

# THE CANALIZATION OF THE LOWER SUSQUEHANNA

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WHEN the courageous colonial immigrant landed on American soil, his first thought was to find a convenient and prosperous locality in which to erect his home and to try his hand at gleanng the golden harvests which America was reported to produce. Rivers were the natural lines of penetration into the interior; so far as they were navigable they served as important highways to the settler. At the places where the Atlantic rivers emerged from the Piedmont and started across the coastal regions, waterfalls or rapids constituted obstacles which made them the heads of navigation. Below the fall line each river valley constituted a separate economic cell; the Connecticut, Hudson, Delaware, James, and other streams of more limited note each became a center of colonial life.

However, the lower Susquehanna Valley was not settled by the early colonists as the river which drains it is unlike all other eastern waterways.<sup>1</sup> Instead of being a stream of moderate descent and bordered with extensive ranges of bottom or flat lands below the fall line, the Susquehanna is roughest from its mouth to about fifty miles northward. Within this distance the river drops about 150 feet and for most of the distance washes the base of precipitous, rocky hills varying from one hundred to three hundred feet above the surface. Although there are no perpendicular falls in this section of the stream, the river bed is naturally rocky and the waters flow rapidly over the successive ranges of rock until they are lost in Chesapeake Bay. The Susquehanna was "ill

<sup>1</sup> For descriptions of the river see: *A Description of the River Susquehanna* (Philadelphia, 1796); A. Gallatin, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on Public Roads and Canals*, Appendix E, Mr. Latrobe's Communication, 93-5; I. Weld, *Travels Through The States of North America . . . from 1795-1797* (London, 1800), I, 127; Phillip Vickers Fithian's *Journal*, ed. Albion and Dodson (Princeton, 1934), 38-9; J. Melish, *A Description of the Roads of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1814), p. 169; American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, I, 276-277.

adapted to navigation"; the topography of the lower valley did not beckon the colonial settler.

The upper course of the river is very much different from the rough, lower course. Including all its northeastern branches, the Susquehanna is peculiar in the fact that as a navigable river it is much less interrupted by rapids or dangerous shoals than one would expect from the tortuous course it pursues through an extensive mountain system. The upper river is free from falls and the occasional rapids were no great hindrance to navigation. Only where the river passes through the Blue Ridge range have the waters been unable to beat a smooth passageway and so are obliged to tumble over the head of the Great Conewago Falls.

These falls marked the lower limits of navigation to the early boatman as they were almost impassable impediments and, in addition, from the falls to the mouth of the river the channel was shallow, rapid, and extremely rough. These features of the Susquehanna system made descending navigation of the lower section of the river extremely dangerous and ascending navigation almost impossible. But to the territory drained by this river within the states of New York and a large part of Pennsylvania, nature seemed to point out the Susquehanna as the great highway to market. As there is no great tributary flowing from the eastern part of Pennsylvania which formed a possible water connection with the Delaware, the early Susquehanna settlers had either to hazard the dangers of the river or haul their products over bad roads to Pennsylvania's commercial metropolis on the Delaware. The latter was not only expensive but was also a time-devouring process which made it practically unprofitable.

Since the Conewago Falls were the beginning of the rough water, early boatmen did not pass below this point. The village of Middletown, erected near the falls, soon became an important port of entry for transshipment. In 1790 as many as 150,000 bushels of wheat came down the river as far as this town along with boards and scantling.<sup>2</sup> As it was necessary to reduce products

<sup>2</sup> *An Historical Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Canal Navigation of Pennsylvania . . . with an Appendix and Explanatory Map . . .*, published by the Susquehanna and Schuylkill, and Delaware Navigation Companies (Philadelphia, 1795), p. 42. Alex Grayslon to Jedediah Morse, Lewisburg, March 5, 1789 in answer to a list of queries on Dauphin county, in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, VI (1882), 115-116.

to a concentrated form for overland hauling, Middletown early became the seat of large flour mills; its flour was sent by wagon to Philadelphia at an estimated cost of 5s.3d. per hundredweight<sup>3</sup> from which point it was carried to all sections of the world.<sup>4</sup> Soon boats began to land at the shore opposite Middletown and there cargoes were transshipped overland to Baltimore.<sup>5</sup> The Chesapeake merchants and shippers early began to recognize the value of the Susquehanna granary and were eager to get the flour trade of the valley away from Philadelphia. The expense of the wagon haul, however, was so great that little profit was made.

