

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL  
COMMERCIAL CONVENTION TO  
CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF INCREASED  
TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES FROM THE  
WEST TO THE SEABOARD, HELD IN  
DETROIT, DECEMBER 15TH, 1871, PP. 1-63**

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# **VARIOUS**

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PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
NATIONAL  
COMMERCIAL CONVENTION

TO CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF

INCREASED TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

FROM THE

WEST TO THE SEABOARD,

Held in Detroit, December 15th, 1871.

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Published by Order of the Convention.

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DETROIT:  
THE DAILY POST BOOK AND JOB PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT.

1872.

## HISTORY OF THE CONVENTION.

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At its session in 1870, the legislature of the State of Iowa took action favoring the speedy establishment of uninterrupted water communication between the Mississippi Valley and the Atlantic Seaboard, and invited the co-operation of the legislatures and people of the country, and more especially of the Western and Northern States, in this work. The legislatures of several other States, more especially Wisconsin and Minnesota, have also repeatedly called the attention of the country to the imperative importance and necessity of making an effort to secure cheap transportation between the Mississippi Valley and the Atlantic Seaboard, by opening up continuous water and steam transportation between the two sections, and more especially from the foot of Lake Erie around the Falls of Niagara, on the American side; and have earnestly and persistently urged the people of the whole country to take measures to secure the opening of that route at the earliest practicable period.

In pursuance of such recommendations, the following named movement, to secure the assembling of a Convention at Detroit, was inaugurated:

At a meeting of the Board of Trade of the City of Dubuque, Iowa, held May 20th, 1871, the following resolutions, reported by a committee previously appointed on the subject, were unanimously adopted:

*Resolved*, That Congress be requested to make an adequate appropriation for the construction of a Canal around the Falls of Niagara, on the American side, equal to the maximum capacity of the Lakes, upon such terms and conditions as shall secure the opening up of the whole route, by private capital and enterprise, to an equal capacity, to the Atlantic Ocean, by the way of Lake Ontario, River St. Lawrence, Lake Champlain and Hudson River; and upon the further condition that the Government of the United States shall have the control of the whole route, so as to regulate the rates of toll thereon; and also have the right and power to purchase the whole work, after a limited number of years, to be named in the law making the appropriation, and thereby make the same free to the commerce of the country.

*Resolved*, That this Board would suggest and recommend that a Convention of Delegates from the States more directly and immediately interested therein, be called to meet at Detroit, in the State of Michigan, on Wednesday, the 23d day of November next, to take into consideration exclusively the foregoing proposition of water transportation on the route herein set forth; that the Governors of the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota Territory, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the New England States, be requested to unite in the call of said Convention; that they, and the Governors, Ex-Governors and Governors elect of all other States, Members and Ex-Members of Congress, Members of State Legislatures, Mayors of Cities, Presidents of unincorporated Towns, Presidents of Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, and other like bodies, and Editors of all newspapers, be cordially invited and requested to attend said Convention, as *ex-officio* members thereof, and that the Governors of the above named, and all other States whose people are interested in cheap transportation, Mayors of Cities, Presidents of unincorporated Towns, and Presidents of Boards of Trade, and Chambers of Commerce appoint such additional Delegates thereto as they shall deem advisable, provided, that State Delegates shall not exceed the whole number of Senators and Representatives in Congress therefrom. Delegates from Cities shall be restricted to three, and from Boards of Trade to six. That the Convention be restricted in its action, proceedings, and labors to measures which shall tend to the opening up of the above named water route; and that the foregoing propositions be submitted to Boards of Trade, City Councils, and other constituent and commercial bodies, for their consideration and concurrence.

*Resolved*, That the Governor of the State of Michigan, President of the Board of Trade, and Mayor of the City of Detroit, and John Burt, Esq., of Detroit, and such other persons as they may call to their assistance, be invited and requested to act as an Executive Committee, one part of whose duty shall be to invite distinguished citizens, and others, to attend said Convention and participate in its proceedings, who may

not be included in the general invitation herein extended, or who, from any other cause, might not attend, and to take such other measures as they may deem necessary to promote the efficiency and success of said Convention."

