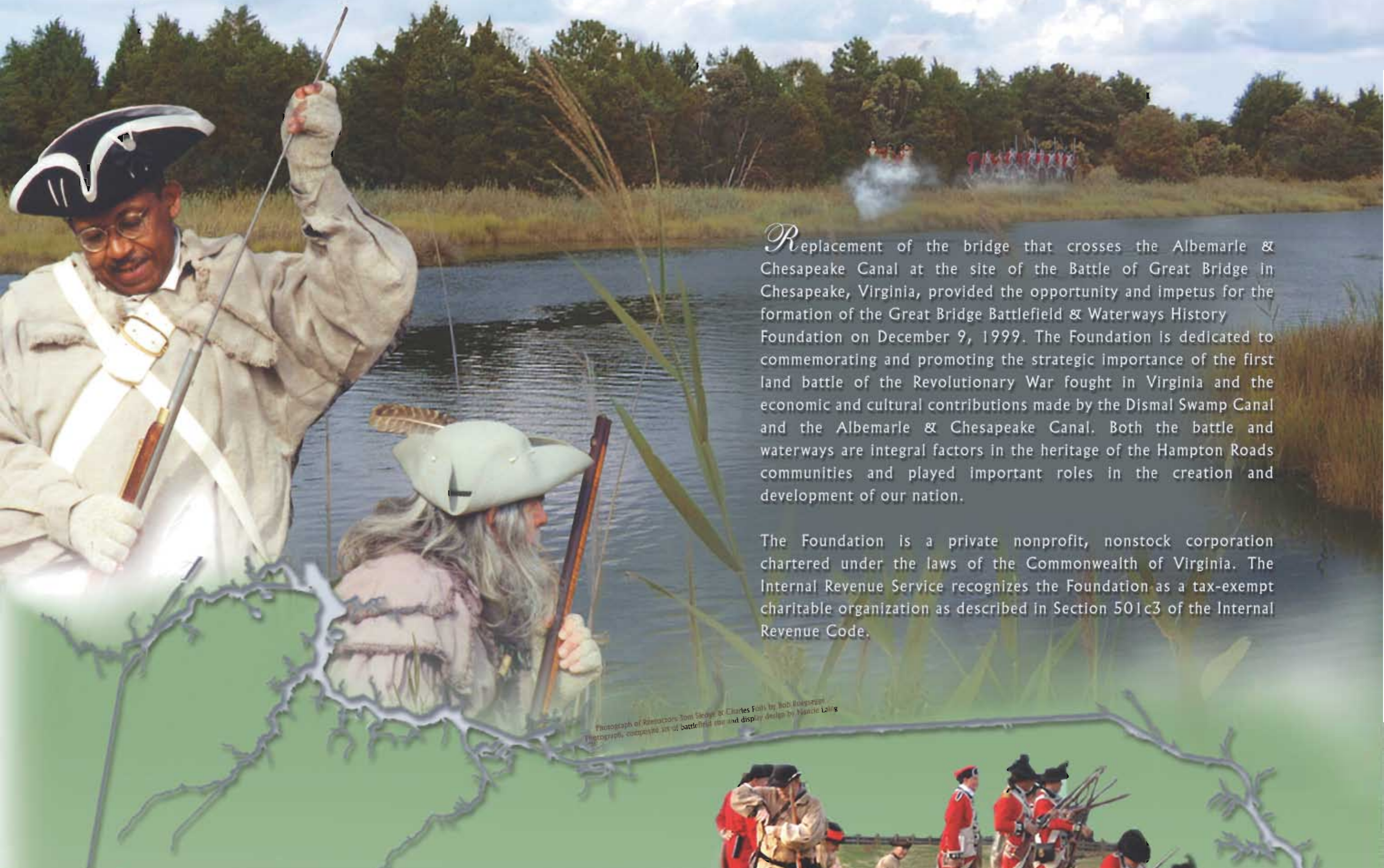


The Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation



Replacement of the bridge that crosses the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal at the site of the Battle of Great Bridge in Chesapeake, Virginia, provided the opportunity and impetus for the formation of the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation on December 9, 1999. The Foundation is dedicated to commemorating and promoting the strategic importance of the first land battle of the Revolutionary War fought in Virginia and the economic and cultural contributions made by the Dismal Swamp Canal and the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal. Both the battle and waterways are integral factors in the heritage of the Hampton Roads communities and played important roles in the creation and development of our nation.

