

When There Were Railway Post Offices Without Railroads in Virginia

No tracks? No Problem...

Frank R. Scheer

The Chesapeake Bay, its rivers that were navigable up to the “fall line,” and estuaries, were transverse by several waterway contractors until they gradually disappeared during and after the Great Depression. The steamboat services carried passengers, freight, and mail into low population density areas that did not support railroad expansion along the Virginia peninsulas between the Potomac, Rappahannock, York, and James Rivers. Each landform was long and narrow, so that residents along those peninsulas were seldom more than 20 miles from a river, and therefore a steamboat landing. Highways were also poorly developed until the 1930s Public Works projects improved the alignment and surfaces. As in the earlier colonial era, it was faster and easier to travel by vessel along the navigable inland waterways than it was for overland transportation.



Figure 1 - The Chesapeake Bay in southern Maryland and eastern Virginia, from a 1920s Post Route Map.

Figure 1 above is the Chesapeake Bay portion of a 1920s Virginia Post Route Map published by the Post Office Department’s Topographer. Thin lines along the waterways depict boat routes carrying mail. Some were designated as “Railway Post Offices” (RPOs) and had a mail compartment for mail distribution en route. Other routes were “SB” for steamboat, indicating that they handled closed-pouch mail between Post Offices in a similar manner as land-based “Star Routes.”

The 1920s Post Route Map legend is missing, which aids interpretation of the map features. Figure 2 from a 1939 Post Route Map has similar information.



Figure 2 - Post Route Map legend, circa 1939.

This survey of water-borne mail transportation in eastern Virginia will be covered in six segments: Potomac River, Rappahannock River, Piankatank River, York River, James River, and Hampton Roads. A larger map of each area and mail routes timetables from a Third Division Railway Mail Service Schedule of Mail Trains #395, issued September 14, 1915, will appear under each subheading. Although Schedule 395 was issued in 1915, some timetables will show earlier years, indicating that the service was unchanged between that date and when Schedule 395 became effective.

POTOMAC RIVER

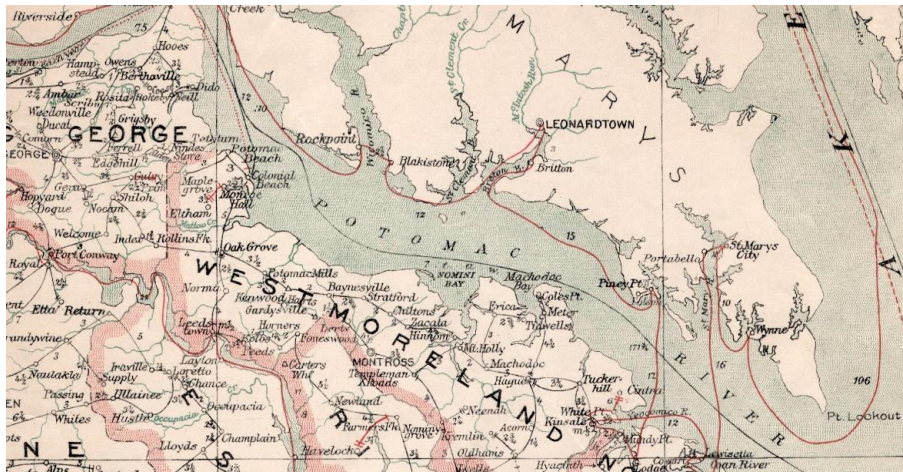


Figure 3 - The "Northern Neck" of Virginia, bounded along its northern side by the Potomac River.

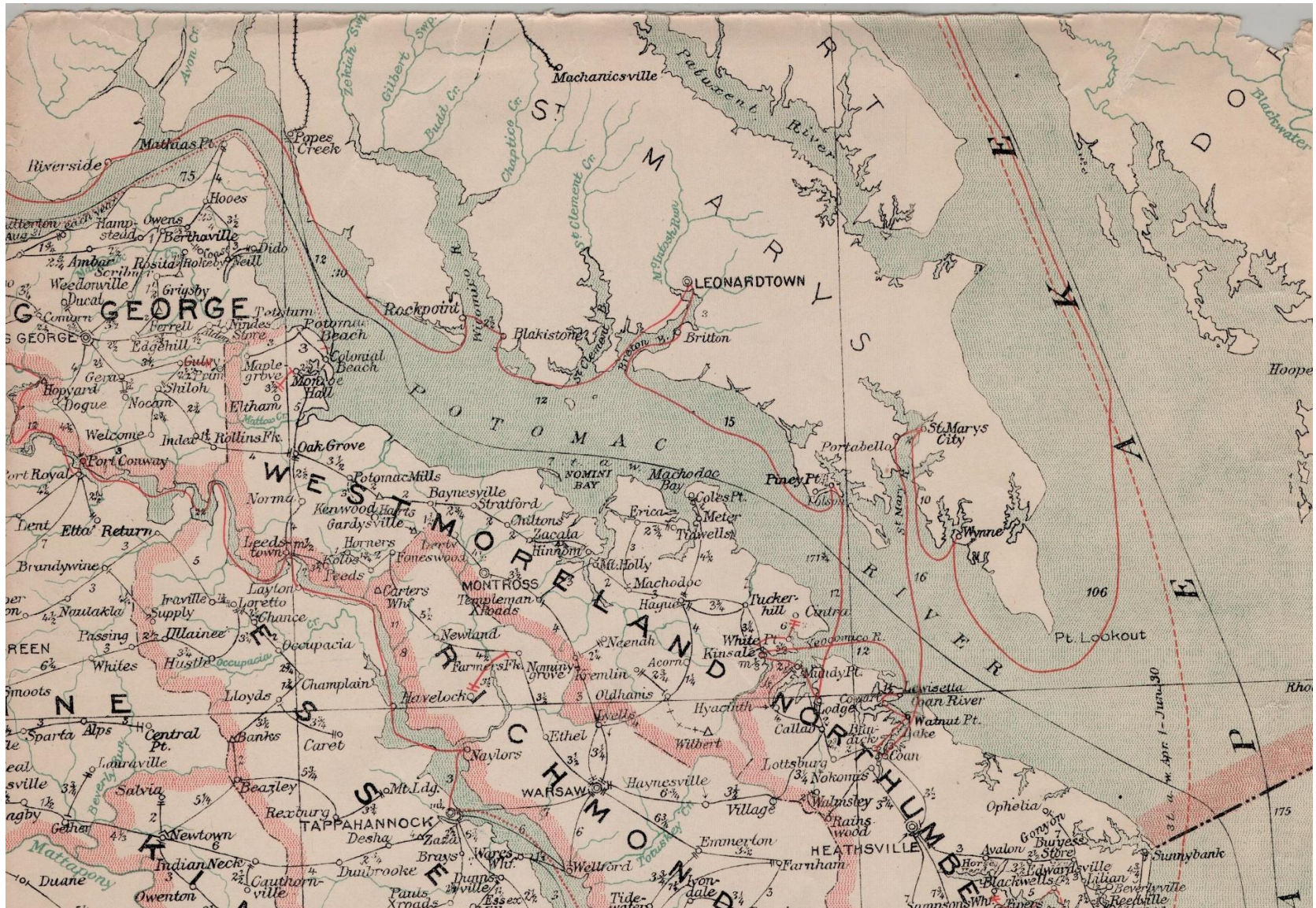


Figure 4 - A larger view of the Potomac River as well as the Rappahannock River to the "fall line" near Port Royal.

