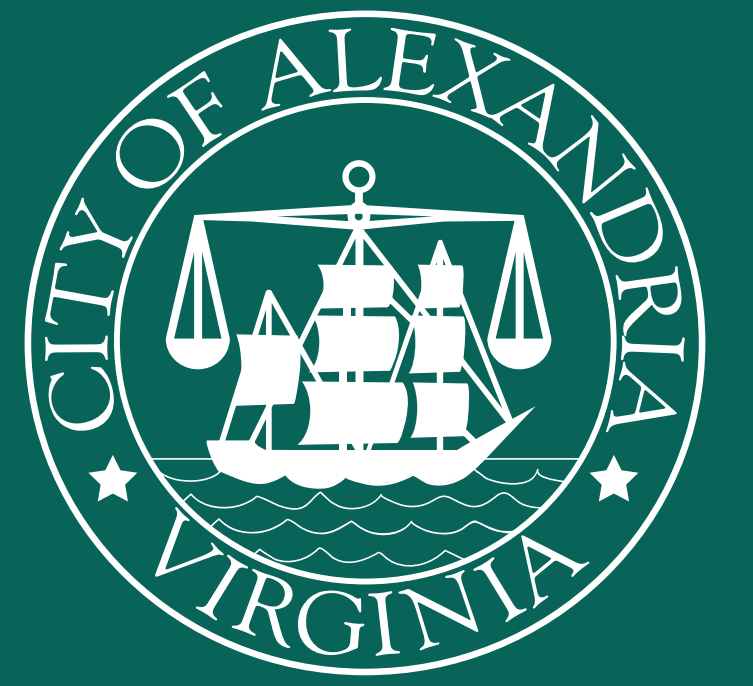


Alexandria Canal Turning Basin

(1843-1886)

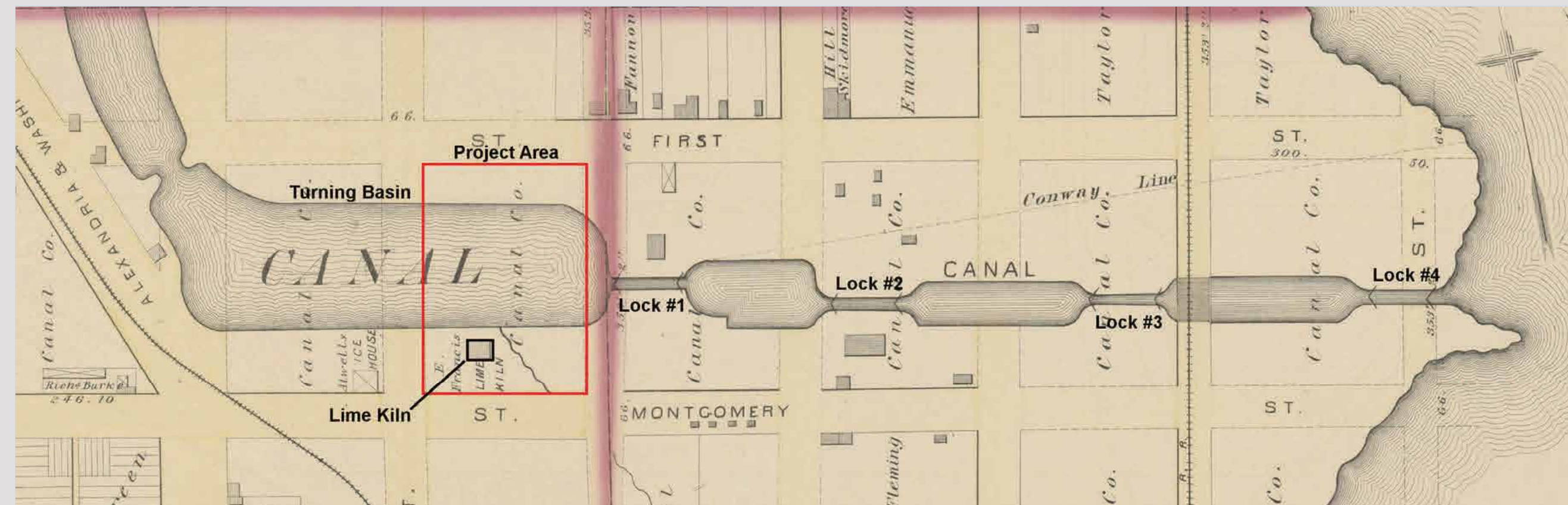


The Alexandria Canal officially opened on December 2, 1843. The seven-mile long canal extended from the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Georgetown to Alexandria's ports on the Potomac River. Boats brought coal, limestone, iron ore, port and harvested crops to Alexandria's ports, while boats heading north took fish, salt, building materials and other sundries.

Canal boats plied the Alexandria Canal until 1886, when a break occurred in the canal's 1,000-foot long aqueduct bridge that spanned the Potomac River in Georgetown. The federal government seized the opportunity to close the bridge, ending Alexandria's canal boat era.