The Foundation is a private nonprofit, nonstock corporation chartered under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Internal Revenue Service recognizes the Foundation as a tax-exempt charitable organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Photograph of Remontons from the film 'The American' by Bob Buehler. Photograph, composite art of battlefield site and display design by Nancy Lally.

Battlefield & Waterways History Time Line

May 25, 1763 - George Washington and others announce formation of Dismal Swamp Company.

1772 - Virginia House of Burgesses, presided over by Royal Governor John Murray IV Earl of Dunmore, authorizes survey of proposed canal route from Great Bridge to North Landing, later completed in the same year by Josiah Ives, Surveyor.

December 16, 1773 - Boston Tea Party demonstrates growing discontent with Great Britain's Revenue Acts and British Rule.

March 23, 1775 - Patrick Henry proclaims "Liberty or Death."

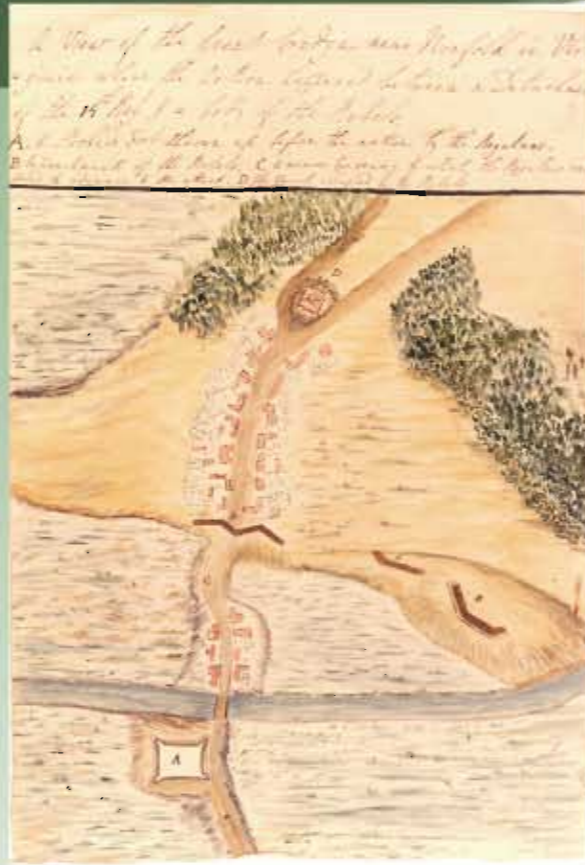
April 19, 1775 - Battles of Lexington and Concord.

April 21, 1775 - Lord Dunmore seizes gunpowder from the Public Magazine in Williamsburg.

June 8, 1775 - Lord Dunmore flees Williamsburg and soon establishes command in Hampton Roads.

June 17, 1775 - Battle of Bunker Hill.

August 5, 1775 - Third Virginia Convention appoints William Woodford Colonel of the Second Virginia Regiment.



