

Yadkin River Navigation Company ^[1]

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Yadkin River Navigation Company

by James W. Wall, 2006

The Yadkin River Navigation Company was chartered in 1818 as part of the [internal improvements](#) ^[2] program of progressive state senator [Archibald D. Murphey](#) ^[3], who, between 1816 and 1819, proposed far-reaching educational, economic, and governmental reforms to improve the quality of life in North Carolina. His plan for internal improvements—water-based transportation facilities and roads to promote trade—called for making the major river systems navigable and connecting them with canals and all-weather roads. Interest by legislators led to the naming of a Board of Internal Improvements in 1819, the hiring of a British engineer later that year, and the appropriation of funds to help finance the projects.

The [Yadkin River](#) ^[4], flowing north to south across the [pedmont](#) ^[5] (then becoming the Pee Dee River through upper South Carolina), was a vital segment of Murphey's program. Plans called for the Yadkin, [Catawba](#) ^[6], and Deep Rivers to be connected with the [Cape Fear](#) ^[7] to the Atlantic Ocean at [Wilmington](#) ^[8], and through the Pee Dee to the Atlantic at Georgetown, S.C. At places where the Yadkin could not be made navigable by straightening or deepening the channel (such as the Narrows and the Uwharrie Mountains area), canals, roads, or portage railroads would be built. A rock canal wall at Bean Shoals on the Yadkin between [Yadkin](#) ^[9] and [Forsyth Counties](#) ^[10], about 16 feet high and ¼ mile long, indicates the way the numerous rocky shoals of the river were to be bypassed.

The Yadkin River Navigation Company project failed due to insurmountable construction difficulties, lack of funds (in part the result of the economic panic of 1819), and the hostility of eastern legislators toward promoting development and growth in the Piedmont and [Mountains](#) ^[11]. Work ceased by the mid-1820s. Two towns, Clinton and Fulton, were planned on the Yadkin in southern [Davie County](#) ^[12]; town lots were sold but no construction was begun. From 1847 to the 1850s and later in the 1880s, efforts to make the Yadkin navigable were again undertaken without success.

References:

Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (1954).

James W. Wall, *History of Davie County* (1969).

Additional Resources:

NC Historical Marker, Bean Shoals Canal: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=J-68%20-%20BEAN%20SHOALS%20CANAL> ^[13]

[North Carolina Digital Collections](#) ^[14] search results for Yadkin River Navigation Company

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[Wall, James W.](#) ^[21]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[22]

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[3] http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/m/Murphey,Archibald_D.html

- [4] <http://yadkinriverstory.org/>
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