Before long, enterprising individuals began to devise schemes by means of which the obstacles to navigation at the Conewago Falls might be removed. A survey party in 1790 suggested that a canal should be built about the falls to permit the passage of river craft below that point. Governor Mifflin believed in the benefits that would be derived from this enterprise and on July 3, 1792 a contract was made calling for the construction of a canal forty feet wide and four feet deep around the falls. This was the first canal constructed within the state of Pennsylvania. It was opened to traffic with great ceremony on November 22, 1797, amid the roar from an "amature cannon."<sup>6</sup>

This canal around the falls, however, was not destined to play

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Ringwalt, *Development of Transportation Systems in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1888). Ringwalt estimates that the charge amounted to about \$14.66 per ton in Pennsylvania currency. American State Papers, *Miscellaneous*, I, 858. In a comparative statement of the cost of land and water carriage made in 1794 it was estimated that the cost of land transportation from Middletown to Philadelphia was 5s.6d. per cwt. or 20 tons for about 110 miles. Kelsey, ed., *Cazenove's Journal* (Haverford, 1922), p. 54. In the same year (1794) this traveller found that the cartage from Harrisburg to Philadelphia was the same as the estimate given between Middletown and Philadelphia (5s.3d. per cwt.). He added that because of the passage of the army through this town, en route to the scene of the Whiskey Rebellion, rates had temporarily jumped to as much as 8s. per cwt.

<sup>4</sup> C. B. Kuhlman, *History of the Flour Milling Industry* (Boston, 1929), pp. 22-23; *A Description of the River Susquehanna*; *Cazenove's Journal*, p. 52; F. A. F. LaRochefoucauld, *Travels through the United States of North America, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, I, 90-91; J. P. Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States* (Dublin, 1792), pp. 154-156; *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, VI, 117.

<sup>5</sup> S. Day, *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1843), 701; *Niles' Weekly Register*, XXXI, 4; J. Gibson, *History of York County* (Chicago, 1886), p. 333.

<sup>6</sup> *Account of the Conewago Canal on the River Susquehanna*; J. Gibson, *History of York County*, p. 333; Gallatin, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on Public Roads and Canals*, 32; A. F. Harlow, *Old Towpaths* (New York, 1926), p. 15.

an important role in river navigation. Even before it was completed a new type of craft appeared on the Susquehanna that was able to run the falls in safety. About the year 1795 the first vessel "in the shape of an ark" passed the Conewago Falls and continued on down the river to its mouth at Havre de Grace, Maryland.<sup>7</sup> Before long many similar crafts appeared on the Susquehanna during high water. The river trade of Middletown was almost immediately destroyed and the bulk of the river traffic was carried to the mouth of the river whence it was carried to Baltimore.

To the valley folk the Susquehanna was now regarded as a navigable river all the way to its mouth, but this was so only in a limited sense.<sup>8</sup> Viewed in its whole extent the ascending navigation was very difficult and extremely limited, while the descending navigation was uncertain and of short duration. Property could be floated down stream only in the time of high water which seldom occurred except in the early spring. During these floods the river was not navigated with any degree of safety or success, if at all, for more than a week or ten days. The consequence was that the whole trade of the Susquehanna descended at approximately the same time. The markets which were at all times uncertain became overloaded; the owners had incurred expenses which they could not meet without sales and so they were frequently obliged to sell their wares at ruinous sacrifices. Then too, it sometimes happened that there was no spring flood sufficient for descending navigation and the producer lost heavily through deterioration and spoilage of his goods.

When the trade of the Susquehanna began to reach Baltimore, via this all water route, the merchants of the city eagerly courted it. They were not blind to the importance of this great transpor-

<sup>7</sup> *A Description of the River Susquehanna*, p. 19; S. Hazard, *The Register of Pennsylvania* (16 vols., Philadelphia, 1828-1835), II, 300; G. Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland* (Elkton, 1881), p. 379; Jones, *History of the Early Settlement of the Juniata Valley*, p. 173; *Cazenove's Journal*, p. 53. The inventor of the ark was an ingenious Pennsylvania Dutchman who lived along the Juniata River. Different accounts spell his name: Cryder, Kryder, and Kreider. Cazenove, the general agent of the Holland Land Company, reported in his *Journal* that arks were on the river when he made his journey through eastern Pennsylvania in 1794; others give the date as late as 1797.

