

HENRY CLAY'S FIGHT
FOR HIS SYSTEM OF INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS

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By

SHERMAN L. LOYD

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T. H. Reynolds
Adviser

T. H. Reynolds
Head of the History Department

D. C. W. Tuttle
Dean of the Graduate School

Preface

This study has for its purpose a survey of the internal improvement policies during the brief period Henry Clay was Speaker of the House of Representatives and Secretary of State during the Presidency of John Quincy Adams. He was very active in promoting improvements reaching into the West in order to bring about a closer union of the sections of the country.

The source material used in this study consists mainly of bound volumes of Congressional records, acts of Congress, and speeches made by members of the House of Representatives. The background material used consists of recognized books on internal improvements, biographies of Henry Clay, and published writings on the improvements completed at the time of Clay. Various economic histories were also consulted to get the economic results of the improvements.

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- S. L. L.

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Chapter I

Life and Early Political Training of Henry Clay

Henry Clay, the first great advocate of internal improvements, was born April 12, 1777, in Hanover County, Virginia. He was the seventh of nine children born to the Reverend John Clay and Elizabeth Hudson Clay. John Clay was an honest, respectable man of property, and his wife had inherited a rather large amount of property from her father. Hence, though he often stated that he was brought up amid poverty and ignorance, Clay was, in fact, reared in a home where the financial standing was above the average.¹ It is true that his education was scanty, for educational opportunities were meager at that time. In 1781, Clay's father died, and a few years later Elizabeth Clay married Captain Henry Watkins.

When Henry Clay was fifteen, he was made a deputy court clerk, his first political assignment, in Richmond, where he spent his leisure hours reading. In 1793, Henry Clay had the great fortune to become associated with George Wythe as the latter's amanuensis, in which post he learned to take dictation quite rapidly. Wythe, the chancellor of the High Court of Chancery, was a distinguished lawyer, a political leader, and a teacher of law and the classics at William and Mary, where he had taught such distinguished

¹ Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The Life of Henry Clay (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), pp. 5-6.

men as Jefferson and Marshall. He encouraged Clay to study law, and in 1797 Clay left the clerk's office and spent about a year studying law under Robert Brooke.

At this time Clay was developing his oratorical powers as one of the leaders of a debating club. Here, in debates over the political questions of the day, he formed his political ideals. He became a Jeffersonian Republican, sympathetic with the French Revolution and with the doctrine of popular rights. He was alert, intent, and keen-witted, and he had a facile mind that allowed him to skim rapidly many things that often should have had more consideration. His voice, at twenty-one, was already developing the perfection of the later years, when, like some superb instrument, it could be pitched at will to majestic denunciation, withering scorn, light pleasantry, or deep and tender emotion.² He had the voice of an orator, and an expressive face and emotional temperament which could easily move audiences to tears.

Henry Clay was not yet twenty-one when he received his license to practice law. He decided to move to Kentucky, the paradise for lawyers. Here, in 1798, he was admitted to the bar in Lexington, where he gained renown as a lawyer. The next year he married Lucretia Hart, the daughter of wealthy Thomas Hart. This marriage added to his social position.

² Ibid., p. 13.

In 1803 Clay was elected to the Kentucky legislature, where he served as the leader of his party until appointed to fill the seat in the United States Senate vacated by John Adair. His record in the Senate was a good one. In 1807 Clay was sent again to the state legislature. His career there had demonstrated his ability as a shrewd and clever legislator, standing generally for wise legislation and for the business interests.

In 1809 Clay was again appointed to the United States Senate, where his fame as an orator continued. In 1811 Clay was sent to the national House of Representatives, where he was immediately chosen Speaker. As leaders of those who favored a war with Great Britain, he, John C. Calhoun, and a few other young Westerners became known as the "War Hawks."

His first venture in politics was clearly marked by idealism, perhaps more clearly marked by it than any other action of his whole life, for in it he appeared as the champion of human rights and democratic government.

In 1814 he was sent to Ghent as one of the commissioners to negotiate the treaty of peace with Great Britain. Upon his return, he received an enthusiastic reception, especially from the people of Kentucky. He declined the offer of a mission to Russia that he might enter again the House of Representatives, where he once more became the

Speaker.³

While Speaker of the House, he became known as the "father of the American tariff system."

In the election of 1824 Clay ranked fourth among the Presidential candidates, the other three being John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson and William Crawford. Since none of them received a majority, the election was thrown into the House. Here Clay and his followers voted for John Quincy Adams. Adams named Clay his Secretary of State in the face of charges by Andrew Jackson and his supporters of a corrupt bargain. Clay's friends advised him to accept the secretaryship because his refusal, as much as his acceptance, would be used by the Jackson party. Jackson made no effort to tell the people of the nation that Adams had also offered to him and to Crawford positions in the Adams cabinet.

Because of this unfair political opposition, the office of Secretary of State, formerly regarded as a stepping-stone to the Presidency, proved an obstacle to Clay. His political opponents never forgot this means of defaming him.

Clay, however, continued to have hopes of becoming President until 1848, when the Whig convention nominated General Taylor. He continued a leader of his party in the

³ Elbridge S. Brooks, Historic Americans (Boston: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1899), pp. 277-290.

Senate until his death June 29, 1852, in his seventy-sixth year.

While a member of the House, Clay advocated a moderately protective tariff bill, the resumption of specie payments, internal improvements, the recognition of the South American republics, and the famous Missouri Compromise of 1820, earning the nickname, "the Great Pacificator."

In the Senate from 1831 to the time of his death, Clay advocated the protective system, the compromise of 1833, a United States Bank, and the Compromise of 1850. This last series of resolutions postponed for at least a decade the outbreak of the Civil War.

When Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, visited the United States to secure aid, Clay advised against interference in the affairs of Europe. He said that the greatest service we could render was by continuing to set an example of the results of liberty. His last public utterance was for isolation from Europe.⁴

Soon after his entrance into Congress Clay took an advanced stand in favor of the building of roads, the improving of water ways, and the constructing of canals by the government, in order to connect the seaboard states with the boundless empire of the growing West. He be-

⁴ G. Van Deusen, op. cit., pp. 421-422.

came the leader, the foremost champion, of a system which was bitterly opposed by some of the ablest statesmen of the time as unauthorized by the Constitution. Clay triumphed, and during his long public service was the recognized leader of a system which, though opposed at first, has been accepted as a national policy by both of the great political parties. That he was actuated by a grand conception of the future destiny of the country, and the needs of such improvements to insure a more perfect union, his able speeches on these questions will show. In one he said:

Every man who looks at the Constitution in the spirit to entitle him to the character of statesman must elevate his views to the height to which this nation is destined to reach in the rank of nations. We are not legislating for this moment only, or for the present generation, or for the present populated limits of the United States; but our acts must embrace a wider scope, - reaching northward to the Pacific and southwardly to the River Del Norte. Imagine this extent of territory with sixty or seventy or a hundred of millions of people. The powers which now exist will exist then; and those which will exist then, exist now. What was the object of the convention in framing the Constitution? The leading object was Union, Union, then peace. Peace external and internal, and commerce; but more particularly union and peace, the great object of the framers of the Constitution, should be kept steadily in view in the interpretation of any clause of it; and when it is susceptible of various interpretation, that construction should be preferred which tends to promote the objects of the framers of the Constitution, to the consolidation of the union. No man deprecates more than I do the idea of consolidation; yet between separation and consolidation, painful as would be the alternative, I should prefer the latter.⁵

⁵ Calvin Colton, Private Correspondence of Clay (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1857), p. 82.