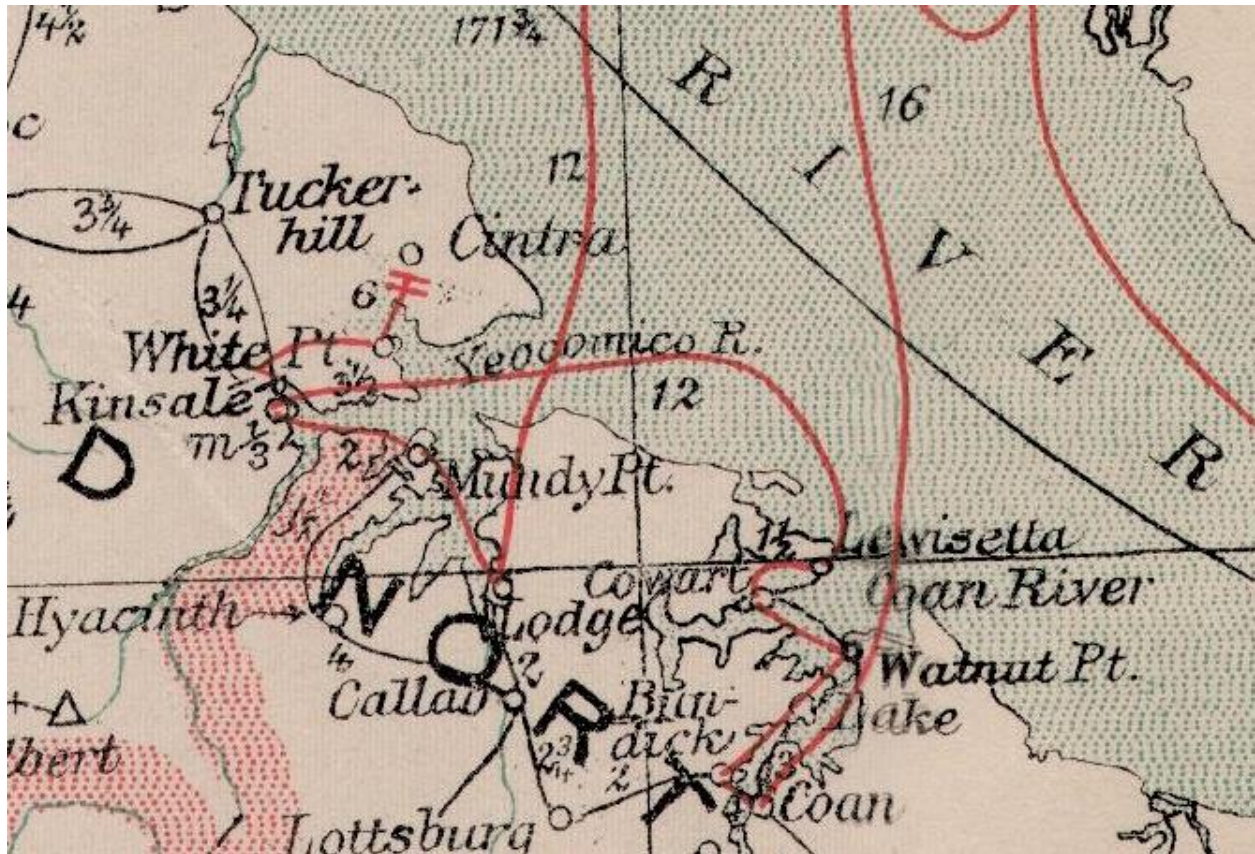


Figure 5 - Tucker Point and Lodge Landing.

Detouring momentarily to an important aspect of Virginia post office history. Three generations of the Benjamin Chambers family relocated from Washington, DC, to Lodge, Virginia. Benjamin Chambers and successors were the contractors to the Post Office Department for manufacturing steel postmarking handstamps, canceling machine ring dies, and other marking devices. These contracts were awarded bi-annually between 1866 and 1931. A history of the Chambers Family shop at Lodge appeared in the 1987 American Philatelic Congress book. A digital copy is available upon request from the RMS Library.

Benjamin Chambers selected Lodge, Virginia, after considering several available locations. Lodge was remote yet connected by steamboat to Baltimore for inbound supplies of steel blanks, wood handles, and other materiel. Finished products were mailed to the Post Office Department Purchasing Agent's Office when completed. The Baltimore, Leonardtown & Washington RPO as well as the Maryland, Delaware & Virginia Railway Company's steamboat route provided trice-weekly services throughout the period of the shop's operation at Lodge.

Aside from a cooler summer climate than Washington, DC, the Chambers family shop had several manufacturing techniques which it regarded as trade secrets. These were purposely not patented so as not to facilitate competitors to create design variations or commit outright infringement. The daily boat arrival was an excellent means of observing who arrived and departed and what the purpose was of their travel.

* Baltimore, Leonardtown & Washington R. P. O. (7)		
(M. D. & V. Ry. Co. Steamboat Route 13100. 303 miles)		
M. W. & Sa.	July 1, 1909	<i>o</i>
5 00	L.....Baltimore, Md.....A	5 00
<i>z</i>		<i>z</i>
8 45	A.....Kinsale, Va.....L	12 00
<i>z</i>		<i>z</i>
12 00	.....Leonardtown, Md.....	6 00
<i>o</i>		M. W. & Sa.
6 00	A.....Washington, D. C.....L	4 00

Figure 6 - BALTIMORE LEONARDTOWN & WASHINGTON RPO timetable circa 1909. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 11.

The Baltimore, Leonardtown and Washington RPO was established on August 25, 1891, and discontinued on June 30, 1893. It was re-established on May 4, 1895, and the final discontinuance date is presently unknown. Prior to 1891 and between 1893 to 1895, the boat route continued to operate for passengers, closed-pouch mail, freight, and express shipments.

Popes Creek & Colonial Beach S. B. (7)		
(Elmer H. Walton, Contractor (Steamboat). Rt. 14098. 12.18 miles.)		
<i>b</i>	Mar. 8, 1915	<i>b</i>
10 35	L.....Popes Creek, Md.....A	2 00
12 15	A.....Colonial Beach, Va.....L	12 15

Figure 7 - POPES CREEK & COLONIAL BEACH STEAMBOAT (CLOSED POUCH) timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 66.

The Popes Creek and Colonial Beach Steamboat route was closed-pouch mail service. Its purpose was to link the Baltimore & Popes Creek RPO operating on the Pennsylvania Railroad south of Bowie, Maryland, with Colonial Beach, Virginia. This water route connection is visible in Figure 4.

Washington & Norfolk R. P. O. (6)		
(Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Co. Rt. 13097. 196.95 miles)		
<i>a</i> South	March 15, 1915	<i>a</i> North
6 45	L... Washington, D. C. (wharf)...A	7 00
7 00	A.....Fortress Monroe, Va.....L	7 00
8 00	A.....Norfolk, Va. (wharf).....L	6 00
South.		
<i>a</i> Hampton, Va...	Ft. Monroe	<i>a</i> Phoebus, Va.... Ft. Monroe
<i>a</i> Newport News, Va	"	<i>c</i> Portsmouth, Va. Norfolk
<i>c</i> Norfolk & Dixondale	"	
<i>a</i> Norfolk, Va., Dis.	Norfolk	

Figure 8 - WASHINGTON & NORFOLK RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 95.