The Battle of Great Bridge

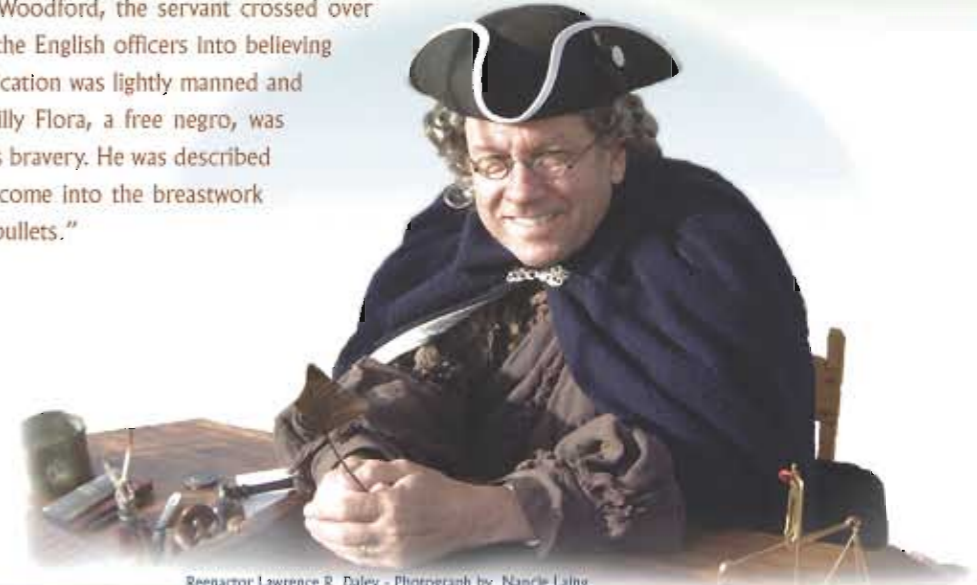
John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, fled Williamsburg in June, 1775 and came to Hampton Roads where he began to establish a British military base of operations in Norfolk. The critical importance of that action and the advantage it would afford the British at this early stage of the American Revolution is clearly demonstrated by the concern of George Washington expressed in a letter he wrote from Cambridge, Massachusetts, wherein he stated "... the fate of America a good deal depends on his being obliged to evacuate Norfolk this winter..."

The route through Great Bridge, including causeways across the swamps, was the only pass over which Norfolk could be approached by land. British regulars and loyalists clashed with American patriots there on December 9, 1775, in the first land battle of the Revolutionary War fought in Virginia. The American patriots succeeded in breaking the hold by the British over this critically important gateway to the Borough of Norfolk.

A letter from the Committee of Safety in Virginia, mailed from Williamsburg on December 16th and addressed to one or more of the Virginia delegates to Congress stated, "The action at Great Bridge proves more important than we expected. The victory was complete. The enemy abandoned their post hastily, and retreated to Norfolk, their loss near an hundred.....Captain (Samuel) Leslie, we are told, declared no more of his troops should be sacrificed to whims, and put them on board the ships, in consequence of which Norfolk is abandoned, and we now expect it occupied by our troops..."

Col. William Woodford, Commander of the 2d Virginia Regiment, was praised for his success and his humane treatment of the British prisoners. Shortly thereafter, he received his commission as Colonel of the 2d Va. Regiment of Continentals. He was later promoted by Congress to Brigadier, placed in command of the first Virginia brigade, fought in the battles of Brandywine and Monmouth, was captured at Charleston, S. C. in 1780 and carried to New York by the British where he died in November, 1780.

A servant of Thomas Marshall, the father of young John Marshall, who later became the Chief Justice and who also fought in the Battle of Great Bridge was credited with a share of the victory. According to Col. Woodford, the servant crossed over the British lines and duped the English officers into believing that the Great Bridge fortification was lightly manned and the men in low spirits. Billy Flora, a free negro, was also distinguished for his bravery. He was described as the last sentinel to come into the breastwork "amidst a shower of bullets."



Reenactor Lawrence R. Daley - Photograph by Nancy Lally

The Dismal Swamp & the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canals

The early histories of our historic waterways are related to events surrounding the early Colonial and Revolutionary periods.

The rich forests and fields south of the Elizabeth River in Virginia and in northeastern North Carolina gave the early settlers bountiful yields of shingles, naval stores, lumber, grain and tobacco. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, getting the fruits of their labor to market was a real problem for landowners.

In 1772, the Virginia House of Burgesses, presided over by Royal Governor John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore, authorized the survey of a proposed canal route from the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, through Great Bridge to the North Landing River and the Albemarle Sound. Josiah Ives, Surveyor, completed the survey that same year. Quite naturally, subsequent events and the outbreak of the War rendered the proposal moot for some time.

Soon after the War ended, attention turned to developing an efficient means of internal transportation. Both George Washington, a principal stockholder in the Dismal Swamp Company, and Patrick Henry, Virginia's first Governor and owner of Norfolk County's renowned "Green Sea," favored a canal following a route through the eastern border of the Great Dismal Swamp. It would connect Virginia's Elizabeth River with North Carolina's Pasquotank River, thus opening the Albemarle Sound to the Chesapeake Bay.