<sup>8</sup> W. C. Carter, *History of York County* (Harrisburg, 1930), p. 204; T. Flint, *Letters from America* in R. G. Thwaites, ed. *Early Western Travels* (32 vols., Cleveland, 1904-7), IX, 66.

tation lane; they realized the potential wealth of the Pennsylvania hinterland. Founded in 1729, Baltimore soon rose to prominence in the Chesapeake region; by 1800 it had grown into a city of nearly 70,000 inhabitants. The Revolutionary War served as a great stimulus to the shipping interests of Baltimore and started her upon a commercial career. The Chesapeake metropolis not only had commercial ties with the people of the Susquehanna valley but its people were of the same race and religion as the settlers of central Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> The Germans and Scotch-Irish of interior Pennsylvania were not too friendly with the Quakers of Philadelphia nor did they especially desire to trade with their own state metropolis when they could float on nature's power, free of charge, to the Chesapeake. The Baltimore merchants anxiously encouraged the rivermen to carry their wares southward for they saw in the control of the Susquehanna region not only a rich, fertile domain added to their market, but also a way to the west via the westward branches of that stream.

In order that Baltimore could better secure the prospective trade of the upper waters of the Susquehanna, the General Assembly of the state of Maryland passed an act as early as 1783 granting a charter to a company for making a canal from tide water to a point known as Love Island located just south of the Pennsylvania-Maryland boundary.<sup>10</sup> The company, composed of William Augustine Washington, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Thomas Russell, Aquilla Hall, John Churchman, and forty others, mostly from the city of Baltimore, promised to raise £20,000 and finish the construction of the canal by 1801.<sup>11</sup> This organization was known as "The Proprietors of the Susquehanna Canal"; their undertaking was the first of its kind in the United States.

Work progressed slowly; the magnitude of the construction was much greater than had been anticipated. At numerous times supplementary legislation was passed by the Assembly extending the time of completion and the amount of stock that could be subscribed. Additional acts allowed the company to expend

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> G. Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland*, pp. 376-377; J. T. Scharf, *Chronicle of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1874), p. 208; Excerpts from the *Original Minute Book of the Proprietors of the Susquehanna Canal*, owned by Mr. Schriver, corresponding secretary of the Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

\$5,000 in opening and clearing the bed of the river with the stipulation that half tolls could be charged on river traffic.

By 1802 enough water could be kept in the canal to make an official inspection; the governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania were taken through the canal. "In the course of the Excursion," the canal manager reports, "they were also to demonstrate to the entire satisfaction of all persons present that the canal will afford a safe, easy, and expeditious navigation of more than nine miles up and down the most difficult and dangerous part of the River."<sup>12</sup> The report of this inspection was disseminated far and wide; the purpose of the inspection was to interest Pennsylvania in extending the canal northward at least as far as Columbia. But the proposed coöperation did not mature; the stock of the company fell rapidly from £1,000 to less than £500.

In 1803 the company reported that the canal was officially finished. It was, indeed, a very rough course about nine miles long and irregular in breadth and depth. The engineers made the fatal mistake of making the bottom circular which was not suitable for arks and other wide, flat-bottomed boats. Premiums were offered to promote navigation up and down the canal. Not many claimants for the prizes appeared although "Mr. Henry Putt, a respectable inhabitant of the Waters of the Juniata, did make one complete voyage down and up and down a second time" for which he received \$50.00.<sup>13</sup>

The Maryland sponsors of the canal continually tried to get the state of Pennsylvania to clear the river for safe navigation as far south as the Mason and Dixon line; the Quaker state persistently turned a deaf ear to any coöperation with the Maryland promoters. The Harrisburg legislators feared that by smoothing the surface of the Susquehanna they would prune Philadelphia's tree of commercial fortune. They held it to be their patriotic duty to aid their own metropolis against a city in a "foreign" state. In view of this situation, the directors of the Maryland canal planned to open a road from the head of their canal to Love Island to connect with Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in order to tap that region without having to hazard the uncertain river.