The Washington & Norfolk RPO provided a relatively direct link between Hampton Roads and Washington, DC. Most overnight transportation was otherwise between Baltimore and Norfolk.

The Washington & Norfolk RPO was established on April 29, 1897, and discontinued on April 25, 1907. It was re-established on August 10, 1908, then terminated on September 18, 1918.

RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER



Figure 9 - Steamboat RPO routes served the southern side of the Northern Neck as well as north-side communities in Essex and Middlesex Counties on the Middle Peninsula.

Baltimore & Fredericksburg R. P. O. (7)

M. D. & V. Ry. Co. Steamboat Rt. 14100. Baltimore to Fredericksburg, 288 miles. Tappahannock to Norfolk, 150 miles.)

		November 2, 1910			
e	z	L	Baltimore, Md	A	m
12 (0)	4 30				7 00
W. Th.					
F. & Sa.					
7 30	7 30		Sharps		9 30
8 00	8 00	A	Tappahannock, Va	L	7 30
g	o			A	l	Tu.
2 00	8 30	L	Norfolk, Va	L	7 00
8 (0)		A			7 00
e	o				z
	6 00	A	Fredericksburg, Va	L	2 00
SOUTH BOUND					
*Norf. Pet. & Rich. 19 Norfolk					

Figure 10 - Baltimore & Fredericksburg RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 8.

Sharps, Richmond County, is across the Rappahannock River from Bowler's Wharf, Essex County. The "fall line" for the Rappahannock River is adjacent to the eastern side of Fredericksburg.

The Baltimore & Fredericksburg RPO transitioned from being a Route Agent route on August 1, 1882. It was discontinued during 1917.

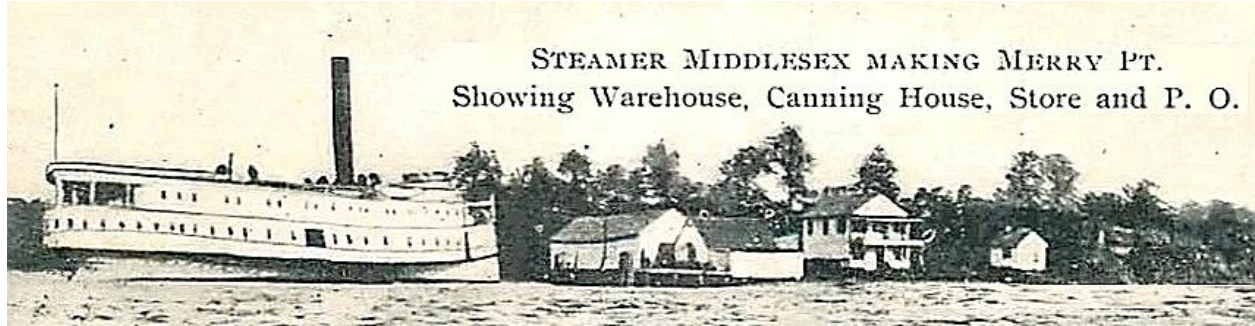


Figure 11 – Maryland, Delaware & Virginia Steamboat Middlesex at Merry Point, Virginia.

*"During the early 1900s steamboats arrived at Merry Point Wharf each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Steamers from Baltimore arrived in the mornings and steamers from Fredericksburg arrived in the afternoons and evenings. To the right of the steamer is Chilton and Derickson Canning Factory. They employed up to a hundred people each season. Factory workers who lived in and around Ottoman used the ferry service to travel to and from work."*¹

PIANKATANK RIVER



Figure 12 - Freeport was located on the Middle Peninsula at the navigable west end of the Piankatank River where the river narrowed and became shallow.

¹ Source: Northern Neck Historical Society.

***Baltimore & Freeport R. P. O.**

(7)

(B. C. & A. Ry. Steamboat Route 13088. 220.75 miles)

	Su.&W.	Dec. 26, 1913	W.&Sa.	
	5 00	L Baltimore, Md. A	5 00	
	4 30	A Reedville, Va..L	5 00	
	12 30	A Fitchetts, Va..L	10 00	
	4 30	A Freeport, Va..L	7 00	
	M.&Th		Tu & F.	

Figure 13 - Baltimore & Freeport RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 8.

The Baltimore & Freeport RPO transitioned from a Route Agent on August 1, 1882. The route name was changed to the Baltimore & Fitchett's RPO on March 5, 1888, then back to Baltimore & Freeport RPO on September 12, 1892. This route was discontinued on January 27, 1908, re-established on July 1, 1909, then terminated during 1917.

YORK RIVER

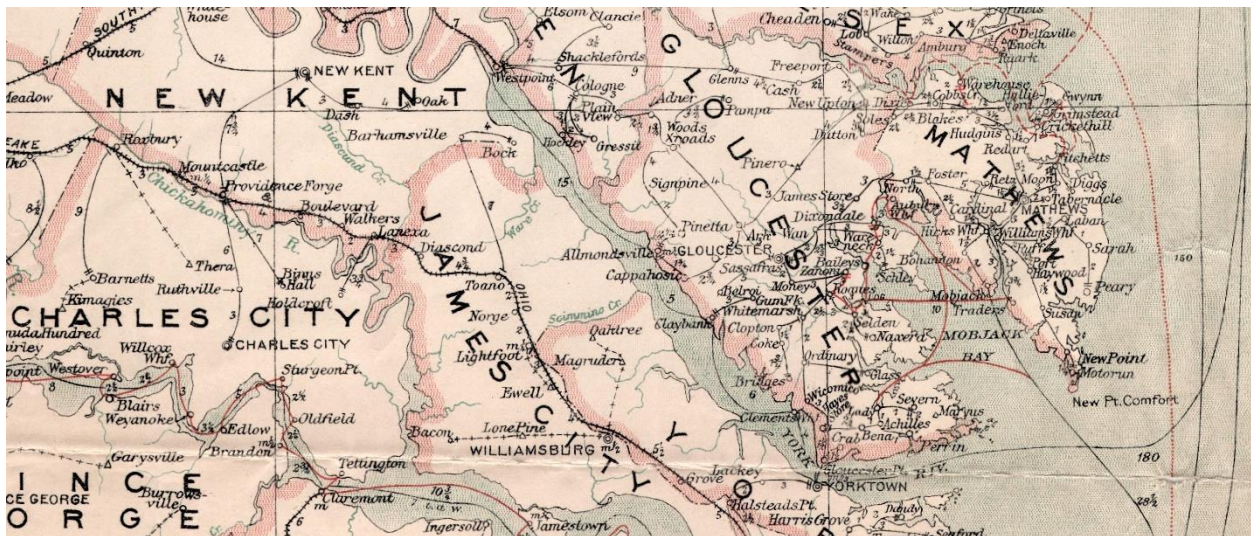


Figure 14 - A single Steamboat RPO route made a connection between Baltimore and West Point. A RPO route over the Southern Railway connected West Point with Richmond.

The Baltimore & Westpoint RPO was established on August 10, 1888, and discontinued on August 14, 1917. During 1921 it was re-established and lasted until June 30, 1941. June 30th is often the ending date for a mail transportation contract since it coincided with the final day of the Post Office Department's fiscal year. The cessation of the Baltimore & Westpoint RPO marked the end of steamboat RPO operations on the Virginia portion of the Chesapeake Bay.

Baltimore & Westpoint R. P. O.

