

**THE NECESSITY OF A SHIP-CANAL BETWEEN  
THE EAST AND THE WEST: REPORT OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS FOR THE CITY  
OF CHICAGO, SUBMITTED TO THE  
NATIONAL CONVENTION ASSEMBLED AT  
CHICAGO, JUNE 2, 1863**

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1863.



## NECESSITY OF A SHIP-CANAL BETWEEN THE EAST AND WEST.

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“The Congress shall have power to levy taxes, duties, imposts and excises—to provide for the COMMON DEFENSE, and promote the GENERAL WELFARE of the United States.”—CONSTITUTION.

*The Committee, appointed to collect statistics as to the importance of uniting the waters of the Mississippi with those of the Atlantic by a Ship-Canal, have discharged the duties imposed upon them, and submit the following*

### REPORT.

Two schemes for the accomplishment of this object have been brought prominently before the country, and failed, only by a few votes, to receive the sanction of the Thirty-Seventh Congress.

1. To make a slack-water navigation of the Illinois and Des Plaines rivers, and to enlarge the present Illinois and Michigan canal to such dimensions as shall admit of the passage of gun-boats, and of the largest class of Mississippi steamers, to the Lakes.

2. To enlarge the locks of the Erie and Oswego canals of New York, to such dimensions as shall pass an iron-clad gun-boat 25 feet wide and 200 feet long, and drawing not less than 6 feet and 6 inches water.

The cost of construction of the first will be about \$13,500,000, and that of the second, \$3,500,000;—detailed estimates of which will be presented to the Convention.

In devising an extensive system of internal communication, it is of the highest importance to inquire into the resources of the region which it shall traverse; its topography, soil and climate; its population, products of industry and internal commerce; and its past and prospective growth;—all are elements to be taken into consideration to enable us to form an intelligible opinion as to the necessity of executing such works, and the scale of magnitude on which they should be projected.

## PHYSICAL CHARACTER OF THE MISSISSIPPI BASIN.

The Valley of the Mississippi, bounded on the one hand by the Rocky mountains, and on the other by the Alleghanies, embraces a drainage area of 1,244,000 square miles, which is more than one-half of the entire area of the United States. The Upper Mississippi Valley is composed of three subordinate basins, whose respective dimensions are as follows:

The Ohio basin.....	214,000	square miles.
The Upper Mississippi.....	169,000	" "
The Missouri.....	518,000	" "
Making a total of.....	<u>901,000</u>	" "

Its navigable rivers are as follows:

Missouri, to near the Great Falls.....	2,160	miles.
Missouri, above Great Falls to Three Forks.....	150	"
Osage, to Osceola.....	200	"
Kansas.....	100	"
Big Sioux.....	75	"
Yellow-stone.....	800	"
Upper Mississippi, to St. Paul.....	658	"
St. Anthony, to Sauk Rapids.....	80	"
Above Little Falls, to Pokegama Falls.....	250	"
Minnesota, to Patterson's Rapids.....	295	"
St. Croix, to St. Croix Falls.....	60	"
Illinois, to La Salle.....	220	"
Ohio, to Pittsburgh.....	975	"
Monongahela, to Geneva (slack-water, 4 locks,).....	91	"
Muskingum, to Dresden " 8 ".....	100	"
Green River, to Bowling Green " 5 ".....	186	"
Kentucky, to Brooklyn " 5 ".....	117	"
Kanawha, to Gauley Bridge.....	100	"
Wabash, to Lafayette.....	335	"
Salt, to Shepherdsville.....	30	"
Sandy, to Louisa.....	25	"
Tennessee, to Muscle Shoals.....	600	"
Cumberland, to Burkesville.....	370	"
Total navigation.....	<u>8,987</u>	"

NOTE.—Steamboats have ascended the Des Moines to Des Moines City, Iowa river to Iowa City, Cedar river to Cedar Rapids, and the Maquoketa to Maquoketa City, but only during temporary floods.

It would thus appear that the internal navigation of the Upper Mississippi Valley is about 9,000 miles in extent; but, during



the summer months, even through the main channels, it becomes precarious, and at times is practically suspended.

The Mississippi Valley, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as one great plain between two diverging coast ranges, elevated from 400 to 800 feet above the sea. St. Paul, the head of the navigation of the Mississippi, is 800 feet above the ocean; Pittsburgh, at the junction of the Monongahela and Alleghany, forming the Ohio, 699 feet; Lake Superior on the north, 627 feet; but the water-shed on the west, at South Pass, rises to nearly 7,500 feet.

It is traversed by no mountain ranges, but the surface swells into hills and ridges, and is diversified by forest and prairie. Leaving out the sterile portions west of the Missouri, the soil is almost uniformly fertile, easily cultivated, and yields an abundant return. The climate is healthy and invigorating, and altogether the region is the most attractive for immigration of any portion of the earth.