Congress now appropriates yearly for internal improvements a sum far greater than the entire revenue of the government at the time Clay made this speech.⁶

⁶ John R. Proctor, "Internal Improvements," in Warner Library (New York: Glasgow, Brooks, and Company), VI, 3767.

Chapter II

Opposition to His Plans for Internal Improvements

The most outstanding opposition to Henry Clay's fight to put over his plan for internal improvements came from three great statesmen of the day, namely, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe.¹ Jefferson had expressed himself adverse to the power conveyed in Clay's plan before he retired from public life; Madison had vetoed a bill for internal improvements the day before the expiration of his term of office, although he had in his opening message to that session of Congress recommended action on the subject;² Monroe, who succeeded Madison on the fourth of March, 1817, took the opportunity, at the opening of the first session of the fifteenth Congress, gratuitously to declare in his message that he had adopted Madison's opinion on the question. The chief basis for their opposition was in the constitutionality of the problems.

Each of these three authorities recommended an alteration in the Constitution conferring this power, which, they acknowledged, was much needed. But an amendment to the Constitution was apparently out of the question. The only open path against such authority and the declared opinion of the incumbent of the executive chair seemed to be to obtain the sense of Congress on this question by a

¹ Calvin Colton, Speeches of Henry Clay (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1857), I, 116-130.

² Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., II, 1339-1341.

resolution. Accordingly, a resolution was offered in the House of Representatives, asserting the power of Congress under the Constitution to construct military roads, post roads, and canals.³ The resolution was carried by the decisive majority of 90 to 75, a signal triumph over the authorities arrayed against it. Though others participated in the debate on the same side as Clay, his argument had, doubtless, an irresistible influence. After having read the speech given in his debate, one is imbued with the feeling that such must have been its power.

First, he encountered the argument of his opponents in the committee and left them little ground on which to stand. The manner in which they were made to stand their part was amusing. Jefferson's reasoning and course on this subject were shown to be puerile, and as to Madison's veto, Madison killed his own bill, for he had virtually recommended it, and nothing could be more surprising to his friends and the public than his veto message.⁴ On Monroe's gratuity in attempting in his opening message to foreclose all debate and action in Congress on this subject Clay bestowed a merited rebuke. Nothing could have been more improper. But the very scathing which he gave Monroe for doing that thing, as the executive officer of the government, which he averred Congress could not authorize to be

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1350-1351.

⁴ Walter S. Franklin, American State Papers (Washington: 1834), XI, 272.

done was a caution against the practice of such inconsistency. Driven into such an uncomfortable corner, and lashed while there with such severity, the severity of sarcasm only, Monroe's position could hardly have failed to be pitied at the same time it afforded an inexhaustible fund of amusement. Monroe was an excellent man and a popular President, but he made a mistake in this matter.⁵ It was remarkable that the first difficulties thrown in the way of internal improvements were from those three Virginia Presidents, the three Virginia "abstractions." If they could always have been treated as Clay dealt with them, it might have been well for the country.

After Clay's speech a resolution was drawn up, and after many arguments it came to read as follows:

That Congress have power, under the Constitution, to appropriate money in aid of the construction of roads and canals, which shall be laid out, and constructed under the authority of the Legislatures of the states through which they pass. That no private property be taken for any such purpose without just compensation being made therefor.⁶

This was in accord with Clay's plans, but by this time he had to convince the people that the money from the sale of public lands was being spent for the benefit of the whole United States, and not for just one certain section or faction.

In his message at the opening of the second session of the fifteenth Congress, President Monroe said that a

⁵ Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., II, 1370.

⁶ Ibid.

difference of opinion had existed from the first formation of the Constitution to the present time among the most enlightened and virtuous citizens respecting the rights of Congress to establish such a system of improvements. After great deliberation he had come to the conclusion that Congress did not possess the right to appropriate money for internal improvements. That right was not contained in any of the specified powers of Congress. He asked Congress to recommend to the states that they make an amendment to the Constitution which should give to Congress the right in question.

In this passage the President furnished no reason, no argument in support of his opinion, nothing addressed to the understanding. He gave, instead, a historical account of his own mind, and he asserted that he had made a laborious effort to conquer his early impressions but that the result was a settled conviction against the power, without a single reason.⁷ In his statement that the power must be specifically granted, or be incident to a power so granted, it was seen that Clay had the honor to concur with him; but Monroe said the power was not among the specified powers. He evidently overlooked the clause about the building of post roads, and Clay asked him to tell why that did not convey the desired power.

Clay said that a system of roads and canals would have

⁷ Ibid., p. 1373.

the effect of drawing all parts of the country more closely together by promoting intercourse and improvements and by increasing the share of every part in the common stock of national prosperity.⁸ He made an earnest effort to commit Congress to exercise the power of construction of interstate highways and canals, which could not be undertaken by individual states or by combinations of states, and which, if built at all, must be built by the nation. He recounted the attention given by Congress to the construction of public buildings and lighthouses, the coast surveys and erection of sea walls in the Atlantic states, saying, "Everything on the margin of the ocean, but nothing for domestic trade; nothing for the great interior of the country." He boldly claimed that the right to regulate commerce granted as fully the power to construct roads and canals for the benefit of circulation and trade in the interior as it did the power to promote coastwise traffic. His speech was a strong assertion of the right of the West to equality of treatment with the older sections of the country.⁹

The opposition to his plans, geographically, was located chiefly in the New England states and New York.¹⁰

In the South, the opposition to Clay's plan came from

⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, Rise of the New West: The American Nation, A History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), pp. 233-234.

⁹ Colton, Private Correspondence of Clay, p. 81.

¹⁰ Macon's Identical Views in 1818 and 1824 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1878).

John Randolph, who, with the recklessness and irresponsibility which was characteristic of him, dragged from its closet the skeleton of the South, and warned his fellow slaveholders that if Congress possessed power to do what was proposed by the bill, it might emancipate every slave in the United States. He also threatened the formation of associations and any other means short of actual insurrection. He insulted Clay, so that Clay, becoming very angry, sent his friend to Randolph and challenged the latter to a duel. They fought the duel, but Randolph, who felt apologetic over his rash statements, fired into the air, and Clay's bullet only went through Randolph's coat. They shook hands and called the duel off.

The entire West and the Southwestern slave states acted with Pennsylvania and the Potomac Valley to favor Clay with the vote of 43 to 0. In the Senate, New England voted solidly against a bill for internal improvements.

Thus, by the close of Monroe's administration the forces of nationalism seemed to have triumphed in the important field of internal improvements.¹¹

Being Secretary of State from 1824 to 1828, Clay had difficulty in finding as much time to devote to internal improvements as he would liked to have had, but with the aid of some of his friends in the House of Representatives he worked out a plan for a system of internal improve-

¹¹ S. H. Birbeck, "The Westward Movement," in Selected Readings in American History (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1928), pp. 272-277.

ments.¹² Through his good friend Mr. Mercer, Henry Clay submitted to the House of Representatives these resolutions as his plans for carrying on a system of internal improvements:

That it is expedient to set aside from the public revenue, a fund for internal improvements, and to devise a system of rules for its impartial and judicious application to such roads, canals, and railways as may be deemed by Congress, within the scope of its Constitutional power.¹³ That this fund shall consist of the portion of revenue each year, which shall remain not otherwise appropriated, and after deducting from the net revenue of the current year, and the unexpended balance of the preceding year, dollars for unforeseen contingencies.

