

Petersburg National Battlefield VirtualCache Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Site 12: City Point Waterfront

N 37°18'58.881"
W 77°16'24.704"



Before General Grant's arrival, the City Point waterfront was an active port since the 1700's. On the eve of the Civil War a rail connected Petersburg to this point and with ships from American and international ports anchoring here. Even with all this activity the village of City Point remained small, but that suddenly changed in June of 1864.

With the Union Army's crossing of the James River and attack on Petersburg, City Point quickly became the Federal supply base and made City Point the second largest city in Virginia.

One observer wrote, "The river bank, rising up high, had been cleared and leveled, so as to make room for storehouses for supplies, and for a station for the railroad. All this had sprung out of the earth as if by magic, in less than a month. The railroad ran behind the docks; the locomotives were running back and forth, leaving long plumes of smoke, and on the ground trails of coals and sparks of fire. All was activity and movement. Legions of negroes were discharging the ships, wheeling dirt, sawing timber, and driving piles. Groups of soldiers crowded around the sutlers' tents; horsemen in squadrons went down to the river to water their horses. And, on the upper plateau, huts of different forms and sizes overlooked the whole scene below. A great village of wood and cloth was erected there where a few weeks before were but two or three houses."

To a great extent, Union victory arrived by sail and was delivered by rail and you are standing at the heart of it.

Visit Instructions: How many ships were there on average in the river on any given day during the Civil War? Why was this method of transportation and re-supply important?