

**THE NECESSITY OF A SHIP-CANAL BETWEEN
THE EAST AND THE WEST. REPORT OF THE
PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, THE
MERCANTILE ASSOCIATION, AND THE
BUSINESS MEN OF CHICAGO, AT A
MEETING HELD AT METROPOLITAN HALL, ON
THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 24, 1863**

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The necessity of a ship-canal between the East and the West. Report of the proceedings of the Board of trade, the Mercantile association, and the business men of Chicago, at a meeting held at Metropolitan hall, on the evening of February 24, 1863 by Various

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Board of Trade

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3

PROCEEDINGS.

On the 15th of November, 1862, the BOARD OF TRADE and the MERCANTILE ASSOCIATION of the city of Chicago appointed Committees to act jointly, in urging upon the National Legislature the importance of connecting the waters of the Mississippi with those of the Atlantic, by a SHIP-CANAL. A delegation of some of our worthiest and most prominent citizens was selected to proceed to Washington, and to urge upon Congress the importance of making an appropriation for the construction of this great work.

Congress having failed to take action in the matter, the Joint Committee called a meeting of the respective bodies represented by them, at the Metropolitan Hall, on the evening of Tuesday, February 24, 1863, to listen to the reports of the Sub-committees, and to take such further action as the importance of the subject seemed to demand.

The meeting was numerously attended by the most prominent business men, merchants, and property holders of the city, when the following proceedings were had.

On motion of Mr. GEORGE STEELE, his Honor, the Mayor,

F. C. SHERMAN,

was nominated as President of the meeting, which was unanimously adopted, together with the following

VICE-PRESIDENTS :

CHARLES WALKER,	W. B. OGDEN,	WM. E. DOGGETT,
D. KREIGH,	C. N. HOLDEN,	CLINTON BRIGGS,
E. W. WILLARD,	J. H. DUNHAM,	C. KIMBALL,
E. HEMPSTREAD,	D. J. ELY,	J. B. FARWELL,
H. W. HINSDALE,	S. S. HAYES,	HENRY FARNHAM,
FRED. TUTTLE,	H. E. SARGEANT,	J. B. TURNER,
C. T. WHEELER,	J. H. WOODWORTH,	

SECRETARIES :

REPORTERS POST, TRIBUNE, TIMES, AND ILLINOIS STAATS ZEITUNG.

His Honor, on taking the Chair, stated that the object of the meeting was to hear the reports of the committees acting under the authority of the Board of Trade, and the Mercantile Association, in reference to the great Ship-Canal,—a matter of great interest to the people, not only of this section, but of the North-West. As he was not familiar with the action of the Committee, he would enter into no extended remarks, but would introduce to the meeting Col. J. W. FOSTER, who would make a statement with regard to the action of the delegation appointed to go to Washington.

Col. FOSTER remarked: That having been appointed one of a Committee, on behalf of the Board of Trade, and the Mercantile Association, to visit Washington, to urge upon the national representatives the importance of connecting, by a ship-canal, the waters of the Mississippi with those of the Atlantic, primarily as a war measure, and incidentally as an outlet for the accumulating products of the West, and that measure having been voted down, he deemed it proper, on behalf of the delegation, to submit a verbal statement as to the causes, or rather the combination of causes, by which it was defeated.

He had supposed that a project of such national importance would not fail to command the sanction of the assembled representatives; that when they considered the past and prospective growth of the North-West, the exposed condition of the frontier, the navigable channels, ten thousand miles in extent, which would be brought under the control of our gun-boats, and the protection which would be afforded to our vast inland commerce, alike against foreign and domestic foes, they would not neglect their constitutional duty—"to provide for the common defense." That when they further considered, that the great grain-crop of the North-West had preserved us from national bankruptcy, had afforded full employment to our commercial marine, at a time when cotton had almost ceased to be exported, that it had furnished, during the past year, three-fifths of our domestic exports, and paid three-fifths of our customs-revenue; that the proposed construction would act as a stimulus to production to the farthest verge of cultivation, enhance the value of the public domain, cheapen the bread of the Eastern mechanic and laborer, and swell our foreign commerce, in a single year, to an

extent far beyond the mere appropriation asked for, Congress would not neglect that other constitutional obligation—"to promote the general welfare."

That the delegation had passed two months in Washington, urging these views upon the representatives of the people; that this project had received the emphatic endorsement of the President, and had, at the last session, been favorably reported upon by three of the Committees of the House, and that there was every reason to suppose it would pass by a considerable majority; but there were elements of opposition which, under the rulings of a hostile Speaker, and the manoeuvres of a hostile leader of the House, were allowed ample time to effect their combinations, in a manner to defeat the bill. That at an early day of the session, a representative from New York, (Mr. Roscoe Conklin) introduced a resolution of inquiry as to the most feasible mode of placing war-vessels on the Lakes, which was referred to the Naval Committee, of which his brother (Mr. F. A. Conklin) was a member. Both of these gentlemen had been defeated at the late election—a loss to the public service, which, he apprehended, would not be very widely deplored—in consequence, it is said, of their opposition in part to this measure; and the real object of this resolution was, not to elicit information, but to enable Mr. F. A. Conklin, by a report, to vindicate the propriety of his course. That report, to use no harsher term, was a tissue of misstatements. He would not criticise the New York portion, but so far as related to the Illinois and Michigan canal, its author, without producing one tittle of evidence, deliberately asserted that the cost of this improvement would be twenty, aye, thirty millions of dollars, instead of thirteen, and this "irrespective of the sums needed to pay damages to ensue from the overflowing of town plats, and lands between Lockport and the mouth of the river." It was an insult to Messrs. Gooding and Preston, who made those estimates, and who are known to the people of the West as men of integrity, and engineers of large experience, the one having been Engineer in Chief at the time of its construction, and the other its Superintendent for the past five years; it was an insult to Col. Webster, who, under the authority of the Secretary of War, was detailed to revise those estimates,—monuments of whose engi-

neering skill were to be found in every State from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico. And this was the criticism of a man who probably never looked through a theodolite, or was capable of correctly reading its vernier.