That to aid the judgment of Congress in the selection of fit subjects for Internal Improvements and to secure in due time, a just regard for all, a system shall be devised for the collection of appropriate information and the application of the fund, which shall embrace the following regulations.

That the number of the United States Engineers to be augmented, and arranged in two distinct corps, to be denominated, respectively the Corps of Military and the Corps of Civil Engineers; that the latter be subdivided into two corps, one shall be denominated the Corps of Topographical Civil Engineers, that every graduate Cadet, on leaving West Point, be allowed the choice so far as may be compatible with the public interests, of entering the Corps of Military or of Civil Engineers; and that the last be recruited, from time to time, by the appointment of practical Civil Engineers of established reputation.

That the Corps of Topographical Civil Engineers be employed in exploring and embodying all such information as may serve to ascertain, define, and illustrate, the natural surface of the United States, and their susceptibility of improvements by artificial roads, railways, and canals, of general importance to the union, from their tendency to facilitate

¹² McLaughlin, Confederation and Constitution (Philadelphia, 1880), pp. 126-130.

¹³ Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., II, part 2, 2554.

the safe and speedy transportation of the mail; to promote the extension of domestic and foreign commerce, and to provide for the common defense of the United States.¹⁴ The residue of the Corps of Civil Engineers should be engaged in estimating the probable cost of all such work; in supervising the work, under the orders of the Department of War, which had already begun; in reporting to that Department both their progress and the difficulties encountered, telling the manner in which these difficulties were encountered and how they were overcome; and in reporting the actual cost compared with that which was estimated in each case. Abstracts of all those reports were to be compiled and sent to Congress at or near the beginning of each session. These reports were to be made under the auspices of the Department of War, by a board consisting of not less than three Civil engineers. These engineers were to give a general history of the distribution and operation of the Corps of Civil Engineers, during the preceding year, and to advise ways in which the existing errors in design or execution of any work may be detected and corrected, and to suggest ways to avoid their recurrence.

The income of the United States, from all such works, should be used in two ways: first, to pay the interest and principal of any loans which had been negotiated under authority of law to accelerate the completion of the work, and, second, to make such similar improvements as Congress desired.

In case of war, all stocks acquired by the disbursements of the fund for internal improvements, the annual revenue which came to the United States from the public works, and the entire fund itself should be at the disposal of Congress by transfer, pledge, or otherwise, if Congress

¹⁴ John Lord, Beacon Lights of History (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hilbert Company, 1883), II, 223-236.

deemed it expedient and consistent with public faith for the public defense.

Clay hoped the details of these resolutions as designed would obviate some of the objections which had before been raised, even by the gentlemen who admitted that Congress had the power to legislate on this subject, and would expedite its exercise. He hoped, also, that they involved no doctrine which would keep from their support those members of Congress who disagreed as to the source of power in the Constitution from which they had authority to legislate this matter, even though they advocated the system of internal improvements.

Clay referred to *The Federalist* as favorable to his plans because it had taken notice of that clause in the Constitution which related to post roads. It had stated that the power must be a harmless power, and also that every use of it must be a beneficial one. Clay pointed out the fact that roads should not be built for military purposes only but that in case of war many battles had been won by celerity and rapidity of movement. Movement was one of the most essential circumstances of war, yet without good roads, it was impossible.¹⁵

Clay accused Nelson, one of his chief opponents on the question of internal improvements, of being influenced by executive persuasion, but Nelson denied it. Clay then

¹⁵ Allen Nevins (ed.), The Diary of John Q. Adams (New York: Longmans, Greene and Company, 1928), p. 353.

showed that although Nelson was personally against granting the charter for a national bank, he had changed his vote from nay to yea the second time the question came up, because the President wanted the national bank. He also showed that Nelson voted against a recommendation by Madison for a comprehensive system of internal improvements.

Clay explained that after Monroe had become President he stated that in regard to internal improvements his reaction would be the same as had been President Madison's and that Monroe's decision had influenced Nelson, because Nelson had with great eloquence shown the danger which the Constitution was in by granting Congress the power of internal improvements.

Clay, in one of his speeches, pointed out that President Monroe while traveling through the early West had ordered a new road to be cut through a certain part of the country. Clay's desire was to know where the President had been given the power to order a new road built. If Congress had not the power, then who gave it to the executive chair? Clay said,

If any member will stand up in his place and say the President is clothed with this authority, and that it is denied to Congress, let us hear from him; and let him point to the clause in the Constitution which vests it in the executive and withholds it from the legislative branch.¹⁶

¹⁶ Colton, Speeches of Henry Clay, I, chap. 4.

There was no such clause; there was no such exclusive executive power. The power is derivable by the executive only from those powers of the Constitution which charge him with commanding the physical forces of the country, the employment of that force in war, the preservation of the public tranquility, and the execution of the laws.¹⁷

But Congress has powers paramount to those of the President. It alone can declare war, raise armies, provide for calling out the militia, and raise and appropriate the necessary means. There should be no discrimination along those lines between the executive branch and the legislative branch. Clay did not condemn the President for his actions only, but he protested against the exercise of such powers by the President which are denied to Congress.¹⁸

On May 4, 1822 a bill, passed by both houses of Congress, for the preservation and repair of the Cumberland Road was sent to the office of President Monroe for his signature. He vetoed the bill, stating as his reason that he did not think Congress had the power under the Constitution of the United States to appropriate money for such purposes.

The power to establish turnpikes with gates and tolls and to enforce the collection of tolls by penalties implies a power to adopt and execute a complete system of internal

¹⁷ Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., I.

¹⁸ Birbeck, op. cit., p. 272.

improvements. The right to impose duties upon persons traveling on horseback or in carriages along a certain road involves the right to take the land from its owner for a certain compensation. Monroe pointed out that if this may be done with one road, then Congress can do the same thing with as many roads as she may think proper to establish.¹⁹

The right to make laws controlling one road gives Congress the right to make laws controlling all roads. It is a complete right of jurisdiction and sovereignty for all purposes of internal improvements, and not merely the right of applying money under the power vested in Congress to make appropriations, under which power, with the consent of the states through which this road passes, the work was originally commenced. Monroe was of the opinion that Congress does not possess this power and that the states individually can not grant it. The power can be granted only by an amendment to the Constitution. In this message Monroe made the great mistake which caused him to lose his point of argument with Clay. He stated that Congress was not granted the specific power to build roads or make other internal improvements. Of course Clay, listening carefully to the address, caught the error, and in his speech to the House of Representatives on the subject pointed out

¹⁹ James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1909), II, 142-143. Veto message to the House of Representatives.

that Congress is given the power to build post roads and post offices and to regulate commerce to provide for the common defense and the general welfare, and pointed to the clause in the Constitution which gives Congress the right to make all laws which are needed in regard to the territory and property of the United States.

