

# *The* VIRGINIA ROAD BUILDER

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Photo by U. S. Bureau of Public Roads

1919 Route 1—Washington-Richmond 1946



Photo by Virginia State Chamber of Commerce.

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# A Brief History of the Construction of Route 1— Between Washington and Richmond\*

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U. S. Route No. 1 through Virginia is a link in the main North-South highway serving the east coast states from Maine to Florida. The route serves a great amount of through truck and bus traffic as well as local traffic and is one of the principal routes of travel for tourists. This route through Virginia is designated as the Jefferson Davis Highway, being named for the President of the Confederacy. However, it was originally called the Old Telegraph Line Road, as it followed one of the first telegraph lines built in the world. The telegraph line was built in 1847 between Washington and Petersburg by the Washington-New Orleans Telegraph Company.

The section of U. S. Route No. 1 from Washington to Richmond carries a daily average traffic of from 4,030 to 24,688 vehicles. During the war this road was designated a part of the strategic network as it served a considerable volume of convoy and other military traffic.

The first modern construction of the section of road between Washington and Richmond was done from 1921 to 1926. During these years the majority of this road was constructed of 18' plain concrete with a thickness of 6"-8"-6",

\*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was prepared by the Dept. of Highways for the especial use of the Latin-American Road Builders who visited Virginia April 30 and May 1.

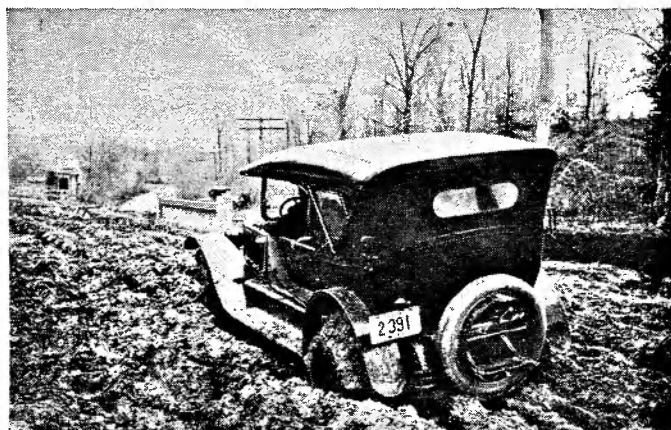


Photo by U. S. Bureau of Public Roads  
Section of Washington-Richmond road near Quantico,  
Virginia—1919

8"-6"-8" and a uniform 6". Between the years 1933 and 1938 the road was widened to 30' with plain and reinforced concrete; and again, between 1939 and 1944, to keep pace with the ever increasing volume of traffic, the road was widened to 40' and surfaced with bituminous concrete to meet the standards of a modern highway. A considerable portion of this construction was done with Federal aid participation.

For a more detailed description of the construction and points of historical interest the road is described in sections as follows:

*From 14th Street Bridge in Washington to Alexandria—Approximately 6 miles*—The first mile of this section of road was completely reconstructed by the War Department in 1944 to provide two 36' concrete divided lanes as a part of the Pentagon network serving the Pentagon Building. The Pentagon Building is the General Headquarters of the War Department and, incidentally, is one of the largest buildings in the world, covering an area of approximately 40 acres.

From the end of the divided lanes to Alexandria the original road was constructed of 18' x 6"-8"-6" plain concrete in 1921 and widened to 30' in 1934-38. Again, in 1944, another widening brought the road to its present width of 44', and the entire width was surfaced with 3" of bituminous concrete.

The bridge over Four Mile Run at the north corporate limits of Alexandria was built originally as a double 20' stone arch masonry bridge, reconditioned in 1921 and widened to 48' in 1944 by adding 20' concrete slab spans. Historical Alexandria: Land was first patented here in 1657. In 1731 a warehouse was built on Hunting Creek about which grew up the village of Belhaven. The Town of Alexandria was established in 1749 and became one of the main colonial trading centers. It was a part of the original District of Columbia, but was returned to Virginia in 1847. Points of interest are the Masonic Shrine and the Stonewall Jackson Shrine.

From Four Mile Run to the overpass over the R.F.&P. Railroad the original construction was 18' x 6"-8"-6" plain concrete in 1921, widened in 1938 to a variable width of 40'-30', and surfaced with 3" and variable sheet asphalt top, the variable thickness due to taking out old parabolic crown. The overpass, a steel deck structure, 667 feet in length, was built in 1938 to replace an old outmoded overpass.