In spite of state aid, assessments, and lotteries, the canal was

<sup>12</sup> Excerpts from the *Original Minute Book*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

not profitable. Expenses grew; construction was faulty; revenues were delayed. Passage through the canal was slow because it was necessary to pass through many locks. Then, too, the canal had been constructed as much with a view to the erection of mills run by water power as to the purposes of navigation. To fit the canal for mill purposes the current had to be fairly strong; this current carried the alluvium of the river into the canal. The banks were washed by the current and bars were formed by the silt. The canal proved to be almost as dangerous as the river itself and its tolls were avoided whenever a river passage seemed possible.<sup>14</sup>

In 1804 the legislature of Maryland granted the directors of the canal the right to operate lotteries to supplement their elusive revenue. The benefit from this right was apparently only temporary as the canal was sold in 1817 by the sheriff of Cecil County at a great loss to the original owners. The purchasers immediately executed the bold measure of extending a wing dam at Love Island so as to obstruct the entire eastern channel of the river. This dam was constructed on the "plea of necessity," but there was possibly the more sinister purpose of making this "a sure means to force upon the public the use of the Canal." This move embittered the valley folk who formerly were accustomed to using the canal only when it was impossible to navigate the river. This policy of the new owners of the canal increased the friction between the two states and created a great demand for Pennsylvania's interference in this situation.<sup>15</sup> To the merchants of Baltimore this little Maryland canal was obviously a keen disappointment. The owners, after 1817, were openly operating for personal profit; they did not recognize the great value of their project as a lane from the Pennsylvania hinterland to the Baltimore market. Instead of befriending the rivermen, they embittered them by mean, tricky policies.

Despite the failure of this canal, Baltimore continued to receive much trade from the regions drained by the mighty Susquehanna system. Although the river traffic still suffered from the hazardous journey, and although there was no ascending navigation to speak of, lumber, grain, flour, whiskey, and many other agricultural products continued to enter the Baltimore market. In the year

<sup>14</sup> *American State Papers, Miscellaneous*, I, 727.

<sup>15</sup> MS. Petition signed by over 800 persons of Union county, Pennsylvania, in 1820. Archive Division of the Pennsylvania State Library.

1822, \$1,337,925 worth of goods descended the river to Port Deposit<sup>16</sup> from whence most of it was transhipped to Baltimore. Despite this rather large trade, the Baltimore people were not satisfied with their water highway to the interior of Pennsylvania and New York.

By this time Baltimore's rivals in the north were very active in the pursuit of internal improvements. New York was Erie Canal-minded; Pennsylvania's Union Canal project had been reawakened and work was again begun on this link to connect the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers.<sup>17</sup> By means of this route Philadelphia not only hoped to reach the West but she also dreamed of diverting the trade of the Susquehanna to her own market. This project made the Baltimore merchants nervous; Maryland business men were alarmed about the future. Besides the dangers created by the Union Canal construction, the old Potomac Company which was to connect the Chesapeake region with the West was reported to be hopelessly insolvent and unable to carry out the purpose of its incorporation. In 1821 a board of investigation declared this project a miserable failure. This investigation gave birth to a new project, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. But to the commercial folk of Baltimore this new company did not mean much; it appeared to throw its traffic into the southern part of the Chesapeake region out of the reach of Baltimore. Notwithstanding her interest in internal improvements, Baltimore opposed the new route to the West.

Thus aroused, Baltimore saw the need of a better navigable connection with the upper Susquehanna. Not only did she wish to make the transportation of the standard forest and agricultural products safer and cheaper, but she was also interested in tapping the growing iron and coal regions of Pennsylvania. The leaders of the city were determined that the magnificence of the Chesapeake and Ohio plan should not dominate the Maryland legislature's mind. In this Baltimore was successful, and by a resolution passed at the December Session, 1822, commissioners were appointed "to lay out, and survey a route for a canal, which will connect the

<sup>16</sup> G. W. Lightner, *Susquehanna Register of Arks, Rafts, &c, &c. arriving at Port Deposit in the Year 1822, 1823*. A copy of this Register is deposited in the Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore. These goods were carried in 537 arks and 514 board and timber rafts. Only \$12,000 worth of property was reported destroyed in transport during this season.

