

P E T I T I O N

From GEORGE O'KILL STUART, Esquire, and others, Inhabitants of the City of Quebec,
praying that the Legislature of this Province will co-operate with the Legislatures of
Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in procuring the construction of a Railroad from
QUEBEC to HALIFAX.

To the Honourable the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL of the Province of Canada, in Provincial
Parliament assembled.

The Petition of the Inhabitants of Quebec and the vicinity :—

HUMBLY SHEWETH,

That your Petitioners beg to approach your Honorable House, and to solicit your early and favourable consideration of the great project lately put before the people of British North America, namely, that of connecting the River St. Lawrence and the Atlantic by means of a Railway from Halifax to Quebec; your Petitioners being satisfied that the question of its practicability may now be conclusively settled; and, that if proper steps be taken, the aid of Her Majesty's Government and of capitalists may be obtained, which is essential to its completion.

That this great enterprise may be regarded in both a national and commercial point of view; and, however considered, the results anticipated rise into such importance and splendour, as to render it a question worthy of the best attention of the Legislature of Canada. In a national point of view, your Petitioners believe it to be now indispensable for military protection and safety, and if not carried into effect, that the British ascendancy may, on this continent, be impaired, if not lost for ever. In the event of a war it will form a great commercial highway for the transit of the produce of Upper Canada, in its passage to the markets of Europe. It will establish the speediest and the cheapest route for the conveyance of Mails and Passengers from the British North American Provinces and the contiguous territories to the old world; and by giving to the Parent State a new influence in settling those principles of international polity which will govern the future relations subsisting between her and the neighbouring Republic, will produce important results to the prosperity both of the population of these Colonies and of the United Kingdom.

That your Petitioners are satisfied from the enquiries conducted by themselves and others, that its prospects as a commercial speculation are far more hopeful than was at first believed; and without entering into details, too comprehensive and cumbrous to introduce here, your Petitioners are assured that, if Her Majesty's Government will devote to it such grant as its national importance demands, and your Honorable House will afford such aid as the state of the finances fully warrant, the balance of capital may be raised, from the opinion now becoming prevalent both in London and here, that it promises to be a safe and eligible investment for capital.

Your Petitioners believe that, if on an estimate being had, the cost will not exceed the sum of three millions, and the Imperial Government give to it a grant of one million or one and a half million; the entire line, before long, will yield a fair return for the capital expended; and that the Legislature, in giving a conditional pledge, as has been suggested for the payment of interest at the rate of four per cent, on half of the balance of that capital,—the Legislatures of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia being bound to secure the other half,—would be making a judicious appropriation of the public revenue. That your Petitioners recommend that every requisite condition and guarantee should be sought to ensure safety; but it is obvious to your Petitioners, that, if the redemption of this pledge be made dependent, on the question of practicability being settled after a skilful survey, on a grant being obtained from Her Majesty's Government, and on the balance of capital being raised, the Legislature will incur no risk of embarking in any premature or impracticable enterprise, because it is clear that all the questions incident to security will be decided before the work is begun or the pledge sought be redeemed.

Your Petitioners are convinced that unless a liberal grant be obtained from Her Majesty's Government, it would not be prudent to engage in the undertaking. But they are led to believe that the present is a time in which such aid may be applied for under very favorable auspices.

Your Petitioners have been informed that Her Majesty's Government, designing to construct a Great Military Road through the Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, has been recommended to devote the funds provided for it, to this project, and in consequence thereof have suspended a final decision in relation to it until the opinion of the Legislatures have been declared. Your Petitioners are further under the belief that the late changes in the commercial tariff of Great Britain, which Her Majesty's Government have introduced for the relief of the British people, but which for a time at least are likely, by the removal of protection before extended to Colonial produce, to affect injuriously the prosperity of Canada and the sources of the public revenue, will induce Her Majesty's Government to view this enterprize with peculiar favor; and your Petitioners are therefore persuaded, if this opportunity be lost by inaction on the part of your Honorable House, and by a refusal to meet the wishes and to concur in the policy declared by the Legislatures of the sister Provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, that the enterprize will be postponed for an indefinite period of time, and until the developments of the country are such as to render it feasible solely as a commercial speculation.

That although a considerable portion of the line now contemplated lies in Lower Canada, your Petitioners regard it as an enterprise of equal importance and value to the people of Upper Canada.

That it will constitute the first step of that grand line of Railway, which, beginning at the Atlantic will terminate at the waters of Lake Huron, and give a fresh and powerful impetus to those several projects now contemplated of connecting the rising city of Montreal with the cities of Kingston, Toronto and others in Western Canada. And looking to the issues of the future, that it will create that bond of union and strength—that combination of Atlantic and inland resources—of agricultural, mineral and commercial wealth, so essential to give to these Colonies dignity and weight, whatever their ultimate destinies in the course of time may be.

That your Petitioners have heard with sincere gratification that His Excellency the Governor General, and the Honorable Members of His Lordship's Executive Government, have expressed opinions favorable to the enterprise; but regret that the consideration of it has been affected by reason of the state of the public finances. That your Petitioners do not think that the debt of £2,400,000 now due by the United Province of Canada is of alarming magnitude, considering the boundless resources we possess, the steady amount of our revenue and the growing extent of our population. That with a debt not equal to a hundredth part of the aggregate wealth, represented by public works still likely to yield an ample return, and not exceeding 30s. currency a-head, while that of Great Britain equals £40 sterling; and with a large revenue derived from other sources, we need scarcely feel apprehension for the future, and the Legislature may without imprudence count upon the means, if desirable, of paying off every incumbrance. That your Petitioners are satisfied, that as the public credit of Canada is above suspicion, no difficulty will be felt in raising the funds to meet every existing obligation; and that no prudential consideration, or the fear of any embarrassment should delay the completion of an undertaking so important and commanding as this.

That if even a public loan were required for the redemption of this pledge, your Petitioners are persuaded that it would be cheerfully met by the country—but considering that it will not require more than £3,000 next year, and not above £15,000 per annum during the next four years,—your Petitioners are convinced that it can be drawn from the ordinary revenue, and that so moderate an appropriation will scarcely be felt, and will be objected to by none.

That your Petitioners in advocating a measure so replete with general advantages, and which has hitherto stood before the country and the Legislature free of party bias, are not disposed to press the claims of Lower in contrast to those of Upper Canada. They regard

the enterprise of equal value to both sections—but if the interests and desires of Lower Canada were solely involved, considering that the public debt is mainly composed of expenditures for the works of Upper Canada, and that the large deficiency now to be provided for, arises from outlays on that section, to be ultimately paid by taxes collected from the *whole people*, your Petitioners are of opinion that they can now claim the appropriation sought for, on the principle of equal justice.

Your Petitioners therefore respectfully pray that your Honorable House will take means to have a survey of this line within the boundaries of Canada forthwith completed—that it will address the Crown to appropriate the funds intended for a Military Road to this preferable project—and will co-operate with the Legislatures of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and give a conditional pledge for the payment of interest as above stated, that the aid of Her Majesty's Government and of capitalists may be sought for, and, it is confidently hoped, secured without further delay.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Quebec, May 1, 1846.

1846 Quebec

Mail and Office

2nd Session, 2nd Parliament, 9th Victoria, 1846.

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Printed by Order of the Honorable the Legislative Council.

250 Copies.

Presented by the
Honorable Mr. WALKER,
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