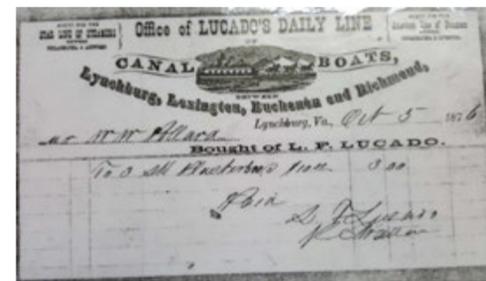


# Road, River, Rail: The Rise And Fall Of An American Waterfront



ABOVE is a photo showing Moses Bros. Lexington Roller Mill, with Miller's House in the background. AT LEFT is a view of Moses Mill Road looking north from near the Miller's House, which would have been to the left of this photo. The covered bridge over the Maury River can be seen in the distance under the railroad trestle.



THIS CANAL boat ticket from 1876 is among a number of similar items that can be found in the Miller's House Museum.

## Park Now, A Thriving Wharf Then

### A Brief History Of Jordans Point

By DICK HALSETH

The history of transportation at Jordans Point goes back centuries.

Native Americans came through what is now Rockbridge County on hunting and gathering expeditions. In the 18th century white settlers began traversing the path on their way south. Soon the trail widened beyond the breadth of a horse to the width of a wagon. Eventually tens of thousands of immigrants from Pennsylvania and other northern areas came south on the Great Wagon Road to settle in the Carolinas or follow Daniel Boone through the Cumberland Gap and on to Tennessee. Until the 1830s they had to ford the North (modern-day Maury) River at the tip of the Point.

Small businesses sprang up to serve the needs of these travelers. John Jordan and John Moorhead jointly operated a general store at the Point for many years. Others followed suit to serve the travelers and local population. A Mr. Campbell sold dry goods, groceries, queensware, boots, shoes and tobacco products and accepted grain, wood, dried fruits, and other products in exchange for goods. William Alexander, in 1778, opened a store selling dry goods, sugar, spices, stationery, and liquor. The Point was becoming a thriving business location.

In 1835 John Jordan built the first covered bridge over the river. With approval from the commonwealth he charged a toll for its use. As today, the tolls varied according to the conveyance used. This greatly facilitated the transportation of people, livestock and agricultural goods. The road now came directly past the Miller's House.

The Great Wagon Road served for north/south communication but the river provided access to Eastern markets. John Moorhead operated a river boat known as a batteau. These were the principal boats used for transportation of iron, tobacco and other agricultural goods to Lynchburg and east.

Industry came in 1806 when Jordan and Moorhead built a tubmill on the north side of the mill race next to the road to the bridge. The mill race was probably built about this time. Operating for a short time this mill would have ground corn, rye and other grains. Of course, there was the obligatory sawmill too. A few years later, on the south side of the mill race, a merchant mill was built on a much larger scale by Jordan and Moorehead. In 1807 a tilthammer shop was constructed as a single-story building housing a large water-powered hammer for forging wrought iron. By 1810 the entrepreneurial Jordan and Moorehead had built a two-story fulling mill for processing woolen cloth. Soon then came a cotton factory, a cooperage shop and foundry.

The industries at the Point provided employment for many, including slaves. After the Civil War the growing worker population prompted the Lexington Presbyterian Church to establish a satellite chapel on the hillside overlooking to Point. Beechbrook Chapel served that purpose, being championed by none other than Margaret Preston and her husband J.T.L. Preston.

By 1850 work had begun to bring the locks and dams from the James River and Kanawha Canal up from Balcony Falls through Buena Vista to Lexington. The batteaux were subject to the vagaries of the water level in the river and the time of year. Running the rapids of Balcony Falls was extremely dangerous and lives and cargos were lost. It took 10 years and 20 locks but Lexington finally had passenger and freight boats arriving at Jordans Point.

The wharf area was a busy place. Segments of the wharf and gauge dock can still be seen. However, a succession of floods entailed expensive repairs that strained resources, and the towpath was finally sold to the Richmond and Alleghany Railroad. The canal only operated to Lexington from 1860 to 1879 ... a lot of work and investment for only a few years of operation. But by that time the national railroad system was enjoying exploding growth. Compared to the packet and freight boat, rail transportation was faster

and cheaper. Economics won out.

By 1880 Lexington was served by two railroads, the Richmond & Alleghany coming from the east and the Valley Railroad coming down from Staunton and points north. The Valley Railroad planned to run rails to Big Lick, today's Roanoke, but they never got past White Street. The two railroads met at today's entrance to the

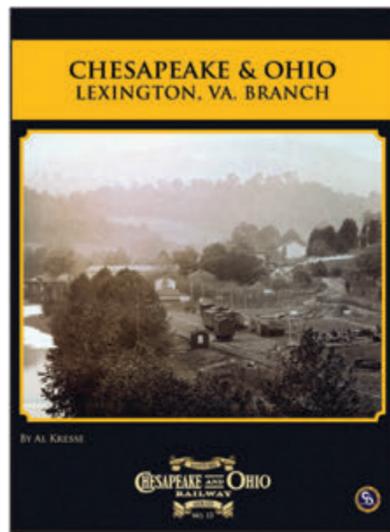
Chessie Trail on Old Buena Vista Road. The rails came down the north side of the river, crossing at Jordans Point where they headed into the city. A short spur track served the Point industries.

The railroads shared the Lexington station until about 1943 when the Valley RR, later the Baltimore and Ohio, discontinued service to Lexington. The several stations between Lexington and Staunton can still

be found along with bridges and right-of-ways. The Richmond & Alleghany, now the Chesapeake & Ohio/CSX, stopped passenger service in 1954. The rails were finally abandoned in 1969 after the disastrous flood caused by Hurricane Camille.

The fascinating story of Jordans Point's transportation and industrial history is told by the exhibits in the Miller's House Museum at the Point.

### Best Wishes to the Miller's House Museum!



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THIS PHOTO shows the railroad spur between Moses Miller on the left and the Beechbrook Foundry at the right. The present-day pavilion is located to the left of the track and the bathrooms to the right.