

**A LECTURE ON
CINCINNATI AND
HER RAIL-ROADS.
JANUARY 22, 1850**

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A Lecture on Cincinnati and Her Rail-roads. January 22, 1850 by Alphonso Taft

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ALPHONSO TAFT

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CINCINNATI AND
HER RAIL-ROADS.
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LECTURE
ON
CINCINNATI AND HER RAIL-ROADS.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
YOUNG MEN'S MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

JANUARY 22, 1850.

BY
ALPHONSO TAFT.

CINCINNATI:
D. ANDERSON.

1850.

CORRESPONDENCE.

CINCINNATI, January 24th, 1850.

ALPHONSO TAFT, Esq.—

Dear Sir :—The undersigned—most of whom were present and listened to your able and instructive Lecture, on the subject of "Cincinnati and her Rail-Roads," before the "Young Men's Mercantile Library Association," on Tuesday evening last—believing the subject to be one of great importance to the people of this city, and one upon which they should be thoroughly instructed, would respectfully request a copy of the Lecture for publication in pamphlet form.

Yours, very respectfully,

JACOB STRADER,
NATH. SAWYER,
EDW'D. F. MANSFIELD,
J. L. WAYNE,
B. STORER,
JAMES GOODIN,
CHARLES ANDERSON,
R. KING,
SAM'L. M. HART,
JAMES SAFFIN,
JAMES C. HALL,
W. D. GALLAGHER,
CHAS. STETSON,
W. GREENE,
JAMES HALL,
SAM'L. H. GOODIN,
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JOHN W. HARTWELL,
P. HOLLAND,
ROBERT MITCHELL,
JAMES GILMORE,
SAM'L. FORDICE,
J. P. WILLIAMS,
T. S. GOODMAN, & Co.,
HENRY STARR,
A. T. BUTLER,
JOSEPH C. BUTLER,
A. N. RIDDLE,

CINCINNATI, January 25th, 1850.

GENTLEMEN :—In compliance with the request in your note of the 24th inst., I place at your disposal a copy of the Lecture. I am sincerely gratified to know that you regard it worthy of publication.

Very respectfully,

ALPHONSO TAFT.

HON. JACOB BURNET, JACOB STRADER, Esq., MAJOR WM. OLIVER, AND OTHERS.

LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATION :

In casting about for a subject, important alike to the merchant, the mechanic, the professional, and the laboring man, I have found none, which, in my opinion, demands more profound attention from the present generation of the citizens of Cincinnati, than the true policy to be pursued by our city, on the subject of *Rail-Roads*. Inland cities, like Cincinnati, are peculiarly sensible to every change in the modes of travel and transportation.

The sites for cities, have not always been selected for the same reasons. Mount Moriah, and Mount Sion, were chosen as the site of Jerusalem, because their precipitous sides could be easily fortified. Petra was seated in the top of Mount Seir, carved deep in the rock, to guard against the attacks of enemies, in a barbarous age. And Rome herself, sat down upon her seven hills, to be secure from invasion.

But the modern, as well as most of the ancient, cities, have been the result, not of military defences, nor of war-like ambition, but of commercial intercourse. Wherever one country, or one section of a country, can most conveniently come and exchange its commodities, for the money, or the commodities of other countries, or other sections of the same country, *there* is a location for a city. The more extensive and populous the regions are, which may be thus accommodated, the more eligible will the location be. Com-

merce, therefore, whether foreign or domestic, has generally designated the ground, whereon great cities have risen.

But commerce depends on artificial, as well as on natural, causes. No mere location can secure the traffic which is essential to the growth of an inland city. Babylon, and the hundred gated Thebes, each possessed important natural advantages, and was in the commercial center of its own age and country. The golden tides of commerce continued to flow in upon them, till they came to regard their growth, as the course of nature; superior to human agencies, and not subject to any ebb. They never doubted, that their power and their glory would be immortal. Yet, with all their natural advantages, they did not maintain their position.

As artificial causes had chiefly served to build them up, so artificial causes, changing the courses of trade and of travel, reduced them again to poverty and solitude.

Thousands of the noblest sites for cities, are desolate, or unknown, for the simple reason, that other, and inferior locations, have been reared and sustained by superior improvements.

London, and Paris, have the advantages of location. London was always on the Thames, at the head of navigation; and has always been in the heart of commerce, by her natural position. But even London has been recently enriched by the tributaries of modern improvement. If twenty new rivers, each equal to the Thames, had opened their several channels from different points of the compass, and had all passed by London, to the sea, they could not have so multiplied the facilities for trade and commerce to that metropolis, as have the Rail-Roads which have put her in hourly communication with almost all parts of the kingdom. These are the works of men's hands. But their power and influence have not been disregarded, even by

London. Two millions of people, however, congregated on the banks of the Thames, in the very eye of the nation, and the world, owning half the wealth of the kingdom, were in no great peril from any changes in the modes of travel and conveyance. In our own country, Boston may be considered similarly situated, in relation to New England; and New York, in relation to the middle States. The spacious harbor of New York, is no where else, but in the bay of Manhattan; where all the commerce of the Atlantic can safely ride, and where the products of a vast inland country are compelled to seek a market. Boston, too, has her renowned harbor, second only to that of New York, from which she is so far remote, as to be left the unrivaled emporium of New England.

Cincinnati has no such *monopoly* of natural advantages. She stands upon the banks of a noble river. But those banks are not, like the coast of the Atlantic, accessible to commerce, by a few widely separated *harbors only*. The banks of the Ohio form one continuous harbor, everywhere safe from the winds and the waves, and everywhere welcoming the approach of vessels, and of business.

They who founded Cincinnati, did not contemplate the changes which were to be wrought in the courses of travel and trade by internal improvements, nor their influence upon the destinies of cities. Their selection, however, was fortunate, and the present generation have only to improve her natural advantages, and Cincinnati may gain far more than she can lose by the *Locomotive*; which, leaving the liquid element, has taken to the land, and now raises, and depresses, towns and cities, at its pleasure.

Cincinnati owed her birth, as a mart of business, to the Ohio. Her prosperity has ebbed, and flowed, with the rising, and the falling, of the river. Like Egypt, she was bound to ascribe her wealth to her river. If the Ohio has not,

like the Nile, enriched, by its annual overflow, the country upon its banks, it has borne away upon its bosom, the vast products of a soil which needed not the overflowing of waters to enrich it, to the most eligible markets, and brought back the commodities for which those products were exchanged.

But, although the city, in its origin, was the product of the river, it is indebted to other causes for its growth. They, who controlled the destinies of Cincinnati, foresaw that access to foreign ports, through the Ohio and the Mississippi, would be vain, without easy communication with the interior. Neither individual enterprise, nor highway taxes, could make the turnpike roads, which were essential to the business of the city. Turnpike companies were organized under legislative charters; associating the public-spirited people of the city, with a kindred class of citizens in the country; which, after struggles and sacrifices, accomplished the work. The McAdam turnpike roads were a great advance on the primitive miry clay, which preceded them.

But the demands of commerce were not yet satisfied. *Canals* had been found useful elsewhere, and the State Legislature was induced to adopt them here. The Miami Canal was a result of this liberal policy on the part of the State Government. This, with the extension to the Maumee, was our share of the system of canal improvements, commenced by the State about the year 1825, of which the Ohio Canal formed a leading part; for all which we should be none the less thankful, that the extension came late and was grudgingly bestowed.

It came at last, complete, and with it came an increase of traffic, and a corresponding advance in the value of property in the city, and in the country.

In the meantime, it was discovered by those who re-