According to Monroe's judgment, the power in question cannot be derived from any of those powers; therefore it does not exist. Henry Clay pointed out to the President that he gave an order to the Secretary of War to build a road through a certain area without the consent of anyone; therefore, if the executive department had the power to do that why should not the legislative department have the same power?²⁰

In another message to Congress in 1823 on internal improvements Monroe recommended to the states that they adopt an amendment to the Constitution to give to Congress the necessary power. Monroe was not so strong against internal improvements as he was afraid that he would do something which would be unconstitutional. In this message Monroe went back to the beginning of each of the two governments, state and federal, to determine which one, if either, has the power to make internal improvements. Monroe's message is very long and enlightening on the subject of internal improvements at this time; therefore, it is fitting

²⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

and proper that parts of it be given here to show the type of opposition Clay had to fight to get his "great American system" over in Congress.²¹

Let it be supposed that Congress intended to run a road from the city of Washington to Baltimore and to connect the Chesapeake Bay with the Delaware and the Delaware with the Rariton by a canal, what must be done to carry the project into effect? I make here no question of the existing power. I speak only of the power necessary for the purpose. Commissioners would be appointed to trace a route in the most direct line, and to acquire the land over which the road and canal would pass, with sufficient breadth for each. The next object to be attended to after the road and canal are laid out is to keep them in repair. Congress should be given the right to punish any person who willfully, destroys or damages any part of the road or canal, as they did on the Cumberland Road. Experience has shown that the establishment of turnpikes, with gates and tolls and persons to collect the tolls, is the best expedient that can be adopted to defray the expenses of these improvements and the repairs which they necessarily require.²²

Let it be further supposed that Congress, believing that they do possess the power, have passed an act for those purposes, under which commissioners have been appointed, who have begun the work. They are met on the first farm on which they enter by the owner, who forbids them to trespass on his land. They offer to buy it at a fair price or at twice or thrice its value. He persists in his refusal. Can they, on the principle recognized and acted on by all the state governments that in cases of this kind the obstinacy and perverseness of an individual must yield to the public welfare, summon a jury of upright and discreet men to condemn the land, value it, and compel the owner to receive the amount and to deliver it up to them? I believe that very few would concur in the opinion that any such power exists. From this view of the subject I think we fairly conclude that the right to adopt and execute a system of internal improvements, or any part of it has not been granted to Congress.²³

²¹ Ibid., pp. 145-146.

²² Ibid., pp. 154-155.

²³ Ibid., pp. 156-158.

The speech is much longer and brings out a great many points on which Clay and Monroe differed, but enough has been said to give a reader some idea of the objections Monroe had to internal improvements.

Another view which Monroe stated was that these improvements would have a very strong effect on the bond of union. The only danger to which our system is exposed, he said, arises from its expansion over such a large territory. The union of the United States is not held together by standing armies, but by the positive interest and powerful attractions of its different sections for one another. He also stated in his speech that it can not be doubted that improvements for great national purposes would be better made by the national government than by the governments of the several states.²⁴

The next President of the United States was John Quincy Adams, whose attitude toward internal improvements was just the opposite of that of Monroe. In the inaugural address Adams let it be known just how he stood on the question of internal improvements. He wanted a more enlarged system of internal improvements than existed at this time. From the time Henry Clay made possible the act of Congress of the thirtieth of April, 1824, which was to procure the necessary surveys, plans, and estimates on the subject of roads and canals, corps of engineers had

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

been out in the field actively engaged in that service.²⁵ Adams said that he did not believe in going outside the United States to look for improvement projects when there were so many that needed attention near at hand.

Going more into detail concerning the act of Congress of April 21, 1824, it is found that this act is very simple and expressive in its delegation of powers. This bill passed the House of Representatives and came to the Senate April 21, 1824. It placed thirty thousand dollars in the hands of the President, and left him at liberty to select such routes for roads and canals as he should think proper. It contained no limitations of any kind. An amendment was attached to the bill in the Senate making everything specific and definite with a limit to all provisions of the bill. There were many amendments brought up that members of the Senate attempted to attach to this bill, but, except for adding the one limiting its provisions, they failed. Holmes, of Maine, opposed both the bill and the amendment. He pointed out that the bill described the character of the roads but failed to state their designation and extent. The amendment designated the roads and canals contemplated but did not define their character.²⁶ He pointed out that neither the bill nor the amendment indicated the source of power of Congress to

²⁵ Annals of Congress, 18 Cong., 1 sess., I, 534-558.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 542-548.

make these improvements.

Henry Clay derived his opinions as to whether or not Congress had this power from the following sources: first, the right to establish post offices and post roads; second, the right to declare war; third, the right to regulate commerce among the several states; fourth, the power to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States; fifth, the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution all the powers vested by the Constitution in the government of the United States or in any department or office thereof; sixth, the power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory and other property of the United States.²⁷ These six powers granted to Congress by the Constitution were the bases for Clay's arguments in favor of internal improvements by Congress. His getting the bill for surveying of roads and canals passed through Congress shows the influence he carried in both Houses. The fact that President Monroe vetoed the bill and that it came back and was passed over his veto is another outstanding achievement attributed to Clay.

In going over the debates, both pro and con, in regard to the six powers of Congress just mentioned, it is impossible to escape noticing that every Speaker who argued

²⁷ Messages and Papers of the Presidents, II, 156-165.

against Congress' having these powers used practically the same arguments.²⁸ Clay made only one complete speech, that is, only one in which he explained his points as he understood the implication of power to be, but that one time was sufficient to cause the members of the House of Representatives to fall in line behind him.

In view of Clay's great victory in overcoming the difficulties that stood in his way, it is plain that his title of "Father of the American System of Internal Improvements" is justified.

²⁸ Annals of Congress, 18 Cong., 1 sess., I, 546-560.

Chapter III

Economic Aspects of Internal Improvements

The westward movement of the population and the development of our resources were made possible only by the building of means of communication better than the old trails or natural waterways. And yet so slow was the early movement that in 1803 Thomas Jefferson said it would be a thousand years before the region east of the Mississippi could be fully settled. If the people had been compelled to depend exclusively upon natural waterways and roads, this would probably have been true.¹ The turnpike, the canal, the steamboat, and the railroad all mark successive stages in the improvements which were effected. The opening of the Southwest, the development of commerce between that section and the North and East, and the growth of the population throughout the entire Western territory at once were occasioned and made possible by the improvement of the means of communication and trade.

The history of transportation in the United States divides itself logically into three periods: the turnpike period, the river and canal period, and the railroad period. The first belongs to the time between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Before this movement had more than fairly gained headway, canals began to be built, and

¹ Ernest Ludlow Bogart, Economic History of the United States (New York: Longman's, Greene and Company, 1925), pp. 190-210.

for some time also the steamboat greatly stimulated river navigation. This period may be said to have continued from 1816 to 1850. About the latter date railroad building, which had begun twenty years before, set in on a considerable scale and railroads began to threaten the supremacy of the canals; by 1860 they had almost superseded the latter.²

The first American turnpike was built in 1790, and soon New York, Pennsylvania, and New England were fairly well supplied with them. They were a great improvement over the early local roads, for they were built as a continuous line for through traffic and in spite of high tolls greatly reduced the cost of transportation. But, as compared with water carriage, land transportation was still very expensive. It cost about 33 per cent of the value of goods to convey them from Philadelphia to Kentucky by land, and only 4 to 4½ per cent from Illinois to New Orleans by water. On the average it cost about ten dollars a ton for every one hundred miles to transport goods by land; articles for which these rates were too high, such as flour and grain, were excluded from a market unless they found an outlet by water.³ During the continental wars the great demand abroad for our agricultural staples increased the demand for better communication. Until 1807

² Charles F. Beard, Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy (Norwood, Massachusetts: Macmillan Company, 1915), pp. 456-460.

