

**RAILWAYS VERSUS WATER-  
COURSES: A PAPER READ BEFORE  
THE QUEBEC BOARD OF TRADE;  
ON THE 20TH NOVEMBER, 1883**

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Railways Versus Water-Courses: A Paper Read Before the Quebec Board of Trade; On the 20th November, 1883 by Jos. Shehyn

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**JOS. SHEHYN**

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# RAILWAYS versus WATER-COURSES.

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THE influence of railways on continental and inland traffic and their bearing upon the natural and artificial water-courses of the United States and the Dominion of Canada, including the question of canal enlargement and the further deepening of the channel between Quebec and Montreal for the purpose of attracting the Western trade to the St. Lawrence route.

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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

QUEBEC BOARD OF TRADE

BY THE PRESIDENT,

JOS<sup>eph</sup> SHEHYN, ESQ., M.P.P.,

ON THE 20TH NOVEMBER, 1883.

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QUEBEC:

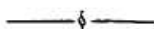
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1884.

## RAILWAYS versus WATER-COURSES.

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At a special general meeting of the Quebec Board of Trade, held in the Board Room, Exchange Building, on Tuesday, the 20th November, 1883, an interesting paper, under the above title, prepared by the President, Jos. Shehyn, Esq., M.P.P., was read, received, and, by unanimous resolution, ordered to be printed, as follows :



For years past, continuous efforts have been made to induce the Government of the Dominion to continue the improvement of our water-courses from Lake Superior down to tidal water, on the ground that, without such improvement, the western traffic would leave the St. Lawrence route. We all know how persistent the Montreal Harbour Commission have been in urging upon the Government the necessity of relieving them of the expenditure already incurred for the creation of an artificial channel between Quebec and Montreal and what pressure was brought to bear upon our Federal authorities to get them to assume the responsibility of all further improvements required to render the channel navigable for the largest actual and future steamships, on the pretext that this amelioration of the river St. Lawrence is in the general interest of commerce and navigation and consequently that the public, and not the Harbour Commission of Montreal, should bear the expense thereof.

The Quebec Board of Trade has, from the very commencement, been opposed to the pretensions of the Montreal

Harbour Commission, holding that the improvements in question, being of a local nature, ought as such to be borne by the trade of Montreal, which is directly benefitted thereby. But, as Montreal is now more urgent than ever in its demands upon Government to relieve it from a burthen which it was willing enough to bear at the outset when the works of improvement were begun with the view of drawing ships to its harbour, it may be opportune to consider the question of the future destiny of the great continental and foreign traffic of this country. My object, however, in treating so vast a question is not so much to seek to influence the members of this Board or to refute the Harbour Commission of Montreal as to bring the public mind to bear upon a subject in which it is largely interested and to place before those who have charge of our destinies such views as may be useful to them in determining the policy to be followed in all matters pertaining to our carrying trade—very few people, so far, having taken the trouble to look, in its broad, general aspect, at a question, which, so to say, has been pretty much left to the treatment of special localities according to their influence or their interests respectively.

The great political economy of the question I am about to discuss is not whether certain localities are to have an advantage over others, but what is to be the future destiny of the local and through transit traffic of our Confederation—what will be the great motors as regards the carriage of our products and those of the western plains to the seaboard—what is to be the future destiny of our railways in this country and what influence will our water-courses have on its carrying trade—in fine, will our great transit trade be absorbed by our system of railways or will it seek an outlet *via* our lakes, canals and rivers ?

These are the aspects in which the question must be viewed and our best efforts should tend to its solution from

as broad and general a standpoint as possible. But, to arrive at satisfactory conclusions, it is necessary to review the progress made of late years in the carrying trade both on land and sea and to note well the changes that have taken place. We must carefully weigh the volume of traffic carried on our inland water channels and the important part played by railways not only in the matter of local traffic, but in the influence they exercise upon that portion of it which seeks an outlet to the sea.

I do not anticipate that the conclusions I have reached will meet the interests or suit the tastes of every one. But I feel confident that, based as they are upon facts which can be verified by all willing to investigate the subject for themselves, they will stand the test of criticism. I must frankly admit that I would have been much better pleased if, after a serious study of the question in which we are all so much interested, I had arrived at conclusions more in accord with the wishes and expectations of all concerned for the rapid development and welfare of the Dominion through the acquisition of a larger share of the grain and produce trade, that is to say, by making the St. Lawrence the great vehicle for more of the immense transit trade annually finding its way to the seaboard. Facts are facts, however, and we must accept them as they are. It will not improve our position to allow ourselves to be carried away by our imaginations or to rest content with illusions.