In February 1787, the Virginia General Assembly passed a bill for the digging of the Dismal Swamp Canal. Steam power had not yet come into being and it was to be dug completely by hand. Progress was slow and expensive. Most of the labor was by slaves hired from nearby landowners. In 1805, the canal was opened to log rafts and flat boats that were either manually poled or towed by draft animals that tread a towpath. The towpath evolved over the years in today's U. S. Route 17.

The Dismal Swamp Canal is the oldest operating artificial waterway in the United States. It is rich in history and folklore. Visitors and canal navigators travel where famous explorers and presidents have stood and literary giants have been inspired for over two hundred years. It is on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic Landmark.

Construction of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal did not begin until 1855, and only after numerous legislative acts were passed establishing companies and enabling construction. The engineer, who carefully put the pieces together to build this canal, envisioned it as a more efficient commercial trade route between the Albemarle Region and the ports of Hampton Roads. The new canal would be wider and deeper than the Dismal Swamp Canal. It had the advantage of primitive dredges and early steam-powered technology. Seven steam dredges on floating platforms gouged their way through low-lying mucky ground. They scooped out huge tree trunks and petrified logs that lay beneath the surface. The feat they performed would have been impossible before steam power became available.

The single lock, which balances the lunar tides of the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River with the wind-driven tides of the North Landing River and the Currituck Sound, is located on the Virginia Cut at Great Bridge.

Today, the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal is the preference for commercial craft while recreational boaters frequent the more romantic Dismal Swamp Canal. Both canals are maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers as navigational resources along the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

October 26, 1775 - British effort to land at Hampton is repelled by Col. Woodford and Culpeper Minutemen.

November, 1775 - Lord Dunmore declares martial law, establishes Fort Murray at Great Bridge, routs patriot militia at Kemp's Landing and begins fortification of Norfolk.

December 2, 1775 - Second Virginia Regiment, including the Culpeper Minutemen, join volunteer militia on the south side of the Great Bridge.

December 9, 1775 - The Battle of Great Bridge.

December 13, 1775 - Fourth Virginia Convention begins first open public debate on a declaration of independence.

December 14, 1775 - Patriot forces, now including companies from North Carolina, march via Kempsville into Norfolk.

January 1, 1776 - Lord Dunmore orders the bombardment of Norfolk by British ships.

February 6, 1776 - The Patriots burn remaining structures and Norfolk is abandoned.

May, 1776 - Lord Dunmore evacuates Hampton Roads and soon leaves Virginia.

June 12, 1776 - Virginia enacts A Declaration of Rights

July 4, 1776 - Declaration of Independence

The American Victory at Great Bridge:

- Lifted the spirits of the patriots and demoralized those of the loyalists.

- Prompted the Fourth Virginia Convention to begin the first open public debate on a declaration of independence.

- Enabled the patriots to advance to Norfolk, forcing Dunmore to evacuate and ultimately to leave Virginia.

- Prevented the British from using Norfolk as a base of operations in the south and from occupying and using the resource rich counties of Norfolk, Princess Anne and northeast North Carolina as supply resources for the British Army.

- Enabled the establishment of a patriot supply line from North Carolina to the Chesapeake Bay and the Continental Army.

- Enhanced the popularity of Col. William Woodford, a factor that influenced Patrick Henry to resign from the military and become the first Governor of Virginia.

- Enabled Virginia to serve as a major resource for troops and supplies free of major military action until the events leading to Yorktown in 1781.

December 30, 1780 - Benedict Arnold enters Hampton Roads, soon occupies Portsmouth and Great Bridge and conducts campaigns up James River.

July, 1781 - Lord Cornwallis occupies Portsmouth before sailing for York Town.