(7)

(Chesapeake Steamship Co. Route 13082. 209.77 miles)

b		January 1, 1914		b	
6 00	L	Baltimore, Md. (Pier 13)	A	7 00	b
7 00	A	Westpoint, Va.	L	6 50	b
Southbound					
b	Richmond, Va. & Dis.	Westpoint			
l	Westpoint & Rich.	15	"		

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Figure 15 - Baltimore & Westpoint RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 18.

Norfolk & Dixondale R. P. O.

(3)

(Old Dominion Steamship Co. Rt. 14092. 57.00 miles)

		March 22, 1915			
b	7 00	L	Norfolk, Va.	A	b 7 00
b	8 15		Fortress Monroe, Va.		b 6 00
b	11 30		Traders, Va.		
p	12 00	A	Wareneck, Va.	L	p 12 30
o	12 35	A	Dixondale, Va.	L	o 12 00

Northbound

o	Dixondale, Va.		b	Mobjeck, Va.
o	Gloucester, Va.	Dixondale	p	Selden, Va.
p	Do	Wareneck	o	Shell, Va.
b	Ft. Mon., Va.		b	Traders, Va.
b	Hampton, Va.	Ft. Monroe	b	Wareneck, Va.
b	Hicks Wharf, Va.		b	Wil'ms Wharf, Va.
b	Lady, Va.	Ft. Monroe		

Southbound

b	Balt. & Norf, N	Ft. Monroe	b	Wash. & Norfolk, N	Ft. Monroe
b	C. Charles & Norf	50			

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Figure 16 - Norfolk & Dixondale RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 57.

The Norfolk & Dixondale RPO evolved from the Norfolk & Thompsons Wharf RPO on March 30, 1908. This route was discontinued on April 27, 1920.

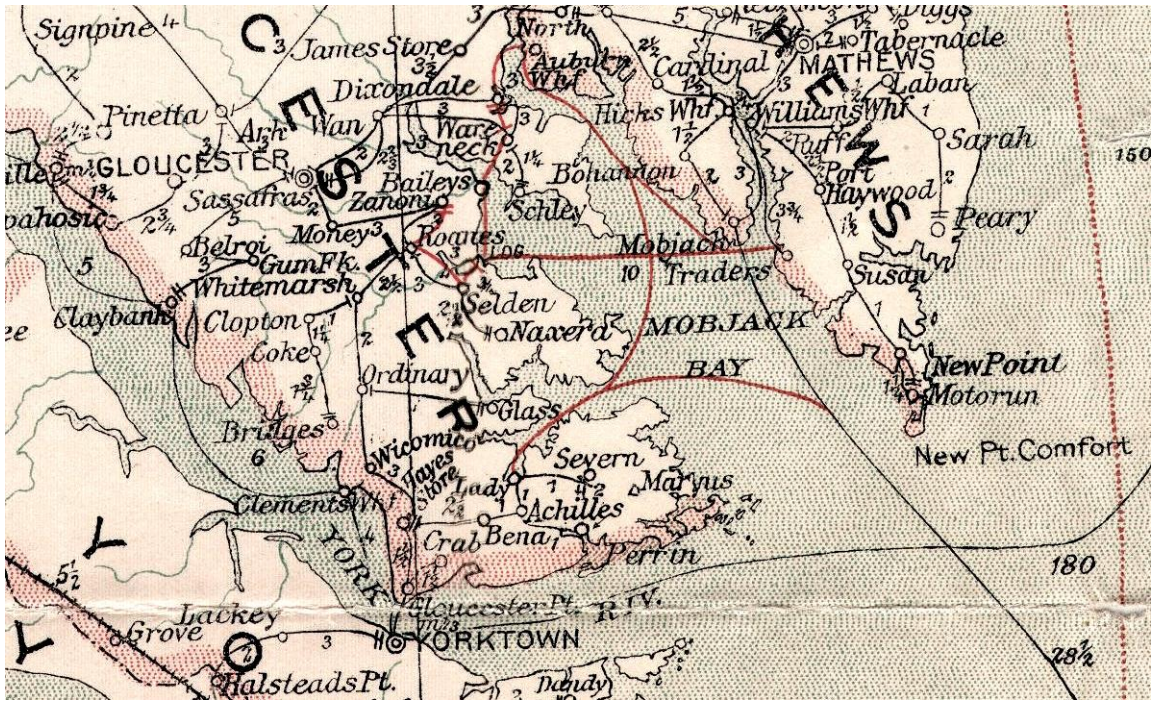


Figure 17 - Mobjack Bay showing Post Offices served by the Norfolk & Dixondale RPO.

JAMES RIVER



Figure 18 - The James River was navigable as far west as Richmond, Virginia.

Richmond & Norfolk S. B. (3)			
(O. D. Steamship Co. Rt. 14081. 125 miles.)			
<i>a</i>	September 15, 1912		<i>a</i>
7 00	L.....	Richmond, Va.....	A 7 00
12 30	A.....	Claremont Wharf (n. o.).....	L 12 30
7 00	A.....	Norfolk, Va.....	L 7 00

Service expires November 15. 1915.

Figure 19 - Richmond & Norfolk Steamboat (Closed Pouch) timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 72.

Norfolk & Smithfield S. B. (3)					
(Old Dominion Steamship Co. Rt. 14089. 28 miles.)					
W. & Sa.	M. T. T. F.	<i>b</i>	May 7, 1915		<i>b</i>
4 00	3 30	7 10	L.....	Norfolk, Va.....	A 10 30
5 35	4 30	9 00	Newport News, Va.....	L 9 15
6 45	6 00	10 40	A.....	Smithfield, Va.....	L 7 45

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Figure 20 - Norfolk & Smithfield Steamboat (Closed Pouch) timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 60.

Norfolk & Richmond R. P. O. (3)			
(Virginia Navigation Co. S. B. Rt. 14084. 135.42 miles)			
<i>p</i>	Oct. 15, 1914		<i>o</i>
6 00	L.....	Norfolk, Va.....	A 7 30
6 10	.....	Portsmouth, Va.....	L 7 45
7 15	.....	Fortress Monroe, Va.....	L 6 30
7 45	.....	Newport News, Va.....	L 5 30
12 15	Claremont Wharf (n. o.).....	L 12 30
3 30	City Point, Va.....	L 9 00
7 30	A.....	Richmond, Va.....	L 6 00

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(Over

Eastbound.		Westbound.	
<i>o</i> C. W. & N. Emp 103	Claremont	<i>p</i> C. W. & N. Emp 103	Claremont
		<i>p</i> Petersburg, Va.....	City Point
		<i>p</i> W. h. & Chas. 80...	"
		via Petersburg..	"

Figure 21 - Norfolk & Richmond RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 59.

The Norfolk & Richmond RPO must not be confused with the Richmond & Norfolk RPO, which was the former Richmond, Petersburg & Norfolk RPO operating over the Atlantic Coast Line and Norfolk

& Western Railway. The Norfolk & Richmond RPO transitioned from the Norfolk & Richmond Route Agent on August 1, 1882. The route name was changed to the Norfolk & Petersburg RPO on August 8, 1912, then back to Norfolk & Richmond RPO on January 24, 1913. This route was discontinued on April 4, 1917.