³ Bogart, op. cit., pp. 198-199.

the roads and turnpikes were usually constructed for the most part by private companies, though often with state and federal aid. Those to the West had been built by the shortest routes through the gaps in the mountains, starting mainly from Philadelphia. Pittsburgh was an important point of transshipment and was growing rapidly.⁴

After Gallatin made his report to Congress, which is explained later in the chapter, Congress readily entered upon a policy of internal improvements, not merely for the economic purpose of securing better and cheaper transportation, but for political reasons also; a minor consideration was the greater speed and safety that would be given to the mails. As a solution of the problem of improved transportation, however, the building of the roads was inadequate, and before the federal government could enter upon a more general scheme of internal improvements, doubts as to its constitutionality brought the federal system to an end; that is, it brought the system to an end until Henry Clay and his cohorts were able to get some resolutions passed through Congress giving Congress the right to construct internal improvements.⁵ Clay's fight for these resolutions has been told in chapter II.

The invention of the steamboat in 1807 and its introduction upon the Ohio four years later made the rivers

⁴ Seymour Dunbar, History of Travel in America (New York: Tudor Company, 1937), pp. 770-785.

⁵ Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., II, 2729.

important highways of commerce. Even in the days of flat-boats and barges the trade of the Mississippi and its tributaries had been considerable, and it now grew rapidly. Towns like Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and, above all, New Orleans increased steadily in population. For the agricultural products of the West the only outlet was New Orleans; but in the early days the long river journey with no hope of a return cargo, the danger to the cargo by reason of the change to the hotter climate of the lower Mississippi, and finally the long sea voyage to a market made the shipment of produce down the river a hazardous and often losing venture. The spread of cotton culture and the peopling of the Southwest by providing a home market at the mouth of the Mississippi greatly increased the river trade and to some extent solved the problem of an outlet for the produce of the Western country.

But the farmers in northern Ohio and Indiana, in Michigan, and in other sections of the country who were not situated on a tributary of the Mississippi still clamored insistently for better means of communication, especially with the East. In addition to the economic weakness, there was also a political danger in the situation. The country was divided into three strongly marked sections, the East, the South, and the West; and the economic bonds holding them together, especially those between the East and the West, were not sufficiently powerful to overcome the tend-

encies toward separation which had even now shown themselves.⁶

While canal building on a large scale did not take place until after the turnpike period had practically ended, a beginning had been made as early as 1785, when Virginia granted a charter to the James River Company. The importance of canal building, however, had early been recognized by George Washington, for even before the Revolution Washington had planned a canal to connect the Potomac and the Ohio rivers and had prophesied the union of the Hudson River with Lake Erie. He recognized that a union of such vast extent could be held together only by closer economic bonds.⁷

The first canal constructed in the United States was the Dismal Swamp Canal, begun in 1787 under a joint charter from Virginia and North Carolina, and opened in 1794. Many other canals were proposed between 1790 and 1800, especially in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, but the era of canal building did not really occur until after the War of 1812.

The first answer on a large scale to the demand for improved means of communication was made by New York State in building the Erie Canal, connecting Lake Erie with the Hudson River. Gallatin named six canals that had been

⁶ James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, I, 466-500.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 199-217.

built prior to this at a cost of over ten million dollars, but none of any commercial importance had been attempted until the success of the Erie Canal showed the way. The plan for this was not a new one; as early as 1792 a company had been formed to connect Lake Erie with the Hudson River.⁸ The actual work of building the canal did not begin until 1817, but within eight years it was finished. The completion of the "big ditch" was celebrated with appropriate ceremonies at Buffalo, from which point a fleet of boats proceeded to New York, where their arrival was the signal for a fresh outburst of enthusiasm. A flask of water from Lake Erie was poured into New York Bay, and the marriage of the inland waters with those of the ocean was declared to have been consummated. The canal immediately became a source of revenue, entirely paying for itself in ten years.

Still more important than the financial returns were the economic advantages of the canal to the community at large. Wherever the canal touched a waterway a thriving town sprang up, as at Syracuse, Rochester, and Utica, Buffalo and Albany, the terminals, grew rapidly, and New York City became the leading port of the United States.⁹ Branch canals were built connecting the main canal with Champlain, Ontario and Seneca lakes, and these stimulated a vigorous trade. The number of vessels on Lake Champlain before the

⁸ Christopher Morgan (ed.), Documentary History of New York (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1850), II, 126-130.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 140-168.

canal was opened was only twenty, but a year later there were 218. Prior to the construction of the canal the cost of transportation from Buffalo to New York City was one hundred dollars a ton, and the ordinary length of passage was twenty days; most of the wheat from western New York was floated down the Susquehanna to Baltimore.¹⁰ On the opening of the Erie Canal the cost of freight fell, according to its class, to between fifteen dollars and twenty-five dollars a ton, and the time of transit was reduced to eight days. Rates from Ohio to the seaboard were steadily lowered until they were about one-tenth of former figures. Nor were the effects confined to New York State alone; the entire western lake district had secured an outlet for its produce, and much that previously went down the Mississippi to New Orleans was now shipped to Buffalo at greatly reduced rates. In 1824 corn was sold in Cincinnati for 8 cents a bushel, wheat for 25 cents, and flour for \$1.25 a barrel; after the opening of the canal these commodities brought double or treble prices to the Western farmers. The building of the Erie Canal had established an economic bond between the East and West.

The success of this undertaking led to a perfect mania for canal building and public improvements, greatest in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore

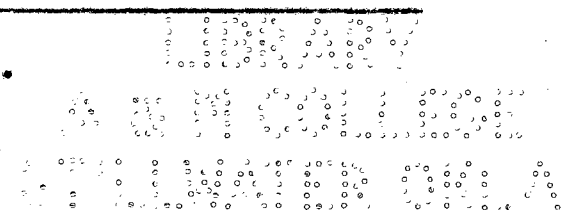
¹⁰ Henry Howe, Howe's Historical Collection of Ohio (Cincinnati: C. J. Krehbuel and Company, 1907), I, 180-190.

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saw their trade threatened by the diversion of the western commerce to New York City, and accordingly the states in which these cities were situated began to plan works to compete with the Erie Canal.¹¹ The State of Pennsylvania constructed a system of canals from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, with a portage railway over the Alleghonies, at a cost of over ten million dollars. It was completed in 1834 and was successful from the beginning. Massachusetts appointed a commission to inquire into the possibility of cutting a canal from Boston to the Hudson River, in order to divert some of the increasing Western trade. By the time Baltimore was ready to act, railroads had attracted favorable attention as an improved means of transportation, and in Maryland the first railroad was built in 1828.