<sup>17</sup> A. F. Harlow, *Old Towpaths*, pp. 89-91.

waters of the Susquehanna with the city of Baltimore, beginning at the Conewago Falls, or on a point of said river which the commissioners may deem the most practicable; and shall also be directed to lay out, and survey a route for a canal from the same point, on the Susquehanna, or Conewago Falls, to the head of tide water, on the Susquehanna; and report upon the practicability, the expense, and necessary circumstances attending the same to the next General Assembly. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

In order to acquaint themselves with practical information on the subject, the commissioners visited the Erie Canal and hired James Geddes, then employed on the Erie, to survey their proposed route. In New York they were convinced that "the great advantages of canal navigation are no longer a matter of speculation and theory" and determined that a Susquehanna canal should be built. In order to acquaint themselves with the Susquehanna system above the upper terminal of their proposed canal and to show the possibilities of a water route from Baltimore to the growing sections of Pennsylvania and New York, they returned home via Lake Cayuga, a short portage to the Susquehanna whence they travelled in an open boat to Harrisburg.

The commissioners estimated the cost of navigating a forty ton ark from Oswego, New York, to Conewago, a distance of 250 miles, at about \$50 while from Conewago to tide, a distance of between 60 and 70 miles by the river channel, the expense varied from \$50 to \$70. The trip from Conewago to tide cost more than one-half of the expense of the whole trip from the highest point up the river independent of insurance which amounted to about  $\frac{1}{2}\%$  above Conewago but which was from 7 to 10% of the value of the cargo below.<sup>19</sup> From the Susquehanna at Columbia a large amount of trade was diverted to Philadelphia for producers found it cheaper to haul their goods by wagon 85 miles at a rate of \$10 per ton than to hazard the river. Practically all of the merchandise intended for the Susquehanna country was sent overland from Philadelphia to Columbia and Harrisburg and conveyed to its destination in Durham boats.<sup>20</sup>

The commissioners were well satisfied that a canal could be

<sup>18</sup> *Report by the Maryland Commissioners on A Proposed Canal from, Baltimore to Conewago* (Baltimore, 1823).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

constructed along the Susquehanna. By means of this avenue they told the merchants of Baltimore that they would gain access to a region three times as large as the state of Maryland with a population larger than that of their own state. As "*their natural and only sea-port*," Baltimore would gain the whole of the ascending trade to this vast region and would no longer have to trade "*in money*" with the rural shippers. Heavy but comparatively cheap articles would be sent to Baltimore over this canal rather than to Philadelphia by wagon.<sup>21</sup>

This canal was also visioned as a link to the West. With a short canal to connect the Juniata and Allegheny Rivers, the commissioners saw a complete avenue opened between Pittsburgh and Baltimore "by means of no more than one hundred and forty-three miles of canal in a distance of about four hundred miles."<sup>22</sup> Such a link was seriously needed by the Chesapeake city, for, since river steamers made their appearance in western streams about 1817, much of the former wagon traffic to Baltimore had been diverted into the renowned triangle of the West to New Orleans to New York to the West. The possibility of such a connection was also a good talking point to be used against the backers of the Chesapeake and Ohio project.

The Baltimore commissioners were not satisfied merely to build a canal to tide; their plans called for a continuous canal from Conewago to Baltimore. River craft and canal boats, they maintained, were "utterly unfit to contend with the wind and waves of the exposed deep waters of the tide." The continuous route would make the journey cheaper and would also eliminate the expense of transshipment at Havre de Grace. But most important was the fact that "no other market whatever can, with any thing like the same advantages, come in competition with that of Baltimore; because, to reach any other seaport would require transshipment at Port Deposit, additional tolls, exposure, delays, and the travelling a greater distance by canal and natural navigation." Baltimore was especially anxious to have a continuous canal because of the strong possibilities that the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal connecting the "two bays" would be completed, thus giving Philadelphia access to the goods received at the mouth of the Susquehanna or the

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 45-48.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

terminus of a canal which extended only to tide. So important did the commissioners regard the Susquehanna Canal that they suggested the project should not be entrusted to the hands of a chartered company or joint stock company but that the state of Maryland should hold it exclusively.<sup>23</sup>