The speaker said it gave him no pleasure to make these accusations, but he knew no language too strong with which to characterize the acts of a man, occupying an official position, who, upon his mere *ipse dixit*, without being an expert on the subject-matter, and with no personal knowledge of the country, except such as he had derived from a casual horse-back ride through it many years ago, thus attempted to discredit the estimates of engineers of the highest skill and capacity.

These estimates, thus assumed without the shadow of authority, were adopted by the opponents of the measure, in the subsequent discussion, and persisted in with a hardihood of assertion truly surprising.

He then remarked that the elements of opposition which combined to defeat this bill were of rather discordant materials, but might be classified as follows :

1. Those who wished to do nothing to impair the ties existing between the Upper and Lower Valley of the Mississippi, and who hoped to make use of the importance of its free navigation as a means to force the North-West into some humiliating compromise.

2. Those who, like Rob Roy, had planted themselves at the gateways of our commerce, and were resolved to persist in levying black mail upon its transit.

3. Those who were jealous of the overshadowing growth of Chicago on the one hand, and of New York on the other, and were apprehensive that the execution of this project would tend still further to their aggrandizement.

He then stated that the analysis of the vote, by geographical boundaries, showed the following result :

New England threw her votes, with the exception of three, in favor of the bill ; New England, whom an Indiana member had charged, on the floor of the House, with having enriched herself out of the war, of owning the railway lines which penetrate the West, and of using those lines to levy extortionate charges upon their products ; New England, with an

enlightened patriotism, virtually said that, although we derive no immediate benefit from the construction of this work, yet, regarding it as one of vast national importance, and vitally essential to the prosperity of the North-West, we will cheerfully assume our share of the burdens for its construction.

Pennsylvania, on the other hand, from the outset, exhibited towards this measure, the most bitter and unrelenting hostility; and on the final action only one of her members had the manliness to vote in its favor. Her great mining interests, coal and iron, enjoyed almost a monopoly under the operation of the Morrill tariff;—a political structure which had all the incongruity and grotesqueness of a Chinese temple, but which, the speaker predicted, would soon be supplanted by one, harmonious in all its parts, and whose portals would be open for the admission and protection of *all* the great industrial interests of the country.

In the debate, Mr. Stevens, of Pa., Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, and by virtue of his position, the leader of the House, participated. This scheme, the most important to the North-West of any that ever occupied the attention of the National Legislature, was characterized by him as “a ditch,”—“an absurdity,”—“a preposterous sham,”—a measure which “no one seriously thought would pass, but might possibly command twenty or thirty votes.” Illinois was denounced as “grasping,”—as “making demands which no decent man could vote for.” Such was the statesman-like argument addressed to the House by its leader, upon a great question in which nine millions of people have a direct interest.

The North-West had a right to expect that Pennsylvania, by reason of her close commercial connections, and the protection heretofore extended, by our representatives, to her great mining interests, would give to this project a cordial support; and that her leading representative, in describing the conduct of a sovereign State, would at least have preserved the decorousness of debate.

The Border States cast seventeen votes against, and five in favor of this measure, for the reason that they feared it would divert trade from its ancient channels; and this feeling was shared by Southern Ohio, and Southern Indiana, whose influence

was sufficiently active to procure the passage of resolutions through the legislatures of those States in opposition to it. A majority of the Ohio delegation, untrammelled by these instructions, the speaker believed, would have voted for the measure. Perhaps Vallandigham expressed their true sentiments when he characterized it as a measure, calculated "to strike down the material interests of the cities of St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, for the benefit of New York." The speaker thought that this was a mistaken view; except that, owing to the precarious navigation of the Ohio river, the products of the Lower Valley, at certain seasons of the year, would seek this route; but to Missouri and Kansas, it would be the same as though their great river debouched into Long Island Sound, giving them a better navigation through this artificial channel, than through the natural one. But the objection resolved itself into this, that the products of the farmer of the North-West are to be loaded, for all time, with an imposition of fifteen cents per bushel, and are to be excluded from the markets of the world, except in the event of a national famine, lest it detract something from the trade of these cities. This is the old war of progress against individual, or local, interest, which has been repeatedly waged in every civilized society, and in which the former has always proved victorious; it is the argument of the tallow-chandler against the introduction of gas, and of the stage-coachman against the construction of railways. Public good must predominate over private or local interest.

Even Missouri, whose lands would be nearly doubled in value by the opening of this route, gave a divided vote; and Iowa, equally interested, cast her single vote into the hostile scale. On the other hand, Kansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan (with one exception), gave to the measure an undivided support.

He remarked that it was in the power of New York to have saved this measure. The city cast only one vote in its favor, and two against it; and from that quarter emanated the most virulent opposition. While Mr. Corning, the President of the N. Y. Central Railroad, gave it his hearty support, the representatives residing on the line of the Erie Railroad, and the Cham-