It was in the Western states, however, with their long distances and complete lack of roads, that canals were of the greatest economic significance. The opening of the Erie Canal was the signal for similar improvements in several of these states. The most important projects were those to connect the lakes with the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. By 1832 the Ohio Canal from Cleveland to Portsmouth had been built for the State of Ohio, joining the Ohio River with Lake Erie. The effect in stimulating production and diverting trade from its old routes was immediate; three years later there were shipped from Ohio alone

¹¹ Dunbar, op. cit., pp. 252-249.



eighty-six thousand barrels of flour, ninety-eight thousand bushels of wheat, and two million five hundred thousand staves by canal to New York.¹²

At the same time the Western farmer was enabled to secure better prices for his goods; products which before had glutted the local market could now be sent to distant points where they were in greater demand. Flour, which in 1826 sold at \$3 a barrel at Cincinnati, brought \$6 in 1835, and corn rose from 12 cents a bushel to 32 cents a bushel. Currency inflation was in part responsible for this rise in prices, but the farmer attributed it rather to improvements in transportation. He could also purchase his axes, plows, and other implements for a fraction of what he had formerly paid. These facts had a powerful effect upon the settlement of the West, which was now assured profitable markets and communication with the East.

When the demand for internal improvements became urgent, the states were turned to for assistance in carrying out the plans. The reasons for invoking state aid were several. In the first place, as has been shown, the federal government, which had undertaken willingly enough the work of improving the means of communication, had been stopped from continuing it by constitutional objections until they were removed by Henry Clay and his fellow work-

¹² Morgan, op. cit., pp. 143-158.

ers in the House of Representatives.¹³ Private capital was not equal to the task of carrying out such large enterprises as were now being planned. Even if it existed in large enough amounts, which was doubtful, the projects were too large and the returns too remote to warrant an individual's risking his whole capital. While these works of public improvement might have been entrusted to corporations, there was the feeling, in addition to a distrust of a corporate management, that many improvements should be made that might not prove commercially profitable and that the state alone could undertake these. Moreover, the state had perpetual life and, with its good credit, could borrow the necessary capital on much better terms than could private individuals. It seemed fitting, therefore, that the state governments should undertake the work of internal improvements. There are, however, some additional forces that should be mentioned which explain the willingness of the state legislatures to enter upon this work.

The people of the whole country, particularly of the West, were insistent upon having improvements of every sort, and especially better means of transportation. Most of the state constitutions adopted during this period contained either directions or permission to the legislatures to encourage internal improvements within the state. The federal government, though it had withdrawn from the work

¹³ Richardson, op. cit., II, 13-18.

directly, gave assistance to the states in land and money; it donated a percentage of all sales of public lands to the states for this purpose and distributed among them the surplus revenue of the federal government in 1827.¹⁴ This was made possible by Congress' adopting Henry Clay's resolutions for developing a system of internal improvements. Finally, the success of the Erie Canal, the commercial rivalry of the Atlantic ports, and the speculative fever of the period led the legislatures to embark in enterprises far beyond the needs or means of the people at that time.

The magnitude of the work of internal improvements undertaken by the states may perhaps best be shown by the increase in state indebtedness. Until 1820 the states had incurred practically no liabilities, but beginning with that year their debts began to grow. In 1820 the states were \$12,790,728 in debt; in 1830, \$26,470,417 in debt; and in 1835, \$66,482,186 in debt. During the next three years the debts almost trebled, reaching over one hundred seventy million dollars in 1838 and two hundred million dollars in 1840. Practically all of this money went into internal improvements - roads, canals, railroads, and banks.¹⁵

It is evident that this enormous expenditure of funds involved a large investment of capital. Little of it indeed

¹⁴ Theodore C. Pease and A. Sellev Roberts, Selected Readings in American History (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), pp. 272-277.

¹⁵ Bogart, op. cit., pp. 200-210.

was raised by taxation; practically all was borrowed, part at home but most of it from foreign capitalists. The extent to which foreign capital was being invested in the United States and domestic capital and labor was being applied to the work of developing the West is well illustrated by the state of our foreign trade. During the decade 1830 to 1840 the imports exceeded the exports by about two hundred million dollars, and at the same time the imports of specie exceeded the exports by more than fifty million dollars. In spite of our agricultural pre-eminence we imported over 5½ million bushels of wheat during the same period. The high credit enjoyed by the American states, which had been greatly enhanced by the payment of the national debt in 1835, enabled them to borrow these enormous sums at a low rate of interest abroad, and especially in England, where capital had been accumulating.

The crisis of 1837 put a complete stop to the work of internal improvements. As soon as the bubble of speculation and high prices was pricked, it was clear that many of the enterprises were premature and unnecessary. Most of them were extravagantly managed, while hundreds of thousands of dollars had been sunk in absolutely useless undertakings. When the debts, so easily contracted, began to press, several of the states repudiated their indebtednesses; the worst offenders were Mississippi, Louisiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Michigan, though some

of these states afterwards paid part or all of their debts.¹⁶

The works already built were sold by most of the states, which now withdrew from the business of supplying railroads and canals. The changed attitude of the people was shown by the provisions in practically all state constitutions adopted after this time prohibiting the use of state funds for internal improvements.

Almost before the use of canals had begun, the railway, which was to revolutionize transportation, was introduced. For a decade attempts at railroad building were largely experimental, and they did not seriously compete with the canals and rivers until after 1840. The revolutionary effect which the introduction of the railway had upon the economic development of the country, however, may be briefly noted at this point. The turnpikes and canals had simply followed existing or natural routes of trade. They had made communication easier and had enormously increased the traffic between the different sections of the country. The rivers, together with the canals, furnished a splendid mode of transportation, but as most of these flowed north and south, something more was needed if the East was to be brought into close touch with the West.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 205-215.

¹⁷ Turner, Rise of the New West, pp. 233-235.

It remained for the railways to break down the sectional barriers and to divert the industrial development of the country into new channels. They were built east and west; they crossed the mountains and united parts of the country hitherto separated. With the introduction of the railway the country entered upon an entirely new phase of development. Owing to the fact, too, that the country was predominantly agricultural, the chief market for most of the produce, especially that of the West and South, was on the Atlantic seaboard. This fact, coupled with the fact of the enormous distances which separated the different sections, made a cheap and quick means of transportation indispensable to the development of the full resources of the country. Had it not been for the railway, the full development of the Far West and of other parts of the country untouched and inaccessible by river or canal would have been impossible.¹⁸

The first railroad in the United States was the Baltimore and Ohio, begun in 1828 and opened for traffic in 1842, although the Quincy tramway, used for transporting building stone to the Bunker Hill monument, and two gravity roads in the coal regions of Pennsylvania had preceded it shortly. On the Baltimore and Ohio, horse power and sails were used at first as motive power, and not until after eighteen months of experiment was steam finally decided

¹⁸ McLaughlin, Confederation and Constitution, pp. 131-132.

upon. The greatest development took place in Pennsylvania, especially in building roads from Philadelphia to the coal regions in the central part of the state; in 1835 there were about two hundred miles of railroad in the state.¹⁹ Connection was made with New York in 1839. Farther south great activity was displayed. The Charleston and Hamburg Railroad, 137 miles in length, was the longest line under one management in the world when it was opened for traffic in 1835. Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia contained most of the other roads built during the first decade of railroad construction.