A WIDE BASIN

The turning basin of the Alexandria Canal covered nearly two city blocks. Shown here on this 1877 map of Alexandria by G. M. Hopkins, the basin was 190 feet in width and 650 feet in length. Locks at the east end of the basin lowered and raised boats to and from the canal's outlet on the Potomac River. Upon completion, Emanuel Francis built a lime kiln adjacent to the turning basin, which allowed him to load and unload lime directly onto barges. However, few industries followed Francis's lead, choosing instead to locate near more accessible railroad lines.



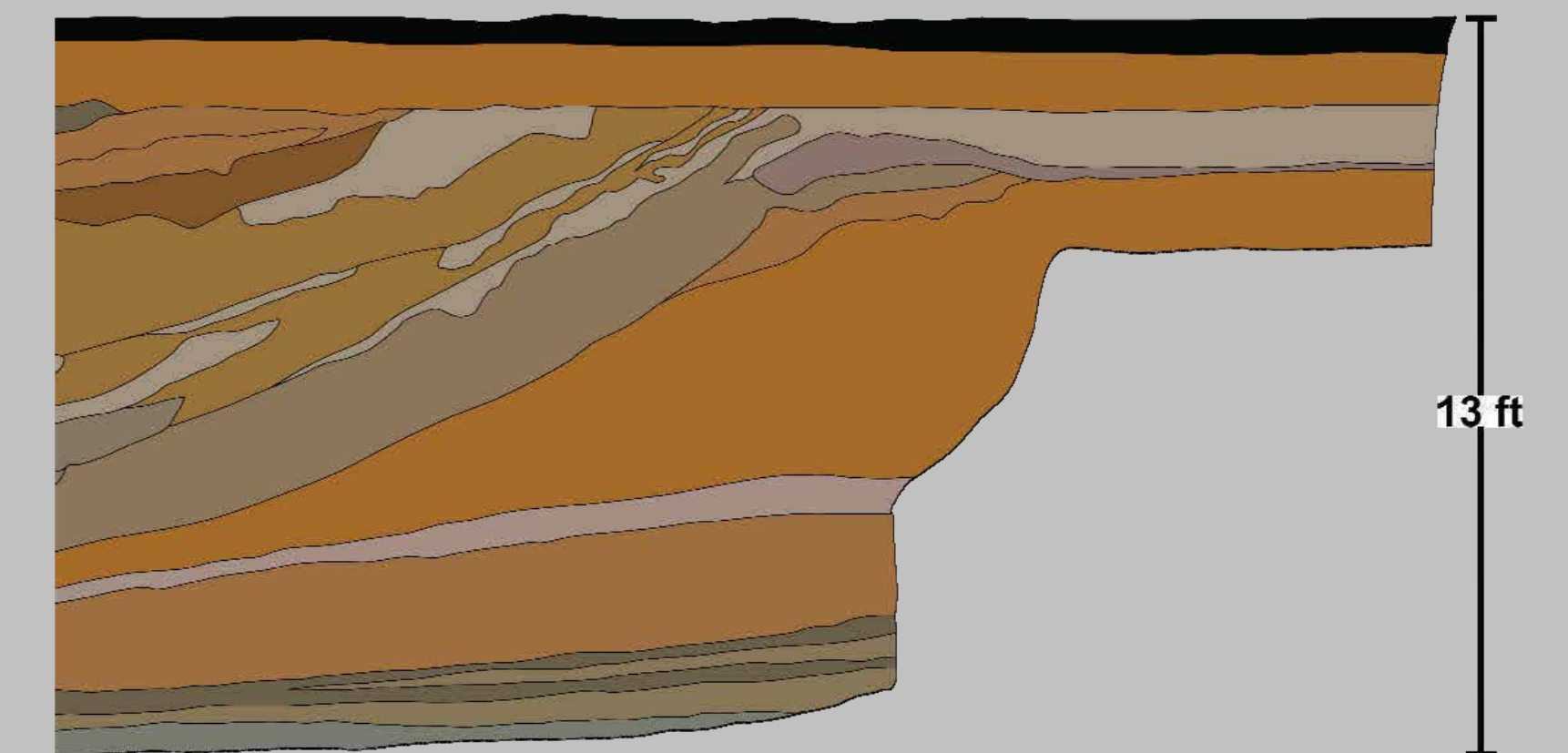
(Library of Congress)

This drawing to the right represents a portion of the soil stratigraphy (layers) associated with digging and then later filling in the turning basin. Building the turning basin was a massive undertaking. A typical daily work crew consisted of two dozen laborers and a half dozen horse carts. The basin needed to be big enough to allow boats to fully rotate when entering or exiting the locks, and to accommodate boats queuing up for the lift locks. Archaeologists discovered that some of the dirt removed from the turning basin was mounded on its north side to create a towpath.



(National Park Service)

The canal boat depicted above on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal is similar to the vessels that traveled the Alexandria Canal. Draft animals pulled these sturdy, workhorse boats along their seven-mile journey between Alexandria and Georgetown.



(R. Christopher Goodwin & Assoc., Inc.)



GABLES.
OLD TOWN NORTH