HAMPTON ROADS

Cape Charles & Norfolk R. P. O.					
(Second Division)					
May 31, 1915					
h47	a49			a50	h48
4 55	6 25	L	Cape Charles, Va.	A	8 55
6 40	8 15		Fortress Monroe, Va.		7 00
7 45	9 20	A	Norfolk, Va.	L	8 40

Figure 22 - Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 24. Note "a" indicates daily service, "h" means that the boat service operated daily but the RPO operated daily except for Sundays.

The Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO was the car and passenger ferry connecting the Philadelphia & Norfolk RPO between the Eastern Shore and Norfolk. It evolved from the Cherrystone & Norfolk RPO on January 9, 1885, then became part of the Philadelphia & Norfolk RPO on August 22, 1901, until November 21, 1905. A Railway Postal Clerk from the Philadelphia & Norfolk RPO Night Line continued on this boat route between November 21, 1905, until January 1, 1917, when it returned to the Philadelphia & Norfolk RPO.

Figure 23 - Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO timetable and space during 1915, from a Second Division RMS Schedule of Mail Trains #320, effective October 10, 1915.

Baltimore & Norfolk R. P. O.				(7)
(Balt. Steam Packet Co. Route 14093. 187.50 miles)				
December 5, 1914				
b	6 30	L	Baltimore, Md.	A 6 45
	6 00		Fortress Monroe, Va.	7 20
A	7 00		Norfolk, Va.	L 6 30
Norfolk City letter mail is distributed in Southbound boat.				
South Bound			North Bound	
b	Ballentine Sta.,	Norfolk.	b	Baltimore, Md. Dis.
b	Berkley Station, Va.	Norfolk	b	N. Y., B. & Wash...
b	§Col. & Norf..... 3	"		"
b	De Bree Sta.....	"		
b	Hampton, Va.....	Fort Monroe		
b	Newport News, Va.	"		
l	§Norf. & Dixondale	"		
l	§Norf. & Raleigh ... 5	Norfolk		
b	§Norf. & Wilm... 49	"		
b	Norfolk, Va. Dis....	"		
b	Phœbus, Va.....	Ft. Monroe		
b	Portsmouth, Va.....	Norfolk		

Figure 24 - Baltimore & Norfolk RPO timetable circa 1915. Third Division RMS Schedule 395, page 11.



Figure 25 - Norfolk and Newport News were the principal points that steamboat services terminated within Hampton Roads.

The Baltimore & Norfolk RPO originated as the Baltimore & Norfolk Route Agent on August 1, 1882. It was discontinued during 1917, then re-established on June 25, 1921. It made its final trip on June 30, 1937.

STEAMBOAT PHOTOGRAPHS AND COMPANY INFORMATION

The vessels used for these overnight services were operated by several navigation companies, mainly operating out of Baltimore, Maryland. The docks along Light Street have several docked in the 1905 view below.



Figure 26 - Steamboat "Augusta" in the foreground of this 1905 Detroit Publishing Company picture of the Baltimore harbor docks along Light Street.

This entry is from Wikipedia: *"The Baltimore Steam Packet Company, nicknamed the "Old Bay Line," was an American steamship line from 1840 to 1962 that provided overnight steamboat service on Chesapeake Bay, primarily between Baltimore, Maryland, and Norfolk, Virginia. Called a "packet" for the mail packets carried on government mail contracts, the term in the 19th century came to mean a steamer line operating on a regular, fixed daily schedule between two or more cities. When it closed in 1962 after 122 years of existence, it was the last surviving overnight steamship passenger service in the United States."*²

<i>City of Norfolk</i> [¶]	1911	1941	297 feet (91 m)	2,379 GT	in service to 1962, on final roster	Chesapeake Line merger acquisition
<i>City of Richmond</i> [¶]	1913	1941	261 feet (80 m)	1,923 GT	in service to 1962, on final roster	Chesapeake Line merger acquisition ³

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltimore_Steam_Packet_Company

³ Brown, Alexander Crosby (1961). *Steam Packets on the Chesapeake*. Cambridge, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers. pp. viii–xiii. [ISBN 0-87033-111-6](#). [LCCN 61012580](#). Retrieved 28 August 2019.



Figure 27 - Old Bay Line office and pier 3, Baltimore, Maryland. Photograph provided by Robert Catlin.



Figure 28 - Old Bay Line "City of Richmond" at Baltimore, Maryland, on May 27, 1964.



Figure 29 - Light Street, Baltimore, Maryland, circa 1920. All boats are out except for the Old Bay Line steamer which was likely the night boat to Norfolk. Photo provided by Robert Catlin.

During the mid-1910s, which is the focus of this article, the Old Bay Line had two ships in service, like the City of Richmond appearing in Figure 26. These vessels continued in service through the end of the Baltimore & Norfolk RPO route operation. They operated northbound and southbound on the opposing schedules in Figure 23. Note “b” in the Baltimore & Norfolk RPO schedule indicates daily except Sunday departures from the originating port.

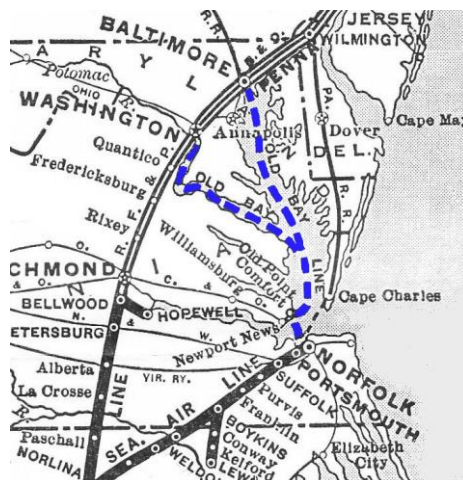


Figure 30 - Old Bay Line route map circa 1920s. The Seaboard Air Line railroad acquired partial ownership to provide a passenger and freight connection between Baltimore and Norfolk, where there was an interchange to the Norfolk and Norlina branch line, to which a main line connection was made at Norlina.