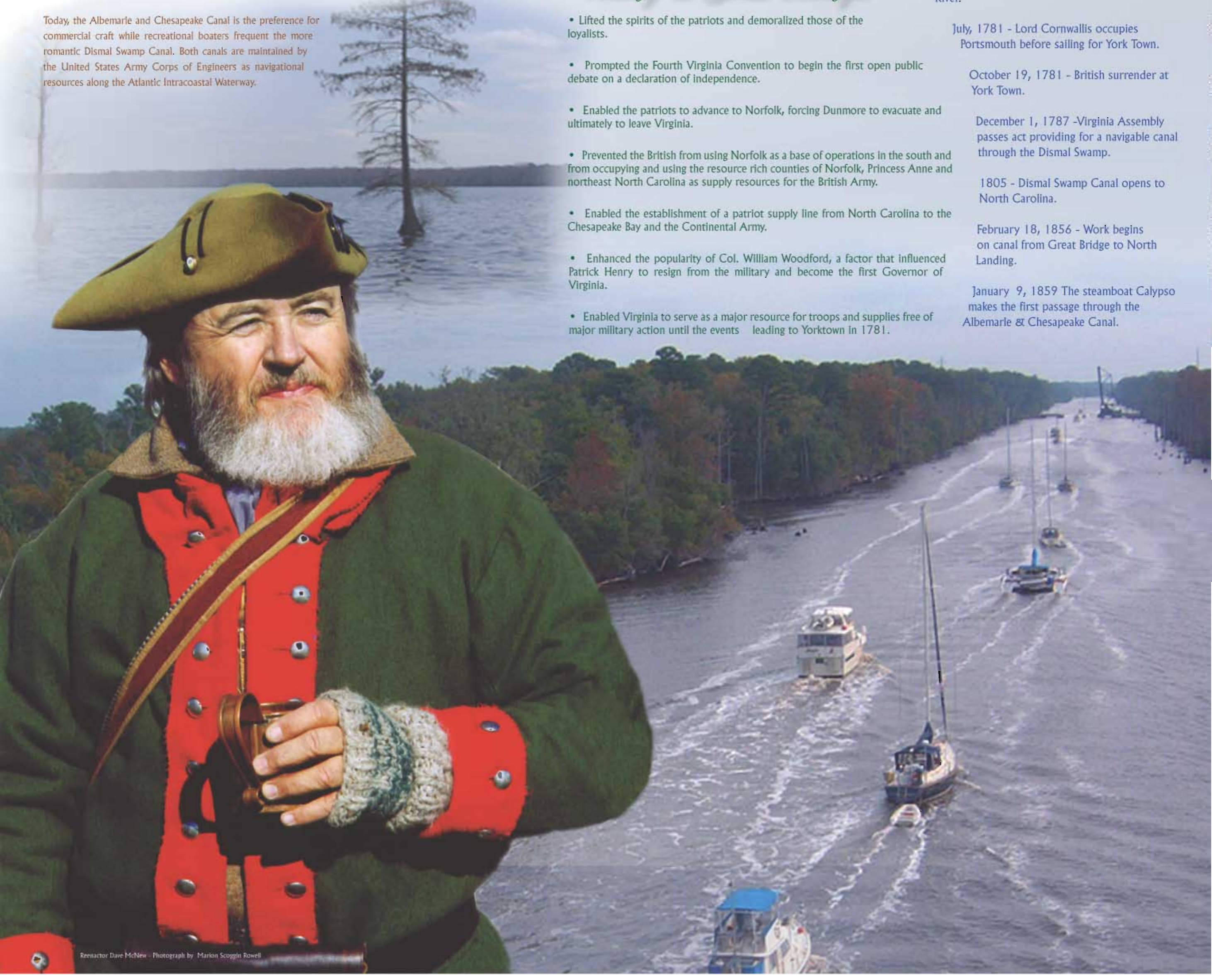
October 19, 1781 - British surrender at York Town.

December 1, 1787 - Virginia Assembly passes act providing for a navigable canal through the Dismal Swamp.

1805 - Dismal Swamp Canal opens to North Carolina.

February 18, 1856 - Work begins on canal from Great Bridge to North Landing.

January 9, 1859 The steamboat Calypso makes the first passage through the Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal.



Reenactor Dave McNeil - Photograph by Markon Scoppio Rowell