The report of the commissioners aroused interest in internal improvements to a fever pitch in Baltimore. Opinion was seriously divided as to whether the Susquehanna project or the Chesapeake and Ohio plan was the more advantageous to the city. Newspapers carried articles to educate the public and acquaint them with the facts of each.<sup>24</sup> Early in December 1823, General Harper and a number of the most prominent citizens of Baltimore waited upon the mayor and requested him to call a meeting of the citizens at the Exchange "for the purpose of taking into consideration the expediency of promoting a connection between the Ohio and the Chesapeake at Baltimore, by a canal through the District of Columbia."<sup>25</sup> The mayor readily agreed and a meeting was called for December 13. When notice appeared of this meeting some citizens requested that it be postponed until the twentieth, at which time the Susquehanna Navigation and the Chesapeake and Ohio project could be jointly considered. The meeting was so arranged; on the appointed day a numerous gathering collected. General Harper addressed the meeting in favor of the Chesapeake and Ohio project. He remarked that he held the Susquehanna navigation to be very important, but that the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal would be of a more national character, would help rescue the western trade from being diverted to New Orleans, and be of greater advantage to Baltimore. In supporting the Chesapeake and Ohio plan, General Harper said that "you now enjoy the downward trade of the whole country watered by the Susquehanna and its branches, in which you can have no successful rival." The General held that the Susquehanna Commissioners had over-emphasized the hazards of the river traffic and that losses were

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Newspaper clippings. Box on Susquehanna-Tide Water Canal in the Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>25</sup> *General Harper's Speech to the Citizens of Baltimore on the Expediency of Promoting a Connection between the Ohio, at Pittsburg, and the Waters of the Chesapeake at Baltimore, by a Canal through the District of Columbia with his Reply to some of the Objections of Mr. Winchester.* Delivered at a meeting held at the Exchange on December 20, 1823.

actually less than one per cent of the total goods received.<sup>26</sup> The speaker then turned his attention to the Philadelphia projects which were being sponsored to tap the Susquehanna trade. He foresaw that the Union Canal would most likely lack water and that the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal would necessitate transshipment. "I think myself warranted in the conclusion," continued Harper, "that Baltimore cannot be deprived of the downward trade of the Susquehanna, even when the two canals projected by the people of Pennsylvania shall be finished; events which are certainly not very near, perhaps not quite certain."

General Harper then turned his attention to the problem of ascending trade on the Susquehanna. He held that the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal would be in the same situation in this respect as Baltimore. Until the Union Canal is finished to Middletown, he declared, all returning merchandise to the Susquehanna country must be hauled over land. Viewing the situation, Harper held that Baltimore suffered no handicap in competition with Philadelphia for this trade. From Baltimore to the Conewago falls where ascending river navigation began, he found to be 58 miles "over an excellent turnpike road"; from Philadelphia to Columbia "over a road not so good" was 74 miles with an additional ten or so to the falls. General Harper warmed to fever heat on this subject. He charged the merchants of Baltimore themselves for the loss of the ascending or return trade and in regard to Philadelphia's superiority he said, "It is your own supineness; your want of attention to the proper means of advancing, in this respect at least, your own interest; the erroneous principles on which you conduct the trade; and, believe me, that while you continue in the same course, the canal to which you look with such fond expectations, would afford you no relief."<sup>27</sup> In conclusion General Harper presented the resolution, "That the measure in question (the Susquehanna Navigation), although highly interesting in its character, and deserving to be steadily kept in view by the citizens of Baltimore, and the whole state, is not of pressing or immediate exigency."

Mr. George Winchester, one of the commissioners and a firm believer in the canalization of the Susquehanna, presented his

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

opinions to the meeting after Harper had concluded. With much feeling and eloquence, Winchester claimed that "the salvation of Baltimore must in a great measure depend upon the Susquehanna canal." "The great importance which it contemplates with the very extensive trade which the proposed canal will lay open to this city, with the fairest portion of the United States," he argued, "certainly presents a prospect which no good citizen can look upon with indifference." He held that it would be premature to consider a western project such as the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, but that the Susquehanna should receive the unanimous and undivided support of the city.

In rebuttal, General Harper answered Winchester and refuted his statements at great length. However, when the question was taken, Mr. Winchester's resolution favoring the Susquehanna project was carried by a great majority. Accordingly in 1823 the Maryland Legislature passed legislation authorizing the city of Baltimore to construct a canal from that city to Conewago providing Pennsylvania would grant her permission.