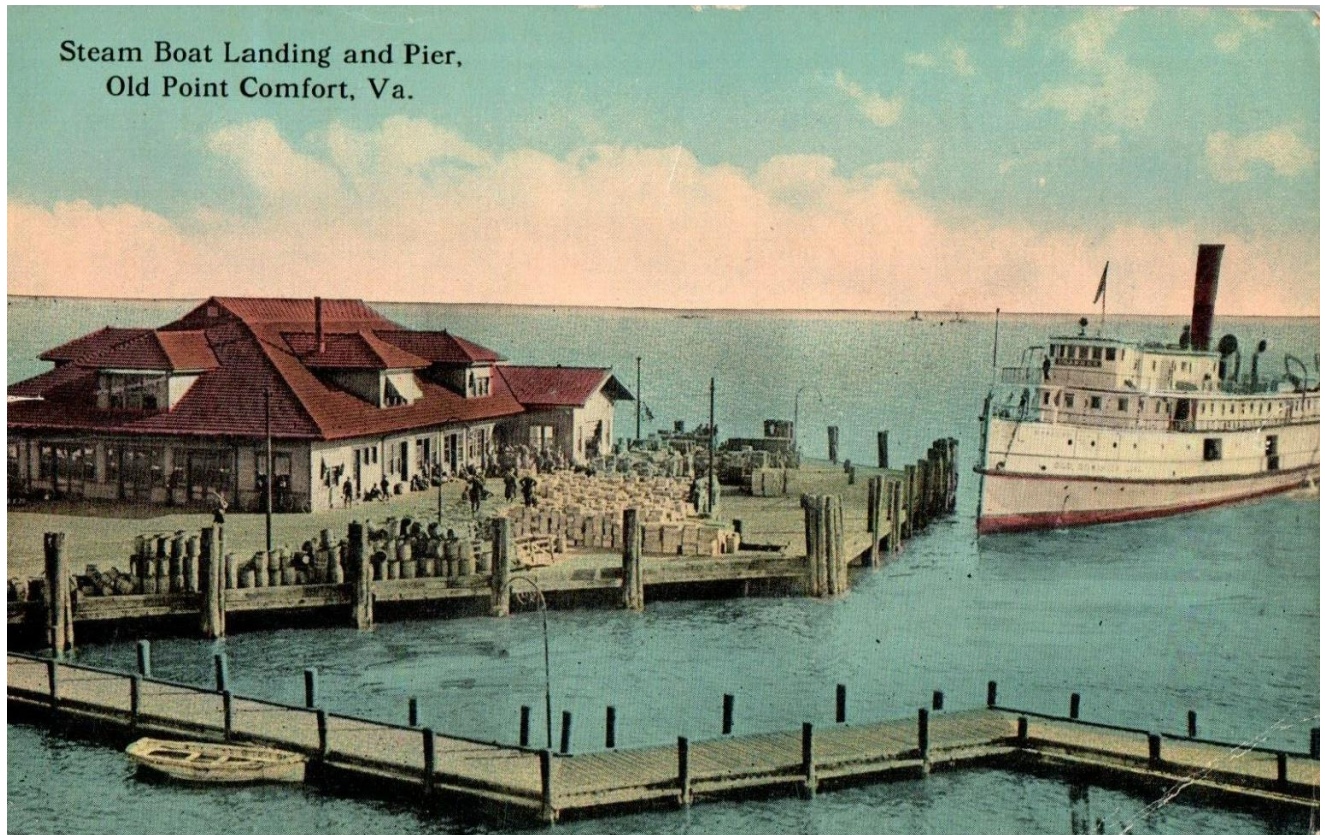


Figure 31 - "Richmond" of the Old Bay Steamship Line at Old Point Comfort Landing.

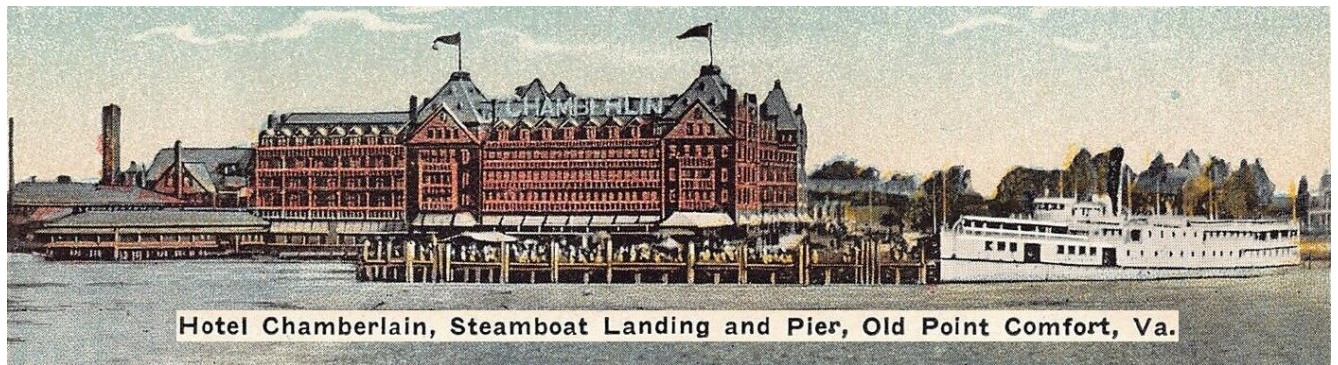



Figure 32 - View of the Hotel Chamberlain at Old Point Comfort. The view appearing in Figure 49 above was photographed from an upper floor in the hotel.

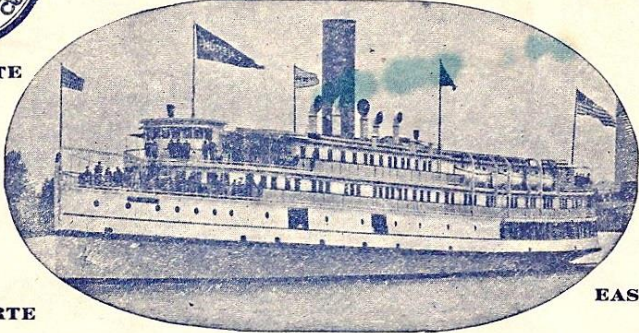
No information or pictures is presently available for the Virginia Navigation Company. This vessel operator performed service on the Norfolk & Richmond RPO route, appearing in Figure 32.



THE HISTORIC LINE
 POTOMAC RIVER--CHESAPEAKE BAY--HAMPTON ROADS
 — MODERN STEEL STEAMERS —
 "DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA" "NORTHLAND" "SOUTHLAND"

TABLE D' HOTE
DINNER
\$1.25

CLUB
BREAKFAST
75 cents
Also A LA CARTE



THRU
TICKETS
TO ALL
POINTS
NORTH
EAST - SOUTH
WEST

Leave	Washington, daily.....	6.30 P. M.	Leave	Norfolk, daily.....	5.45 P. M.
	“ Alexandria “.....	7.00 P. M.		Old Point “.....	7.00 P. M.
Arrive	Old Point “.....	6.40 A. M.	Arrive	Alexandria “.....	6.30 A. M.
“	Norfolk “.....	8.00 A. M.	“	Washington “.....	7.00 A. M.

Figure 33 - Front of a Norfolk & Washington Steamboat Company ticket envelope circa 1920s.

The Norfolk & Washington Steamboat Company was organized in 1889. The Company was to build four first-class powerful steamers with all modern improvements according to the incorporation bill. They would run from Washington, DC to Norfolk with stops in Alexandria at Old Point and Newport News. During the 1910s, the Southland was launched during 1909, followed in 1911 with its sister ship, the Northland.⁴ These boats had steel hulls and are the vessels which had mail compartments for the Washington & Norfolk RPO that appears in Figure 8.

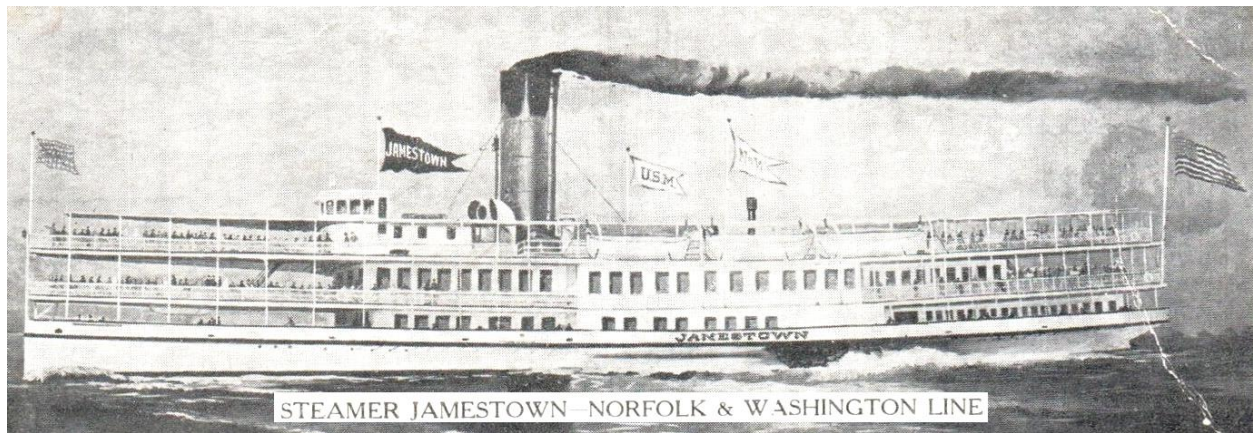


Figure 34 - a cropped, undated post card view of the steamer "Jamestown." The "USM" flag indicates that it was carrying U.S. Mail.

