

PETITION

OF

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES RESIDING IN THE VALLEY OF THE
NORTHWESTERN LAKES,

PRAYING

The adoption of measures to procure the free navigation of the St. Lawrence.

APRIL 11, 1850.

Referred to the Committee on Commerce.

JUNE 4, 1850.

Ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The undersigned, citizens of the valley of the northwestern lakes, beg leave to represent to your honorable body, and for its consideration—

That the section of country tributary to and dependent upon the commerce of these lakes in extent of coast, and within the United States, is about three thousand miles; that there is about two hundred and eighty thousand square miles of territory, and one hundred and eighty million acres of land, with a population of about four and a half millions of people; the commerce of which, for the year 1848, will be found in an able report from the Topographical Bureau, carefully prepared by a very competent person, familiar with and residing in its midst, and which will be laid before your honorable body by that department at its present session, and amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars.

That this immense trade has hitherto been, from necessity, forced to market through the Erie canal, four feet in depth and forty feet in width, a distance of about three hundred and sixty miles, and involving more or less transhipments, both prejudicial to its condition and expense of transit.

That the value of western productions has been greatly reduced to the grower, and that of foreign greatly increased to the western consumer, by reason of the inadequate means of transit between the agricultural producers of the west and the manufacturing producers of the east; that during the last five years, at times, this canal has been so overtaxed with business that the expense of transporting grain through it has entirely absorbed the whole value of the article in the ultimate market, and brought bankruptcy and ruin upon the shipper. It must be manifest to your honorable body, that the rapidly increasing trade between the west and east must have additional facilities for transit, or the productions of this vast valley must be checked so as to keep them within the means of transit now

enjoyed. The inadequacy of the canal for the passage of so vast a business creates enormous fluctuations in price of freights through it, thus creating uncertainty, and rendering the produce trade between the west and east exceedingly hazardous, and often ruinous to those engaged in it.

As a remedy for this great and growing difficulty, the undersigned beg leave to call the attention of your honorable body to the river St. Lawrence. This great and natural outlet of the lakes seems designed by Providence as the great commercial channel by which the immense commerce of the lakes should find its way to the Atlantic ocean and the world. This natural communication, which would have been of vast value to the commerce of the lakes, had it been enjoyed, has thus far been entirely unavailable to the west. And it must remain so, against its rapidly increasing necessities, without the action of your honorable body in the premises.

Your petitioners beg leave further to state that there is now on these lakes not far from eight million dollars' worth of shipping owned here and in commission. That the extreme distance traversed by lake vessels is about fifteen hundred miles, viz: from Chicago to Ogdensburg; but there is no direct trade between these two distant points, for want of an opening to the ocean eastward of Ogdensburg. By far the largest amount of western produce finds its terminus at Buffalo, which is but one thousand miles from Chicago, the extreme west. The average of distance that the lake shipping have to carry the productions of the country, does not exceed four hundred miles. At least one fourth part of the shipping above referred to is well adapted to the ocean and coasting trade upon it, and, with the right to navigate the river St. Lawrence, western shipping may increase the distance of its own freighting to the ultimate market, whether in this or in foreign countries.

The navigable season on these lakes averages about seven months out of twelve, the balance being ice-bound. With the use of the St. Lawrence two million dollars' worth of shipping may be employed on the ocean these five months, carrying our productions to foreign markets or our own Atlantic cities, greatly to the advantage not only of ship-owners, but to producers and consumers, as it will cheapen transportation as much as it increases the shipping ability, which will be five-twelfths of present means.

Your honorable body will observe that what your petitioners call the Valley of the Lakes embraces almost the entire wheat-growing section of this country, and a respectable portion of the corn, pork and beef productions; the transportation of which would be essentially cheapened by the use of this channel, which would inure to the same extent to producer or consumer, and tend greatly to encourage and increase this species of trade. But especially would the wheat-producer be benefited by the constant enjoyment of a foreign market. With the use of the St. Lawrence, wheat from the lakes can successfully compete in the English market with the Black sea. Cleveland, Ohio, is more than a thousand miles nearer Liverpool than Odessa, the principal wheat mart on the Black sea; and even Chicago, Illinois, is nearer; and Illinois and Wisconsin wheat may go to Liverpool and sell against Black Sea wheat. Freighting via the St. Lawrence can be done as cheap from Illinois to Liverpool, as from Odessa. Hitherto and hereafter, under present embarrassments, the American wheat-grower must patiently wait the exhaustion of the Black sea surplus, be-

fore he can enter the English market, and simply because an extravagant canal toll, freight, and commissions, lie between the grower and the market. Open the channel, so that the same vessel that loads her cargo at Chicago, Detroit, or Cleveland, can proceed, without breaking bulk, to Liverpool, and no wheat growing country in the world can drive lake wheat out of the English market, as your petitioners fully believe.

The advantages of this navigation to this valley are altogether too numerous to present in a petition like this, and your petitioners will content themselves by saying that, in their opinion, no public measure could be devised that would so invigorate business, give confidence and energy to both agriculture and commerce, enhance the value of property and labor, and increase the productions of the country, as the one herein suggested. Your petitioners, therefore, pray your honorable body, at the earliest practicable period, to take measures to procure the right of navigating the river St. Lawrence to the shipping of these lakes. And, as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

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Gamaliel Loomis
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Richard S. Molony
Joseph Keith
W. A. Thayer
William Smith
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Mason Smith
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