



The History of The Port of Richmond

The James River has been and continues to be an important waterway in the Commonwealth of Virginia for the flow of world commerce. The City of Richmond was founded as a trading and industrial center due to its location at the head of navigation on the James River. Richmond, (as well as Fredericksburg, Washington, DC, and Baltimore) is a fall line city where the falls or rapids block ships from sailing further west. The Fall Line is the western edge of the Coastal Plain, the physiographic province where tides affect the water level in the rivers and to where ocean-going vessels can sail.

In 1619, Falling Creek Ironworks was established in the Virginia Colony near the future site of Warwick. The facilities were destroyed and most of the colonists there killed during the Indian Massacre of 1622. Warwick an unincorporated town and port, was located on the navigable portion of the James River about 5 miles south of downtown Richmond (and east of the fall line). Due to a sandbar in the river, although the falls did not begin until the river reached Richmond, Warwick was as far upriver as many ships of the day could safely navigate. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in 1781-82, then-Governor Thomas Jefferson stated "Vessels of 250 tons may go to Warwick". On April 30, 1781, British troops burned the town, destroying ships, warehouses, mills, tannery storehouses, and rope works. The Lost Town of Warwick no longer exists, but the Port of Richmond's facility known locally as Richmond Deepwater Terminal includes part of the former site.

The twentieth century saw the development of two City-owned marine transportation facilities, first the Intermediate Terminal below the Great Shiplock and then Richmond Deepwater Terminal, now known as the Port of Richmond. The Port was completed in 1940 at a cost to the City, State, and Federal government of over \$2 million. It was built as a general marine cargo terminal facility. Richmond Waterfront Terminals, a private company, entered into a lease with the City in 1940 to operate the Facility.

For many years the predominant cargoes through the Richmond port were sugar and tobacco. The sugar trade came to an abrupt end with the 1960 embargo on trade with Cuba. Newsprint was the next big cargo until the local newspaper changed sources to domestic paper. The Port continued to rely on the mainstay cargoes of scrap iron, tobacco, newsprint and general cargo. In the late 1970s, Contract Marine Carriers brought the first containerized ocean shipping to the Port of Richmond.

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The importing and exporting of tobacco and tobacco products experienced significant change of manufacturing and distribution practices. The tobacco industry had imported tobacco, produced tobacco products in Virginia and North Carolina and then exported the products to the worldwide marketplace. By 2009, this production had substantially moved overseas significantly reducing the import of tobacco and the export of tobacco products.

In 1979, the City of Richmond appointed a task force to assess the facility and to make recommendations for its future. The Port of Richmond at this time was a part of the City's Public Works Department. This task force concluded that the Port of Richmond was a vital economic asset to the City of Richmond and the surrounding counties, and the Port of Richmond Commission was created in 1982 to oversee the operation of the Port as a free enterprise agency of the City, and to implement the recommendations made by the task force.

In 1985, the Commission hired its first Executive Director, James McCarville and Meehan Overseas Terminal replaced Richmond Waterfront Terminals. In the same year, Contract Marine Carriers was replaced by Independent Container Line Ltd. (ICL) who brought a regular scheduled service to and from north Europe to Richmond. Captain Martin J. Moynihan, USCG (Ret.), became the Port's second Executive Director in 1990. Mr. M. David McNeel with 30 years of maritime industry experience became the port's third Executive Director in 2008.

The Port Master Development Plan, the most extensive expansion project in the Port's history, was completed in 1995. The \$8.8 million capital improvement plan included a 318' extension of the wharf; a new entrance gate and truck processing facility; a new vehicle maintenance building; container lot consolidation, and paving and site drainage improvements.

Additional construction for improvements to the terminal began in 1996 and was completed by 2002. This included completion of roadway and container lot paving and lighting, repairs to the existing wharf, and site development for future expansion at the south end of the port. Over \$22 million of capital improvements have been made at the Port beginning with the 1992 Port Master Development Plan.

The terminal operator changed in September 1996 when Federal Marine Terminals (FMT) purchased Meehan's assets and the business of operating the port.

The Port of Richmond Commission adopted a new *Port Strategic Plan 2003-2007*. Building upon the *PORT 2020 Vision Study*, the plan developed the strategic vision that, "The Port of Richmond will be a strong domestic and international multi-modal freight center recognized for contributing to the regional and state economies."

To comply with the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, a Port of Richmond Security Plan was developed which went into effect July 1, 2004. The Port, assisted by two grants from the Homeland Security Transportation Security Administration, made security improvements at the Port which included the installation of new entrance gates, perimeter fencing, a vehicle restraint system, exterior lighting, guardrails, and bollards in 2004.

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In November 2006, a new container service began at the Port of Richmond. Eimskip Shipping Company, Iceland's largest shipping line, provides the Port with a monthly regular and refrigerated container liner service between Richmond, VA and Halifax, Nova Scotia; Argentia, Newfoundland; and Reykjavik, Iceland. Cargoes include frozen seafood, produce, consumer goods, vehicles, recreational campers, heavy equipment and bottled water. The Port of Richmond installed container refrigeration plugs on the terminal to support its new customer.

In 2008, the Port saw the establishment of barge service for containers. The increasing size of ocean going vessels and the highway congestion in Hampton Roads provided an opportunity to establish a barge service between Richmond and Hampton Roads. The service, "64 Express", operated by the James River Barge Line provides weekly service between Richmond and Norfolk International Terminal.

The 2009 year brought a number of challenges to the Port of Richmond. The economic down turn decreased the marine cargo movements throughout the United States. In Richmond we saw the downturn first hand with the loss of ICL and decreased vessel calls from Eimskip. Independent Container Line, experiencing declining volumes, moved their operation to Wilmington, NC. Waterborne cargo in Richmond decreased by 78% and Federal Marine Terminals decided to not to renew its lease due to their reduced volumes and the uncertain economy.

In 2009, due to the decreased business volumes and with the departure of Federal Marine Terminals, the Port changed its business model from the port operator having leasehold to where the port operator has an operating contract. To enable this change the Port purchased all the necessary operating equipment including two cranes, top lifts, reach stacker, yard trucks, bomb carts, forklifts, and various stevedoring gear.

Today the Port of Richmond, "*Virginia's Mid-Atlantic Multi-Modal Freight Center,*" is steadily increasing its transshipment cargo that comes into the Port by water, rail and truck. The Port handles machinery, aluminum, consumer goods, frozen seafood, produce, bottled water, project cargo, vehicles, wire coils, wire rods, pipe, steel, steel products, textiles, chemicals, forest products, pharmaceuticals, and aplite. The Port serves Canada and Iceland through the Eimskip service, and the world through the weekly barge service to Hampton Roads.

The Port of Richmond celebrated its 70th Anniversary as a unique transportation facility on the James River in 2010. Significant capital investment continues to be made at the Port in equipment and in the facility. The Port is optimistic that the Port of Richmond will continue to be a valuable regional asset that benefits not only the Greater Richmond Metropolitan area, but also the Commonwealth of Virginia.