No information is currently available about the "Jamestown." This vessel may have been a predecessor of the "Southland," "Northland," and "District of Columbia."

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norfolk_%26_Washington_Steamboat_Company

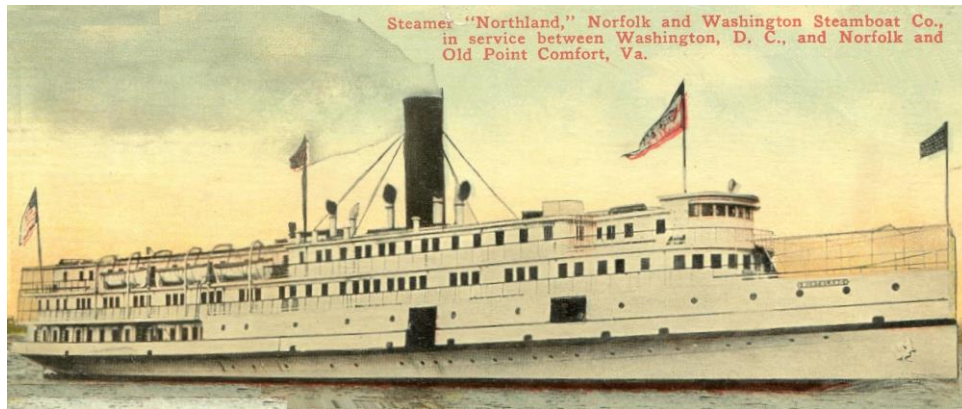


Figure 35 - a cropped postcard view of the Northland.

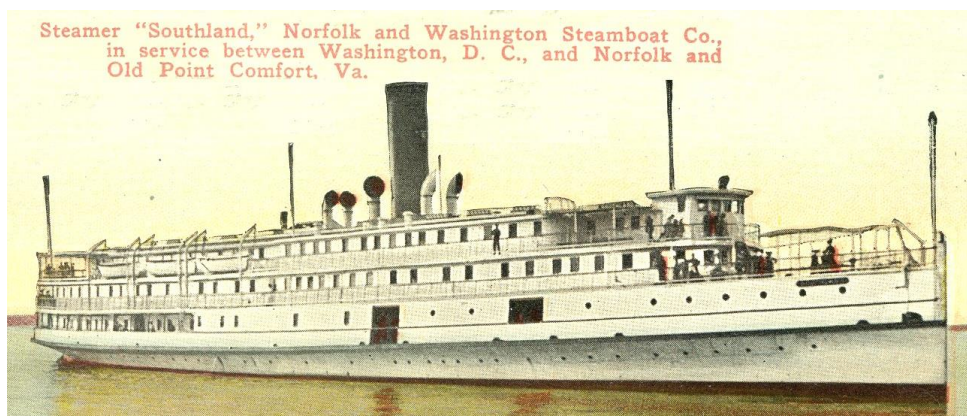


Figure 36 - a similar cropped postcard view of the Southland of the same era.



Figure 37 - Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Company pier and office, Southwest Washington, DC waterfront, circa 1908. Source: Wikipedia. The pilot house at left appears to be that of the "Northland."

No information is presently available for the Chesapeake Steamship Company. This company operated the Baltimore & West Point RPO route depicted in Figure 14. Figure 11 earlier in this article shows Steamer Middlesex, M. D. & V. Railway Company, at Merry Point, operating on the Baltimore & Fredericksburg RPO route schedule depicted in Figure 10. No information is presently available for the B. C. & A Railway Company. This company operated the Baltimore & Freeport RPO route depicted in Figure 12.

The New York, Philadelphia & Norfolk Railroad (NYP&N) operated the Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO route appearing in figure 21. There were several ships used because of the crossing frequency and relatively short distance across Hampton Roads.



Figure 38 - Cape Charles, Virginia, steamboat pier with adjacent NYP&N Railroad station.



Figure 39 - Port-side view of steamboat "Maryland."

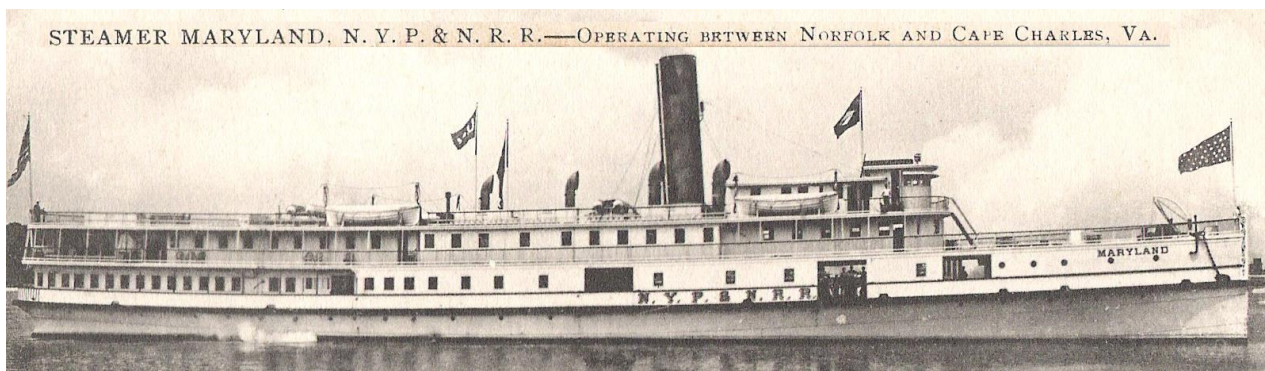


Figure 40 Starboard-side view of steamboat "Maryland."



Figure 41 - NYP&N Steamboat "New York," circa 1920s.



Figure 42 - NYP&N Steamboat "Pennsylvania," circa 1920s.



Figure 43 - A NYP&N Railroad steamboat and tug "Salisbury 01" receiving coal in their bunkers for firing the boilers.