#### PHYSICAL CHARACTER OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

The sources of the Mississippi on the east interlock with those of the St. Lawrence, which, with its associated lakes and rivers, presents a system of water-communication of nearly equal extent and grandeur.

TABLE SHOWING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE FIVE GREAT AMERICAN LAKES.

LAKES.	Greatest length.	Greatest breadth.	Height above sea.	Area in square miles.
	MILES.	MILES.	FEET.	
Superior.....	355	180	627	32,000
Michigan.....	320	100	578	22,000
Huron.....	260	160	578	20,400
Erie.....	240	80	565	9,600
Ontario.....	180	35	232	6,300
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	.....	.....	.....	90,300

The entire area drained by these lakes is estimated at 335,515 square miles, and their shore lines are nearly 5,000 miles in extent, while those of the Atlantic are but 3,500.

These rivers are as diverse in character as in direction. The

Mississippi is the longer, but the St. Lawrence discharges the greater volume of water; the one abounds in difficult rapids, the other in stupendous cataracts; the one is subject to great fluctuations, the other preserves an almost unvarying level; the waters of the one are turbid, those of the other possess an almost crystal purity; the one affords few lake-like expansions, the other swells into vast inland seas. Both have become the great highways of commerce, enriching the regions through which they flow, and supplying the inhabitants with the varied products of distant climes. (*Foster and Whitney's Report on Lake Superior.*)

The commerce of these lakes, whose annual value reaches \$450,000,000—more than twice the external commerce of the whole country—is carried on by a fleet of 1,843 vessels, of the following classes:—

	No.	Tonnage.	Value.
Steamers.....	143	53,622	\$2,190,300
Propellers.....	254	70,263	2,573,300
Barks.....	74	38,203	982,900
Brigs.....	85	24,831	526,200
Schooners.....	1,068	227,831	5,955,350
Sloops.....	16	667	13,770
Barges.....	3	3,719	17,000
<b>TOTALS.....</b>	<b>1,843</b>	<b>418,026</b>	<b>\$13,257,020</b>

The following are the distances of some of the commercial routes, taking Chicago as the initial point:

Chicago to Fond du Lac Superior.....	900 miles.
“ “ Georgian Bay.....	650 “
“ “ Buffalo.....	950 “
“ “ Gulf of St. Lawrence.....	1,950 “

#### PROGRESS OF DEVELOPMENT.

The first colony of English extraction, planted in the territory of the Upper Mississippi, was in 1788—just seventy-five years ago—at Marietta, within the present limits of Ohio. This was the origin of that spirit of colonization, which, within the lifetime of many living men, has peopled this region with nine millions of human beings; has subdued and brought under cultivation, an area greater than that of all the cultivated lands of the British Empire; has connected the principal commercial points with a net-work of railways more than eleven thousand miles in extent; and has built up a domestic industry, the value of whose annual

product is in excess of three hundred and fifty millions of dollars. Out of this territory have been carved not less than nine States, which are indissolubly linked together by a similarity of conditions in soil and climate, and by the geographical features of the country. They have already received the appellation of the "Food-producing" States—an appellation which they are destined to retain for all time.

The rivers and the lakes, which water this region, offer the most magnificent system of internal communication to be found on the surface of the earth. No mountain barriers interpose to divide the people into hostile clans, or divert the great currents of trade in their flow to the markets of the world. With a soil sufficiently rich in organic matter for fifty successive crops; with almost boundless fields of coal, stored away for future use; with vast deposits of the useful ores, and the precious metals, on the rim of the great basin; and with a climate most favorable to the development of human energy, it is impossible for the mind, even in its most daring speculations, to assign limits to the growth of the North-West. When all of these elements of wealth, now in a crude state, shall have been fully developed, there will be an exhibition of human power and greatness such as no other people ever attained.

The subjoined table (A.), compiled from the Census returns of the United States, exhibits the progress of population, as well as of cultivation in these States, from 1800 to 1860; and it will be perceived that, during this period, in both these respects, the increase has been each decade about two-fold.

The appended table (B.), also compiled from the Census returns, shows that the increase in agricultural products and in domestic animals has been in about the same proportions. Comparing the whole superficial contents of these States with the portions cultivated, it will be seen that only about 15½ per cent. of the surface has been subdued; and, if population and cultivation increase in the same ratio in the future as they have in the past, before the lapse of another decade there will be collected annually, on the borders of the Great Lakes, more than 200,000,000 bushels of cereals for exportation, giving employment to a fleet of more than 3,000 vessels, and requiring avenues of more than twice the capacity of existing ones.