

# VILLAGE OF GREAT BRIDGE



## *A Vital Link*



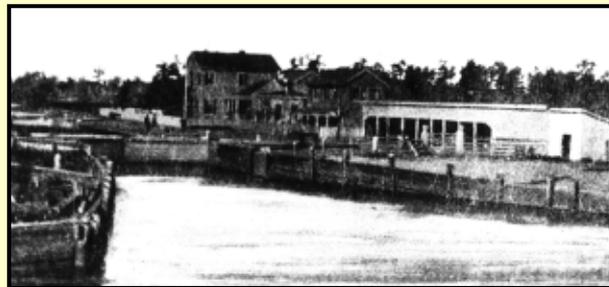
The village of Great Bridge was located at a strategic crossing of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. This canal, along with the Dismal Swamp Canal, was recognized as being a strategically important corridor by both the Union and Confederate forces.

The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal was built as a commercial rival of the Dismal Swamp Canal. The six-mile long canal cut through the flat Tidewater countryside to connect the South Branch of the Elizabeth River at Great Bridge with the North Landing River, Virginia, which empties into Currituck Sound. When the canal opened for business on January 6, 1859, it featured the biggest lock chamber in America at Great Bridge.

On the eve of the Civil War, the village of Great Bridge contained only a handful of houses. Most of the residents were associated with the operations of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. According to the Census of 1860, George Lowe was the landlord of a hotel that housed some Irish and English canal laborers. Solomon

Smith was a physician and Cary Woodward was the constable. Norman Cartwright, a native of New York, was a superintendent of the canal. James Lyons, one of the canal's general superintendents and Cornelius Mahoney, its engineer, lived in the same house with Cartwright. In another house outside Great Bridge lived Miles Boyles, another canal superintendent, with his assistant, the dredge engineer, and several others who worked on the dredge. Even though the canal increased the value of local commerce, farming remained the community's leading occupation.

During the early stages of the war the Confederacy benefitted greatly through the control



Chesapeake & Albemarle Canal entrance at Great Bridge, c. 1890.



Great Bridge, c. 1890.

of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. The Canal was the focus of Union efforts to block this link to North Carolina. On February 12, 1862, Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, USN, issued orders to Federal naval forces operating in the Albemarle Sound to obstruct the cut connecting with Currituck Sound. Lt. William N. Jeffers was dispatched on this mission in the USS *Underwriter*. When he arrived, Jeffers found that the Confederates had already blocked the canal themselves.

Once Norfolk was captured in May 1862, the canal came under Union control. The Federals quickly cleared out the canal of debris left by the Confederates to disrupt its use. Nonetheless, Confederate guerrillas constantly disputed the Union use of the canal. Numerous skirmishes took place around Great Bridge and on May 15, 1863, the local Confederates were able to capture and destroy two small steamers operating in the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal.