribulations of the Santee Canal's chief engineer and architect, Johann Christian Senf. Senf was South Carolina's chief engineer, who designed and oversaw the construction of the canal. Though faced with tremendous obstacles like malaria, uncooperative landowners, and tremendous budget overruns, Senf saw the project to its completion in 1800. For the next 50 years, the Santee Canal served as an economic superhighway for the settlers of upstate South Carolina as well as the Southeast.

People

William Buford: Buford was a planter in the upcountry of South Carolina. He arrived via the Santee Canal in Charleston with his own boat, built on his own land, loaded with his own crops. His arrival on the coast was the first reported commercial use of the canal.

General William Moultrie: Revolutionary war veteran, William Moultrie was the governor of South Carolina from 1785 to 1792 and then again from 1792 to 1794. In his dual role of governor and president

of the Santee Canal Company, Moultrie wrote his friend and comrade-in-arms George Washington for advice and suggestions for engineers to oversee the project. Moultrie's Northhampton plantation near Black Oak, South Carolina, was one of the first to plant cotton in the state.

Henry Mouzon, Jr.: Mouzon was a French-educated engineer who was commissioned in 1773 to survey possible routes for the Santee Canal. His five suggested routes were later abandoned by Colonel Johann Christian Senf, in favor of his own.

Governor John Rutledge: Rutledge was the governor of South Carolina from 1776 to 1782. In 1782 with Charles Towne, then the capital of South Carolina, still in the hands of the British, exiled Governor Rutledge recommended a charter be enacted for the construction of a towpath canal to connect the Santee and the Cooper rivers at the closest point above Charleston. He later became a representative from South Carolina to the United States Congressional Convention.

Colonel Johann Christian Senf: Originally born in Sweden, Colonel Senf came to America with British General John Burgoyne's troops and spent the first part of the American Revolution fighting for the British. He was captured at Saratoga and converted to the American cause. During the last years of the war, Senf served as an engineer for the state of South Carolina.

George Washington: First President of the United States, surveyor, and canal enthusiast, Washington sent his endorsement of the building of the Santee Canal, as well as suggestions for suitable engineers for the project. From his Mount Vernon home, Washington referred to the canal project as "a laudable and important design. . . . It gives me pleasure to find a spirit of inland navigation prevailing so generally. No country is more capable of improvements in this way than our own."



Questions for Comprehension

- ❖ Why were canals important in world history?
- ❖ What geographic elements made the Santee Canal a viable solution to interstate transportation?
- ❖ Why was the Santee Canal important to Upstate South Carolina and the region's planters?
- ❖ What were some of the problems Colonel Senf encountered while building the canal?

Questions for Discussion

- ❖ What modern advances in technology and science could have aided the construction of the Santee Canal?
- ❖ What happened to the canal systems in this country? Why are they not used today? (Discuss advances in modern technology.)
- ❖ What environmental factors do modern builders have to consider today that did not apply to Colonel Senf?
- ❖ What would it take to make a canal system viable economically today?

Activities

- ❖ Build a model of a pound lock with miter gates.
- ❖ Make a map of American canals.
- ❖ Visit state and national canal parks, including Old Santee Canal State Park in South Carolina, the Patowmack Canal National Park in Great Falls, Virginia, and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Park in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

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Glossary

By-pass canal: A by-pass canal is a canal or series of canals which serves as a detour around rapids or other dangerous portions of a river.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company: Formed in 1828, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company took over the Patowmack Company's purpose of making the Potomac River navigable to the Ohio River and points west. Instead of constructing by-pass canals, the C & O canal paralleled the Maryland border of the river, starting in Washington, D.C. By 1850, the project had reached Cumberland, Maryland, and was formally opened to trade. Railroad transportation eventually replaced canal traffic, causing the C & O's demise. Today, the 185-mile waterway is owned by the National Park Service. The Park Service has restored 23 miles of the once-bustling canal, portions of which are open to the public.

Flat boat: Flat boats or barges, common on the canal, were usually 54 feet long and nine feet wide. They were constructed of cypress logs split down the middle, hollowed, and shaped with pine planks set in the bottom. A single piece of shaped lumber 40 to 50 feet long, two feet deep and eight inches thick often made up the sides of these canal vessels. Construction design is thought to be representative of a mixture of native American, European, and West African cultures.

Miter gate: Miter gates are constructed to fit together at a 90-degree angle—the joint forming a corner. When placed at either end of a lock, the water pressure on this joint keeps the gate closed until the pressure is released.

Patowmack Company: The Patowmack Company was founded in 1785, with George Washington as its president, to oversee the construction of a series of canals by-passing the dangerous stretches of the Potomac River. The ability to navigate the Potomac opened up the western territories for exploration and settlement. Remnants of the Patowmack are now part of the National Park Service and open to the public.

Pound lock: Pound locks are chambers through which water is diverted with gates at either end to "impound" the water. Damming or releasing this water raises or lowers the water levels to the desired elevation.

True canal: A true canal is a manmade channel of water which connects two bodies of water.