On Washington and Franklin Streets in Alexandria the

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construction was done by the City with some Federal participation. The construction was accomplished by stages and is mostly bituminous surfacing on concrete, varying from 36' to 60' in width.

The bridge over Hunting Creek at the south corporate limits of Alexandria is a reinforced concrete structure built in 1927 with a 23' roadway. In 1939 a 24' steel beam span was built parallel to the original bridge and now serves as the northbound lane of the divided road. The approaches are two 22' reinforced concrete divided lanes.

*From Alexandria to Fort Belvoir—Approximately 11 Miles—*This section of road was originally built by the War Department during World War I. The construction was 20' concrete. This was replaced by 20' x 8"-6"-8" concrete in 1930, widened to 30' in 1930-33, and widened to 40' in 1938-39. In 1943 a sand asphalt surface was placed over the entire width.

Fort Belvoir was used as a combat engineers' training ground for Officers Candidate Training School during World War II.

In the vicinity is located Pohick Church, built in 1774, which was planned by a committee of three men including George Washington. Also, in this vicinity was the extreme southern defense line for the City of Washington during the Civil War.

*From Fort Belvoir to Occoquan Creek—Approximately 4 Miles—*This section of road was originally constructed of 18' x 6"-8"-6" plain concrete in 1926-27, widened to 30' in 1933, and widened to 40' in 1938-39. A sand asphalt surface was applied in 1942.

The bridge over Occoquan Creek was built in 1927. In 1943 a 23' roadway, steel deck and girder bridge was built parallel to the original bridge, providing the divided road at this point.

The settlement of Cholchester was established in 1753. It was here in 1608 that Captain John Smith found the king's house of the Doeg Indians. Four miles south of Woodbridge there was an old iron furnace on this road and iron was mined here on this stream before 1738.

*From Occoquan Creek to Fredericksburg—Approximately 32 Miles—*This road was originally built of 18' x 6"-8"-6" concrete in 1922-25, widened in 1933 to 30' with reinforced concrete, and widened to 40' in 1938 with reinforced concrete. Since 1938 the State has applied a bituminous concrete surface, the majority of which was applied in 1941. When the widening was accomplished in 1933, a new northbound lane was constructed in the vicinity of Stafford Court House,



Photo by U. S. Bureau of Public Roads.

Washington-Richmond road near Dumfries, Virginia—1919

making a divided road at this point. The north- and southbound lanes were surfaced with sand asphalt in 1944.

The divided road near Dumfries was also constructed in 1933. The concrete beam span bridge over Chopawamsic Creek was built in 1933. The bridge over the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg was completed in 1943. This structure is 1,416' in length, composed of the following spans:

- 2—65' Steel beam spans
- 1—25' cantilever arm
- 7—120' continuous steel girder spans
- 1—25' cantilever arm
- 1—65' steel beam span
- 4—81' steel beam spans

Along this road near Dumfries, skirmishes were held between the Confederate troops and the Union forces.

Giles Brent built a house in 1647 near Aquia Creek and it was here, after the Indian War of 1676, that the northern frontier of Virginia existed for ten years. The crucifix here was placed to commemorate the first Catholic settlement in Virginia. It was here that George Brent requested a proclamation of religious tolerance for all peoples of the Colony of Brenton.

South of the Bridge, Route No. 1 goes through Fredericksburg. However, a by-pass is now under construction which, when completed, will take the majority of traffic. The by-pass is on new location and will be two 24' plain concrete lanes, separated by a grass plot. This construction is approximately 4 miles and re-enters U. S. Route No. 1 south of Fredericksburg.

*From Fredericksburg to Richmond—Approximately 52 Miles—*The original road was constructed as 18' x 6" plain concrete in 1924-26, widened to 30' with plain and reinforced concrete in 1934-38, and widened to 40' in 1938-40. A 3" bituminous surface was applied at various times between 1939 and 1945. Approaching Richmond, a short section of divided road was built in 1939, the southbound lane 22' reinforced concrete and the northbound lane 30' bituminous surfacing on concrete.

The Town of Fredericksburg was established in 1727 and named for Prince Frederick, father of George III.

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