Attest with the seal of said Board attached, this 20th day of May, 1871.

T. L. BOWMAN, *Secretary*.

By L. A. THOMAS, *Secretary pro tem*.

In accordance with the resolution last above given, James Burt, Wm. I. Gilchrist, R. J. Gibbs, Dr. G. W. Scott, A. C. Call, M. Kingman, of Iowa; D. W. Ingersoll, of Minnesota; F. H. West, Wm. W. Jones, of Wisconsin; W. W. Wheaton, C. M. Garrison and John Burt, of Michigan, were constituted an Executive Committee, with Lewis A. Thomas, of Iowa, as Secretary, to call a Convention at Detroit, as suggested. The Committee sent the above resolutions to the Governors of several States, and the following, among many favorable responses, was received:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE,  
DES MOINES, IOWA, October 4th, 1871. }

COL. L. A. THOMAS, Dubuque county;

DEAR SIR: I have received yours of September 30th, together with resolutions, and printed circulars entitled, "A call for a Commercial Convention of the people and business men of the country, to devise ways and means for opening up continuous and uninterrupted water and steam navigation from the Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic Ocean."

I most cheerfully join the Governors of the East and West in this call, which I have signed and herewith returned to you.

I regard this effort, by the friends and advocates of cheap transportation between the East and the West, to open up continuous water and steam navigation of maximum capacity from the Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic Ocean, as the most important enterprise of its character that has ever been brought before the American people. *The West must have cheap transportation to the East and to Europe, or her continued development and consequent prosperity will be materially retarded.*

Even now we begin to see unmistakable signs of such a crisis. At this very hour, in the interior and all the western portions of Iowa, and all of Nebraska and Dakota, the products of the farm, after deducting interest on capital invested, expenses, &c., will make the agriculturist only a meager return for his labor in raising them. Never before has



Iowa had such a crop of corn, wheat, and other products of the earth, as that of this year. Yet of this immense production, little or none can be shipped, except wheat and pork; and the prices for these articles rule so low that the expense of getting them to market consumes the greater part of the whole crop. This, it will be readily seen, cannot long continue without producing utter prostration of our agricultural interests. For this state of affairs a partial, if not a full, remedy can be found in cheapened transportation; something that will materially reduce the expense of getting this wealth of field and stock to market. Railroads cannot meet this requirement. More than eighteen months ago, a leading Northwestern journal stated that the West "even now is at the end of its transit ability. Not another ton of freight can be removed from the West to the East with its present means and facilities of transportation, immense as they confessedly are." If this was true at that time (and I have not the slightest doubt of it), how much more emphatically is it the case at the present day; the facilities of transportation, thus fully occupied then, have not been increased; yet the population of the West has in that period of time been augmented by nearly, if not quite, a million of people, nine-tenths of whom are agriculturists, who by their industry and energy are adding immensely to her agricultural products, even while the fruits of their labor yield them little more than a bare living. And no amount of probable increase of railroad facilities will be adequate for the demand.

The advocates of the contemplated water route affirm (and I fully concur with them) that it is the only agent by which we can bring about cheap transportation, and draw producer and consumer together, as well as open up new markets in Europe, now closed to us because of the cost of reaching them. The friends of reform therefore urge enlightened, energetic, and representative men, in all parts of the country, to come up to this Convention, and aid in devising means and inaugurating measures to facilitate this great work, demanded by the interests of the East and the West. Cheapened transportation across the continent means cheap food for the seaboard, and cheaper merchandise for the West. Thus, farmer, merchant, mechanic, laborer, East and West, will for all time be benefited.