Some principles drawn from political economists have been alluded to, and Congress was advised to leave things to themselves, upon the ground that, when the condition of society is ripe for internal improvements, that is, when capital can be invested with a fair prospect of adequate remuneration, the improvements will be executed by associations of individuals unaided by the government. In regard to foreign trade and any other intercourse between nations, Clay said the same course would be a wise one to follow.²⁰ But in regard to internal improvements, it does not follow that they will afford a competent dividend upon the capital invested. It may be true, generally, that in old countries, where there is a great accumulation of surplus capital and a consequent low rate

¹⁹ Howe, op. cit., pp. 110-120.
Bogart, op. cit., pp. 199-209.

of interest, they will be made. But, in a new country the condition of society may be ripe for public works long before there is in the hands of individuals the necessary accumulation of capital to effect them; and besides, there is, generally, in such a country, not only a scarcity of capital, but also such a multiplicity of profitable objects presenting themselves as to distract the judgment of the individual. Further, the aggregate benefit resulting to the whole society from a public improvement may be such as to amply justify the investment of capital, and yet that benefit may be so distributed among different and distant persons that they can never be got to act in concert.

The turnpike roads which wanted to pass the Allegheny Mountains and the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal are objects of this description. Those who will be most benefited by such improvements reside at a considerable distance from the sites of them. Many of those persons never have and never will see them. How is it possible to regulate the contributions or to present to individuals so situated a sufficiently lively picture of their real interests to get them to make exertions in effectuating the expenses of such a project? The capitalist who would invest his money in one of these objects might not be reimbursed 3 per cent annually on the investment, while society, in various forms, might actually reap 15 or 20 per cent. The benefits from a turnpike road, built by private associations, are divided among the capitalist

who invests his money and receives his tolls, the land owner through whose lands the road passes, augmenting their value, and the farmer or shipper whose commodities are enhanced in value by the diminished expense of transportation.²¹ A combination upon any terms, much less a just combination of all those interests, to effect the improvement is impracticable.

Again, improvements made by private associations are generally made by local capital. At that time years would have had to pass before there would have been concentrated in certain places where the interests of the whole community called for improvements sufficient capital to make them. The place of the improvement, too, is not always the most interested in its accomplishment. Other parts of the union, the whole line of seaboard, are quite as much, if not more, interested in the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal as the small tract of land through which it passes. The same observation will apply to turnpike roads passing through the Allegheny Mountains. Sometimes the interest at the place of the improvement is adverse to the improvement.²² Of all the modes in which a government can employ its surplus revenue, none is more permanently beneficial than that of internal improvements. Fixed to the soil, it becomes a durable part of the land itself,

²¹ Richardson, op. cit., II, 315-360.

²² Colton, Speeches of Henry Clay, I, 116-135.

diffusing comfort, activity, and animation on all sides. The first direct effect is on the agricultural community, into whose pockets comes the difference in the expense of transportation between good and bad ways. Thus, if the price of transporting a barrel of flour by the erection of the Cumberland turnpike should be lessened two dollars, the producer of the article would receive two dollars more now than formerly.

But putting aside all pecuniary considerations, there may have been political motives sufficiently powerful alone to justify certain internal improvements. How were these improvements to be effected if things were left to themselves? There were many instances where internal improvements would help the country politically.²³

As no state or community, in the crude methods of taxation then prevailing, could provide the means for the construction of any extensive system of roadway, private enterprise came in. Corporations were formed, often with financial aid from the government; they procured the rest of their capital by lotteries, and they charged tolls for the use of their highways. These highways were called turnpikes, and that word, of somewhat obscure origin, was generally used as synonymous with an artificial stone road. In the first twenty-one years of the century, twelve hundred miles of road, nearly all of it of approved construc-

²³ Ibid., pp. 122-137.

tion, was built.²⁴ Soon after that time canals and railroads attracted public attention, and the turnpikes failed to pay expenses and had to be taken over by the public. In those years, the State of Pennsylvania had subscribed nearly two million dollars to the capital stock of the road companies within her limits, besides contributions that had been made by counties and towns. The construction of bridges on these roads was usually undertaken by other companies which were also often aided by the federal government through the money Henry Clay had been able to get set aside for internal improvements.²⁵

Most of these bridges were made of timber, with stone abutments in some cases, and they were constantly being destroyed by fire, flood, and ice.

The discussions of the Cumberland Road project and the growing interest in canals culminated in a resolution of the Senate requesting Gallatin to prepare and report a plan for the application of such means as were within the power of Congress for the purpose of opening roads and making canals. Gallatin, then Secretary of the Treasury, wrote one of the most remarkable documents that ever came from his pen on his plan of internal improvements along the Atlantic coast and extending on into the Mississippi Valley.

Fulton argued most strongly for the construction of

²⁴ Edward Channing, History of the United States (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921), V, 5-8.

²⁵ Annals of Congress, 7 Cong., II, 365-396.

canals, which were vastly superior to any form of turnpike. He calculated that the saving on transportation of one barrel of flour for one hundred and fifty miles, if carried by canal instead of by road, would be \$1.50, which was equal to the existing import duty on thirty pounds of coffee or thirty gallons of molasses, and the saving on the bringing of fifty thousand cords of wood to a city of fifty thousand inhabitants in one year would pay all the duties levied by the government on those people during that time and leave a surplus.²⁶

It followed, therefore, that canals could be dug and operated at public expense with a great saving of money and effort, even though they were operated free of toll.

²⁶ Thomas W. Knox, History of Steam Navigation (London: C. P. Putnam and Sons, 1892), pp. 14-34.

Chapter IV

Some Improvements Influenced by Henry Clay

In noting a few of the improvements that were begun under the impetus of the "great American system" which Clay started, the reader must take into consideration the fact that a large number of books have been written on each one of these improvements; therefore, he must look in those books to find more detail in regard to their construction. The improvements which are cited are only a few of the many that were made during the time of Henry Clay. His influence in Congress while he was Speaker of the House of Representatives was responsible more than anything else for the cooperation Congress gave these projects. Time after time he used his great oratorical powers in the defense of his American system of internal improvements.¹ Being a very shrewd lawyer and an eloquent speaker, he was able to come out on the better end of the arguments in the debates in Congress. The most outstanding debate he made was perhaps that one in which he tore down the arguments of three such good speakers as Madison, Monroe, and Jefferson. Clay was thinking of the union as a whole and not as a section, state, or any one group of states. Naturally, he favored the Western states to some extent, but he gave reasons to show that internal improvements which helped the Western states would be a great

¹ Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., II, 1343-1356.

help to the Eastern states also.