The favorable opinion which had so heartily endorsed the plan, however, did not suffice to bring it into execution. Financial conditions were extremely precarious at the time; the outlook for the canal to the north was indeed poor.<sup>28</sup> But the merchants of Baltimore realized that they had either to keep pace with rival cities or suffocate. In 1824 and 1825 reports were made by the Susquehanna Commissioners in an attempt to keep the project alive and attempts were made to cultivate Pennsylvania's favor.<sup>29</sup> It was the opinion of most of the active citizens of Baltimore that a canal was vital, and since it began to appear that the Chesapeake and Delaware canal would be constructed, an improved connection with the mouth of the Susquehanna appeared absolutely necessary. The Baltimore people had no doubt in their minds that the Chesapeake and Delaware project was planned to carry away the trade of the Susquehanna and give Philadelphia the exclusive control of the Pennsylvania hinterland. As the completion of a canal to Conewago appeared too burdensome at this time, the proposition of a still-water Canal from Baltimore to Havre de Grace was brought forward.

<sup>28</sup> J. T. Scharf, *Chronicles of Baltimore*, p. 445.

<sup>29</sup> *York Recorder*, January 27, 1824.

The Chesapeake metropolis realized that something had to be done immediately to thwart Philadelphia; the bitter rivalry grew daily. Since the passage of the 1823 law it became more and more manifest that supreme efforts and sacrifices had to be made to overtake Philadelphia. The Quaker City was about to enjoy the usefulness of the Union Canal; she was vigorously pushing the Chesapeake and Delaware project; she was spending great sums of money in encouraging the Pennsylvania State Works. But the Baltimore citizens disagreed over minor details; dimensions, terminals and locations were street corner subjects. In this state of affairs nothing constructive could be done and it was finally deemed advisable to call a meeting to promote "concert and unity of action." This assemblage appointed a Committee "to place before the public the object to which the city's single attention should be brought."<sup>30</sup>

With lynx-eyed accuracy the committee sorted out the main issues and reported to their fellow citizens in January, 1827.<sup>31</sup> They maintained that after forty years of planning and spending for internal improvements Baltimore was "still in the wilderness." Before the days of canal transportation Baltimore could compete with the Philadelphia market but in 1827 those days of "generous competition" were over. Since the Pennsylvania metropolis began to experiment with canals, the life of Baltimore hung in the balance but still had done nothing constructive. Now with the Pennsylvania State Works in construction it was absolutely necessary for Baltimore to make "instant exertions" to cope with the problem. The investigators held that it was necessary to sponsor a canal project immediately. Once trade was diverted from a city, it could not be regained. In very descriptive language they held that "the desert daily advances upon the city, and in such cases the very spirit of pestilence seems to have driven from its streets *the busy hum of industry*." The committee then presented their solution to the problem. They suggested that a canal be built to connect with the Pennsylvania State Works at Columbia, Pennsylvania. This proposed canal was to extend only to tide

<sup>30</sup> "Diary of Robert Gilmore" in *Maryland Magazine of History and Biography*, XVII (1922), 245-246.

<sup>31</sup> *Report and Resolution relative to Internal Improvement and the Susquehanna Canal Report*. Report adopted January 5, 1827. A copy of the report and resolution is owned by Mr. Shriver, corresponding secretary of the Maryland Historical Society.

water; it was thought that the canalization of the lower Susquehanna would divert all of the trade of the Pennsylvania State project to Baltimore. This all sounded very encouraging to the commercial folk of the Chesapeake center but Pennsylvania still held the trump card.

Baltimore's great difficulty was that her projected canal had to be constructed partly on Pennsylvania soil. For some time her merchants had been fencing for charter rights to construct a water way to Conewago; for a long time they had fought loud and boisterously for their Baltimore and Susquehanna railroad charter to York. In this struggle Baltimore received valuable support from the southern counties of Pennsylvania. Much of this section of the state was physio-geographically connected with Baltimore and its interests lay to the south. The improvement policy of the state of Pennsylvania was very unpopular in this region; in the eyes of the people of Lancaster, York, Adams, Franklin, and Cumberland counties the State Works failed to give them any advantages but their taxes helped pay the bills. The citizens of this southern tier of counties openly stated their desire for a connection with Baltimore. They readily joined the Anti-Mason party in opposition to the administration's internal improvement platform<sup>32</sup> and became the spokesman for Baltimore in the Pennsylvania legislature.