I may say that my conclusions are not based on any mere flight of imagination. They are the result of a great deal of investigation and a careful study of the whole subject and are supported by the strongest possible evidence, being not only fortified by official statistics of various kinds, but endorsed by men perfectly competent to pronounce authoritatively upon the points raised. They may not satisfy every one. Men, as a rule, look at such questions from their own stand-points and those of their immediate interest.



But, in the present instance, my object is not to please individuals. It is rather to fearlessly and honestly put before the great body of the public my views respecting the routes and the mode of transport that are destined, in my humble opinion, as well to absorb the bulk of the through transit traffic, as to control the local distribution of merchandize and products of all kinds.

Without further preamble, therefore, I shall lay before you and the public the results of my observation and research, trusting that the arguments and facts which I shall bring to bear on a subject matter of such urgent and paramount importance may serve not only to impart some valuable information, but to determine the precise value of certain theories that have been emitted from time to time touching the destiny of our great water ways and the influence they are likely to exercise upon the western trade in attracting a larger share of it to our chief channel of navigation, the St. Lawrence.

#### QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED.

Is the deepening alone of the channel between Quebec and Montreal indispensable to the further development of the eastern and western traffic *via* the St. Lawrence?

Are the pretensions of the Montreal Harbor Commission that the undertaking should be carried out at the public expense founded upon irrefutable facts, and has that body upon reliable data attempted to satisfactorily prove to the public that a deeper channel will secure the western traffic and increase the amount of business over our water-courses west of Montreal?

Would the Government be warranted in adopting a policy dealing at once with a grave and intricate question of political economy, whose solution requires to be well considered, as it will necessarily involve the country in a

vast expenditure to carry out a scheme relative to our water-courses beneficial to the whole country and not to a single locality?

Is the deepening alone of the channel between Quebec and Montreal to be considered as a public work and should the cost of giving it a further depth of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet be assumed by the Government?

I have read with much interest all that has been uttered and written by the advocates of the scheme. I have also perused with great attention the memorial of the Montreal Harbor Commission and must candidly admit that all the pleas advanced in the connection have failed to convince me that they are right in their claim.

I have sought in vain in all the arguments used for one solid reason in their favor. Plenty of words I have found, but no substantial, unanswerable reasoning to uphold their pretensions.

#### MONTREAL'S PRETENSIONS.

It is true that Montreal boasts of being the head of navigation, styling itself *the* port of the Dominion; but, while proclaiming this fact to the world, it declares in the same breath to the Government that, unless a further depth of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet be given the channel at public expense, the trade will leave the St. Lawrence route, thus parading its pretension on the one hand to be the great port of the Dominion and denying its correctness on the other.

The Montreal Harbor Commission, by their own memorial to the Government, admit that the port of Montreal can only be made available for the general traffic upon certain conditions, that is, by the Government making, at the public expense, an artificial channel, by which, on the plea of seeking the general interest, they hope to bring the trade

to their own doors. According to their own confession, Montreal can only become the great shipping port of the Dominion upon one condition—that it be made so at the public expense. On the face of that confession, the futility of their pretensions is at once apparent. But, if further evidence of the weakness of their cause be needed, I advise all interested in the subject to carefully read their memorial to the Government and try to discover in it, if possible, anything tangible and of a nature to justify the expenditure which they desire to saddle on the public at large.

How comes it for several years past that they have failed to secure a larger share of the western traffic? Is this fact due to "want of water" in the channel between Quebec and Montreal or is it traceable to other causes over which they have no control?

If a greater share of the through traffic has not been secured, it is clearly not owing to want of water east of Montreal, for, with the improved channel, excepting a few of the largest steamships afloat which have to lighten before going up, all other steamships and vessels have had no difficulty in reaching that port. It cannot consequently be on that account that a larger share of the through traffic did not seek the St. Lawrence route or that we failed to secure our due share of the grain trade seeking an outlet over American territory.

The question with which we have to deal is invested with a deeper significance than the mere fact of having a little more or less water in the channel between Quebec and Montreal, and any one, who has made the least study of the subject, will at once come to the conclusion that we have to contend with other causes which have reduced the value and diminished the importance of our great river highway.