Respectfully yours,

SAMUEL MERRILL,  
*Governor of Iowa.*

Subsequently the following call was issued:

## A GREAT CONTINENTAL ENTERPRISE.

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### Continuous Steam Navigation from the Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic Ocean.

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WHEREAS, Resolutions have been adopted by Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, City Councils, and public meetings and other bodies in most of the principal cities and commercial centers in the Northern and Western States, calling for a Commercial Convention to take into consideration the foregoing proposition, which resolutions are all in substance as follows, to wit:

*Resolved*, That the business men in all parts of the country interested in cheap transportation between the West and East, be invited and requested to meet in Convention at Detroit, in the State of Michigan, some time this autumn, to devise ways and means of opening up, at the earliest practicable period, a continuous water and steam navigation route, of maximum capacity, from the Mississippi Valley, around the Falls of Niagara on the American side, thence by the way of Lake Ontario and River St. Lawrence, Lake Champlain and Hudson River to the Atlantic Ocean, by the nearest, cheapest and best route; also to petition Congress to assist in the consummation of this Great Continental as well as National Enterprise, by making an appropriation adequate to the construction of the works at Niagara Falls; also as to the expediency of proposing to Congress, that such assistance be granted upon the following terms and conditions, to wit:

1. "That Congress shall thereby secure control of all the works along the proposed line to the sea coast, so as forever to regulate the rates of toll and transportation thereon, as also to keep the same open to navigation.

2. "That Congress shall also thereby have the power and right (after a limited term of years, to be fixed in the law making the appropriation) to purchase all of such works through to the Atlantic Ocean, and thus make the whole route practically free to the Commerce of the country.

"That the Convention be restricted in its proceedings and resolutions exclusively to measures for the promotion and success of this enterprise, and that it petition Congress to legislate thereon separate and apart from all other questions and measures.

"That Governors, Ex-Governors, and Governors elect, of all the States, and especially of the Eastern, Western and Northwestern States, Members and Ex-Members of Congress, Members of State Legislatures,

Mayors of Cities, Presidents of Towns and Villages, Presidents of Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce, and like organizations, be requested to appoint such additional delegates thereto as they may deem proper and necessary, not, however, to exceed the following ratio, to wit:

"State Delegates not to exceed the whole number of Senators and Representatives from such State or Territory; three from each City or Town, and six from each Board of Trade, Chamber of Commerce, or like organization."

Resolutions (all of which are substantially embodied in the foregoing) have been unanimously adopted by the following civil and commercial bodies and public meetings of the people in various and distant parts of the country, to wit:

#### STATE OF IOWA

Board of Trade and City Council of the City of Dubuque, June 1st, 1871.  
Board of Supervisors of the County of Dubuque, June 5th.  
City Council and public meeting of McGregor, July 20th.  
City Council of Lansing, July 21st.

#### STATE OF WISCONSIN.

City Council and Board of Trade of LaCrosse, July 25th.  
Chamber of Commerce of Milwaukee, September 20th.

#### STATE OF MINNESOTA.

City Council of Winona, July 24th.  
City Council and Board of Trade of Redwing, July 27th.  
City Council of Hastings, July 28th.  
Board of Trade of St Paul, August 7th.  
City Council, Board of Trade and Lumbermen's Board of Trade of St. Croix Valley, Stillwater, August 4th.  
Board of Trade of Minneapolis and St. Anthony, August 3d, and City Council of Minneapolis, August 10th.  
City Council and Board of Trade of Duluth, August 9th.

#### STATE OF NEW YORK.

Public meeting and President and Trustees of Lewiston, August 18th.  
Public meeting and President and Trustees of Youngstown, August 19th.

#### STATE OF VERMONT.

President and Trustees of St. Albans, August 25th.  
Public meeting, Mayor and City Council and Board of Trade of Burlington, August 28th.

#### STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

City Council of Concord, September 6th.

#### STATE OF MAINE.

Board of Trade of Portland, September 6th.