The Cumberland Road, one of the improvements influenced by Clay, is about eight hundred miles long, extending from Cumberland, Maryland, to Vandalia, Illinois. It had an important part in the opening up of the West and Southwest to settlement from the East. It was begun in 1806, was built in sections, and was finished in 1840. It was to have been built by the federal government out of funds derived from sales of public lands in the states to be traversed, but additional appropriations soon became necessary, and, largely owing to the influence of Henry Clay, the national government advanced the sum of \$6,821,246 for this purpose between 1806 to 1838. For many years the road was under federal control and was called the Great National Pike, but by 1856 the government had turned it over to the various states through which it passed. For many years it was perhaps the chief avenue for Western emigration, and thousands of prospective settlers passed over it from the various Eastern states.²

The National Southern Road was to have run from Washington to New Orleans through the western part of Tennessee, the northern part of Alabama, and the State of Mississippi. This road was built largely through the efforts of Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. It was not completed all the way, as the appropriation ran out. Some great historians

² Archie Butler Hulbert, The Cumberland Road (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Publishing Company, 1905), pp. 1-120.

say that if the roads and railroads in the United States had run north and south instead of east and west there would have been no Civil War.³

Given to the House of Representatives on April 3, 1826, was the petition from the central committee of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company and of the commissioners appointed by the states of Virginia and Maryland and by the United States to open books for the subscription of stock to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, praying the aid of Congress to their enterprise by a subscription of stock. The petition was referred to the Committee on Roads and Canals.⁴

The first board of directors was elected April 23, 1827. The company was organized April 24, 1827. An examination of the country was commenced on July 2, 1827, under the direction of Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen H. Long and Captain William H. McNeill, United States topographical engineers, and William Howard, a United States civil engineer, assisted by Lieutenants Barney, Trimble, and a Mr. Harrison. The State of Maryland became a stockholder in the company by subscribing for half a million dollars of its stock March 6, 1828.⁵

In August, thirty-four sections of the canal from Little Falls to Seneca, seventeen miles, were placed under

³ Congressional Debates, 1825, II, part 2, 235-248.

⁴ Ibid., I, part 2, 246-258.

⁵ Howe, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

contract, and on September 1 work was actually begun. Though at all times master of the situation, the canal company found its task tremendously heavy; the weather and varying prices of labor and necessities, combined with great physical obstacles, rendered the undertaking one in which patience was as necessary as capital. Both were many times exhausted. If it had not been for the cooperation of the State of Maryland, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal would never have been finished, in spite of Clay's hard work to get the national government to appropriate money for the canal. The canal, finished in 1850, cost \$11,071,176.21.⁶

In the nineteenth Congress an act was passed April 20, 1826, appropriating the sum of fifteen thousand dollars for the repair of the post road in the Indian country, between Jackson and Columbus, Mississippi, to be expended under the direction of the Postmaster-General; the sum of money was to be paid out of any money in the Treasury. Although Henry Clay was Secretary of State at this time and could not directly control things in the House of Representatives, he was largely responsible for most of the internal improvements through his friends in the House. He was the instigator of this bill, which became a law, for improving the roads for mail routes and for military purposes.⁷

⁶ Ibid., pp. 1-44.

⁷ Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., II, part 2, 2551.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was first started by two very energetic and daring young men, Philip E. Thomas and George Brown. These two young men, with the help of Henry Clay, the State of Maryland, and the City of Baltimore, brought back to Baltimore the Western trade and prestige it had enjoyed in the days of the stagecoach and freighter. These two men, after talking to Clay, met with a group of Baltimore business men and drew up plans for their railroad. Up to this time there were only nine miles of railroad in the United States. This new road was to run between the City of Baltimore and some suitable point on the Ohio River, by the most eligible and direct route.⁸ This was in the same territory as that in which the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was being built, and therefore, there was much rivalry between the two companies. The steam engine had not been very successfully developed as yet, and so the first car on the railroad was pulled by a horse walking on a revolving belt, which started the locomotion. This was the largest railroad ever yet attempted in the world and naturally the people were a little skeptical of the outcome.

Strangely enough, the stock of the railroad sold much faster than did that of the canal, for the railroad was much more of an experiment than the canal. A very bitter fight took place for the right of way along the

⁸ Dunbar, op. cit., pp. 976-1008.

Potomac River and at "Rock's Point," twelve miles below Harper's Ferry. By a court order the railroad gained the right of way. The road was completed in June, 1842, to Cumberland, 178 miles.⁹

The Erie Canal stands out from all others of the period because of its influence on building up the industries of the East, peopling the farms of the West, and providing the laboring masses of large portions of Europe with food. It has been so successful that its origin has been clouded by the claims of many persons and their descendants. It makes little difference to whom the idea first occurred, for the canal would not have been dug when it was had it not been for the powerful, continuing support given to the project by DeWitt Clinton, and to him, therefore must be given the credit for its construction. Although the federal government's kindly attitude was a great help, Henry Clay, other than in swaying the minds of the members of Congress favorably toward internal improvements, had very little to do with the building of the Erie Canal.¹⁰

The Western Inland Lock Navigation Company had provided somewhat uncertain navigation between the Mohawk and Lake Ontario, using existing water courses wherever possible. The Erie Canal, on the other hand, was constructed independently of any parallel river or lake navigation and

⁹ Bogart, op. cit.

¹⁰ Morgan, op. cit., pp. 380-389.

connected the Mohawk with the Great Lake system above Niagara Falls; it ran by the side of the Mohawk and even crossed it but never utilized its bed. The canal was close to Lake Ontario but soon changed its course for Lake Erie. Its only dependence upon lakes and rivers was for the water necessary to operate its locks. In this way it avoided all the dangers and difficulties besetting river navigation - high water, low water, rapids, rocks, and tumultuous currents - and it connected the Hudson with the navigation of the continental interior and not with that of the St. Lawrence Valley. As at first constructed, it was 363 miles long, and the highest point was at Lake Erie, 568 feet above the Hudson at Albany. Due to this fact the total lockage was increased to about 700 feet.¹¹

¹¹ Channing, op. cit., pp. 11-14.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Henry Clay was most fortunate in that he had a father and a mother with strong intelligence and forethought. Although they were not rich financially, they were in knowledge. Therefore, they gave to Henry Clay something that he perhaps would not have possessed if they had been wealthy.

The political phase of Henry Clay's life began while he was still a young man and continued on through his life until just before his death. His greatest aspiration in politics was to become the President of the United States. He ran for the office two times and was defeated each time. His ideals and principles were formed early while listening to Thomas Jefferson, his favorite of the statesmen of that day. In his debates for internal improvements he often referred to Jefferson as being one of the early men to see the benefits of them, while in truth Jefferson was somewhat opposed to Congress' appropriating money for them.

There is no question but that internal improvements have been the greatest single reason for our country's developing economically as fast as it has. They brought the sections of the country closer together. The settling of the Western states could not have been achieved as successfully and quickly as it was without such improve-

ments as the Cumberland Road and the Erie Canal. There is no other one phase in the history of the United States that could have made the City of New York as great a port as it is in the world today. The other Eastern cities have benefited by improvements to the West. The West had no market until ways and means were opened up to them to get their products to the cities of the East.

Henry Clay religiously was not of a devout type, but he never committed any great offense, possibly his worst being his great love for gambling. He never could resist a good card game but was always honest in gambling. He would indulge in a drink of intoxicating liquor once in a while, but seldom did he over-indulge.

In his public life he was usually in the thick of events when his presence was of the utmost advantage to his plans. Thus, by an exercise of his talents his name was forever associated with the acts that began the internal improvement system of the United States.

Having been called into politics and kept in politics by the exigencies of his country, he on two notable occasions delayed the United States from plunging headlong into a civil war. His nickname, "The Great Pacificator," was justifiable in view of the fact that he wrote the Compromise of 1850 and also the Missouri Compromise.

The conclusion derived from this study is that Henry Clay was beneficial and helpful to the country in spending his time and energy to justify a system of internal improve-

ments by Congress. It has been shown how he managed to put over his plans in spite of the opposition arrayed against him. He was in truth the "Father of the Great American System of Internal Improvements."

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