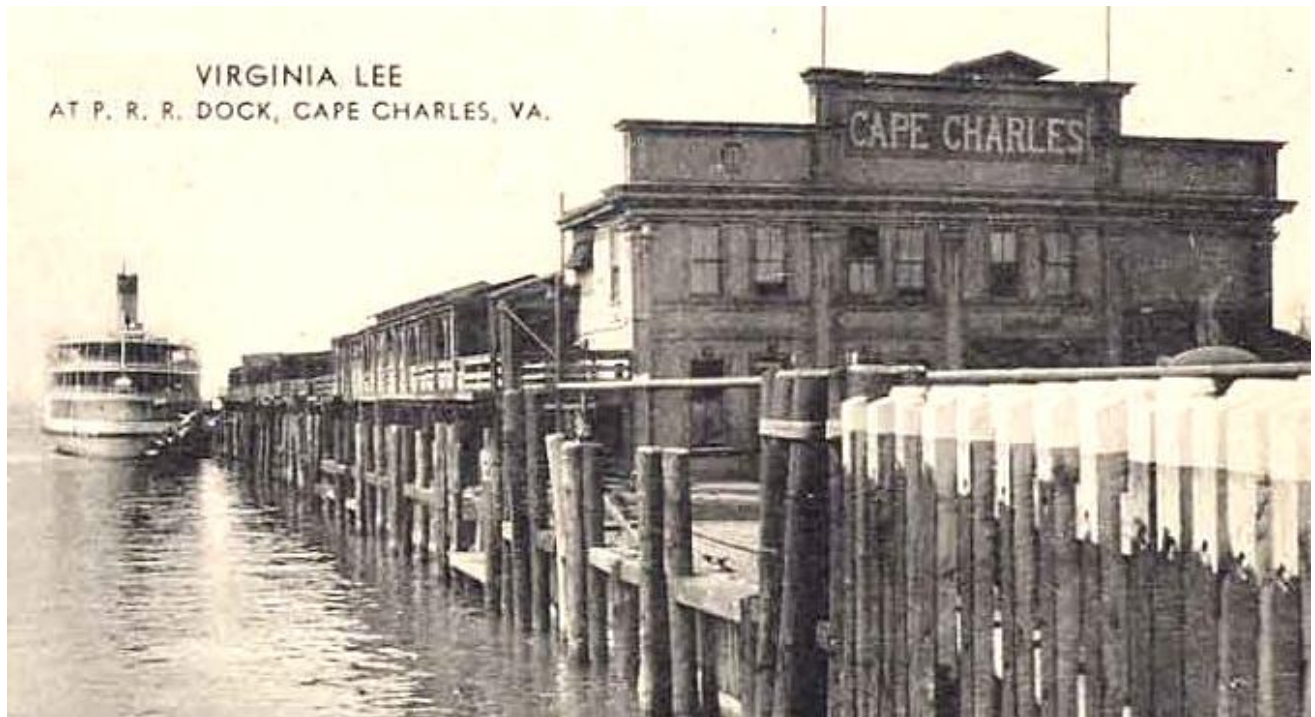


Figure 44 New York, Philadelphia & Norfolk --later, the Pennsylvania Railroad-- ferry terminal view at Cape Charles.

SAMPLE CHESAPEAKE BAY BOAT RPO POSTMARKS

Rick Kunz provided several covers of Chesapeake Bay steamboat RPO routes which are greatly appreciated. Cropped pictures of the postmarks are included below. All these imprints were made by postmarking handstamps were Chambers shop products from Lodge, Virginia, manufactured prior to 1931.



Figure 45 - Baltimore & Freeport RPO, 1910.



Figure 46 - Baltimore & Fredericksburg RPO, 1917.

The postmarker that made the imprint in Figure 39 –as well as all the others shown--was produced by the Chambers shop at Lodge, Virginia, prior to 1931. They were all produced at the workshop adjacent to Lodge landing and were sent to the Post Office Department via the Baltimore, Leonardtown & Washington RPO. Chambers shop products continued in use at many post offices until a requirement to add ZIP Codes during 1963 supposedly made them obsolete, but later usages are observed –a testimony to their durability.



Figure 47 - Baltimore, Leonardtown & Washington RPO, 1907.



Figure 48 - Baltimore & Norfolk RPO, 1937. June 30th was the route's final day of operation.



Figure 49 - Baltimore & West Point RPO, 1939.



Figure 50 - Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO, Trip 50, 1911

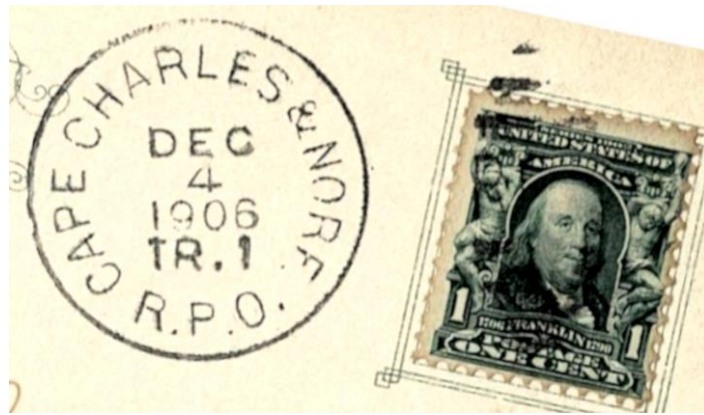


Figure 51 - Cape Charles & Norfolk RPO, Trip 1, 1906



Figure 52 - Norfolk & Richmond Route Agent, circa 1881.

U.S. Mail Route Agents were like express company messengers. They accompanied the mail pouches and sacks en route and handled receipt and dispatch during stops. They did not sort mail as was the practice in later Railway Post Offices, but they could accept letters which were postmarked and placed into a way-pouch delivered to the final post office along the route for distribution and further dispatch.



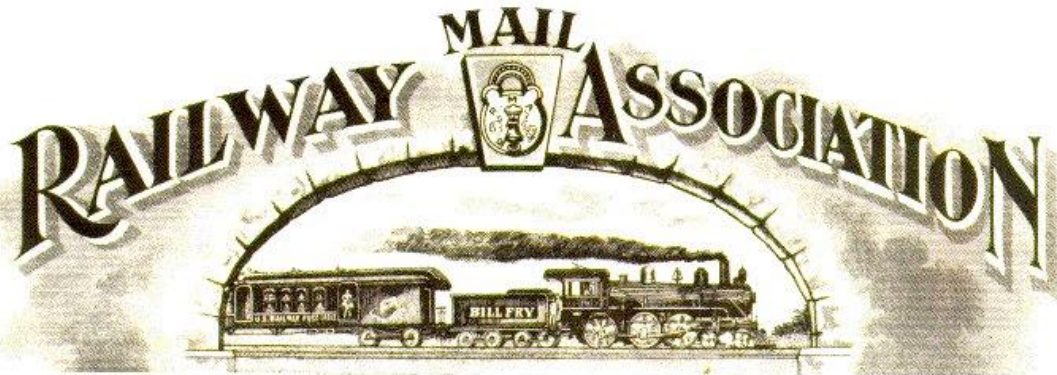
Figure 53 - Norfolk & Dixondale RPO, 1930. The postmark is on a registry dispatch card.

IN CLOSING...



Figure 54 - "Anne Arundel" at a dock near St. Mary's City, Maryland, during 1930.

Although Figure 46 is not a scene within Virginia, the steamboat at a landing for exchanging mail, freight, express, and passengers could be anywhere during the 1910s-1920s. As has been said about the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers, they are the "Land of Pleasant Living."⁵ These mail boat "RPOs" are part of its fascinating lore.



RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE LIBRARY FOUNDATION **POSTAL HISTORY RESEARCH - ARTIFACTS PRESERVATION**

⁵ <https://attractionmag.com/2022/11/23/the-land-of-pleasant-living/>

The Railway Mail Service (RMS) Library is a major collection of materials pertaining to en route distribution history. It can assist researchers interested in route agent, Seapost, railway, and highway post office (RPO and HPO) history. The collection has many unique, original-source documents that provide answers to questions dealing with the transportation and distribution of USA Mail between 1862 and 1977, as well as other countries during the 19th and 20th centuries.

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Frank R. Scheer
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