

The bill, together with the special message of the President, was referred to a large committee and was favorably received. Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury, in answer to a letter from the committee, urged their favorable action upon considerations of the wisest statesmanship and purest patriotism; but as expectation, verified by subsequent events, was held that a rupture with Great Britain was impending, Congress finally declined to make the appropriation at that time, on the ground that "the resources of the country might be required to support a war."

The commissioners marked their sense of the refusal to grant aid to a national object no less important in war than in peace by saying, in the conclusion of their report to the legislature:

These men console themselves with a hope that the envied State of New York will continue a suppliant for the favor and a dependent upon the generosity of the Union, instead of making a manly and dignified appeal to her own power. It remains to be proved whether they judge justly, who judge so meanly of our counsels.

Congress having told the New York statesmen to wait until the war was over, they replied that they would not wait; that "delays were always the refuge of weak minds." In the current language of those days they called the work "the grand Erie canal," appreciating the sublimity of the beneficent changes it would produce in opening out for immigration and the use of mankind an area of fertile land greater in extent than the narrow edge of the continent occupied by the leading nations of the Old World, more clearly in the confidence of their well-founded hopes than we do now who look at their realization as a fact accomplished long ago.

After the postponement of aid by Congress, applications were made to the legislatures of different States; several of them returned favorable answers, but the war with Great Britain having begun, little progress was made.

On the 10th of November, 1816, De Witt Clinton, as president of a board of commissioners, appointed the previous year, renewed the application to the government of the United States, and on behalf of this State he represented, again bore significant testimony to the lofty purity of her motives in seeking her own interest only by promoting the national welfare. He said:

The State of New York is not unaware of her interests, nor disinclined to prosecute them, but when those of the general government are concerned and seem to be paramount, she deems it her duty to ask for their assistance.

Finding that all her efforts to secure aid from other States or the general government were unavailing, the State of New York alone and with the slender resources of those days resolved to commence the gigantic undertaking. Even then she persevered in rejecting considerations merely selfish. Her commissioners repudiated the idea of a "transit duty" to be levied for the advantage of the State, and said this would be "the better course if the State stood alone, but fortunately for the peace of the Union this is not the case. We are connected by a bond which, if the prayers of good men are favorably heard, will be indissoluble."

The act inaugurating the construction of navigable communications between the great western and northern lakes and the Atlantic ocean was passed by the State, April 15, 1817, and was based upon an important memorial presented to the legislature by the leading merchants and men of influence in the city of New York. It stated that—

Whereas navigable communications between Lakes Erie and Champlain and the Atlantic ocean, by means of canals connecting with the Hudson river, will promote agriculture and manufactures, mitigate the calamities of war, and enhance the blessings of peace, consolidate the Union, and advance the prosperity and elevate the character of the United States, it is