A number of up-state coal and lumber people soon joined the representatives of the southern counties in their clamor for the extension of the state canal to tide at Havre de Grace. They claimed that the great coal, iron, and lumber products of the branches of the Susquehanna could not advantageously reach market without a continuous canal connection with tide water. The Philadelphia and Columbia railroad (the eastern link of the mongrel State Works) could not carry their bulky goods; the Union Canal was not large enough for their passage to Philadelphia via Reading. In 1835 petitioners of the valley stated that "the whole lumber and coal of the Susquehanna, destined for the Chesapeake markets will pursue the precarious, and very often ruinous channel of the river" unless a canal were constructed.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> C. McCarty, *Anti-Masonic Party: A Study of Political Anti-Masonry in the United States, 1827-40* in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1902, I, 427-428.

<sup>33</sup> S. Hazard, *Register of Pennsylvania*, II, 103-4. This argument was nothing more than a talking point for little coal could be shipped via the

As early as 1834 Baltimore began to feel the effects of the Pennsylvania State Works<sup>34</sup> and the clamor made by the friends of Baltimore became louder. Although the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was now completed and would afford Philadelphia a means of tapping the Susquehanna at Havre de Grace if a canal were dug to tide, her representatives still condemned Baltimore's Rasputin-like power behind the scenes at Harrisburg. In 1835 the bill providing for a canal charter passed the Senate and from all appearances was destined to become a bill.

At this time Philadelphia decided to take a final stand to thwart the canal charter bill. The leading citizens of the city met in town-meeting on April 9, 1835, where they drew up resolutions which were forwarded to their representatives at Harrisburg. The Philadelphians viewed the proposed charter as completely subversive to the principles of the State Works; they feared that it would make "*our public works tributary to a rival state.*" The Philadelphians requested their representatives to use all "honorable means" possible to kill this legislation."<sup>35</sup>

Despite Philadelphia's stand the bill became law on April 15, 1835. It authorized the construction of a canal from Columbia, Pennsylvania, to the Maryland-Pennsylvania line along the eastern bank of the river. Maryland had already chartered a canal from the state line to tide under the incorporated name of the Tidewater Canal Company. The two canals were later united and went under the name of the Susquehanna-Tidewater Canal. Even in the bill itself, protection was given to Philadelphia; Section 10 of the act required that charges on the canal should not be less than the rates on the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad with the exception of lumber, iron, and coal and that the charges on the canal should be uniform with the tolls of the State Canals.

In spite of these protection clauses and the fact that the Chesapeake and Delaware canal would offer a connection with the new canal to Philadelphia, the passage of the act caused a great excitement in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Herald cried that "this measure strikes a deadly blow at the prosperity of Philadelphia." The capitalists of the Quaker City shook their

river as that product had to rely on a regular carrier and could not depend on spring freshets.

<sup>34</sup> *The Columbia Spy*, September 27, 1834.

<sup>35</sup> *Niles' Register*, XLVIII (April 25, 1835), 135-36.

heads in disgust to think that their thirty-two million dollar project would carry all of the profits of the West and of the Susquehanna region into the lap of another.<sup>36</sup>

The Marylanders, when they heard the news of the passage of the charter bill, were indeed, happy and "almost ready to illuminate." They believed that they now held a commanding position in reference to the whole of the improvement projects of Pennsylvania; to them the canal opened golden lands for their market. The *Baltimore Gazette* about this time remarked: "Philadelphia had gained by the passage of this bill, she has acquired information which perhaps could not have been obtained in any other way and which may prove of infinite service in the future, it has taught her that a portion of the state of Pennsylvania lies west of the Susquehanna."<sup>37</sup>

Two editors who had carefully followed the bitter commercial war between Philadelphia and Baltimore overlooked all petty fears and prejudices and foresaw the new canal to tide as an avenue which would bring wealth to both. The editor of Niles' *Commercial Register*, writing only a few days before the passage of the bill authorizing the construction of the canal, maintained that the canal would "give to commodities descending the Susquehanna their *natural* direction to the tide—from whence, by the Chesapeake and Delaware canal, or to Baltimore, they will seek a market as circumstances, or the wishes of parties, may direct."<sup>38</sup> The editor of the *Columbia Spy* held the same opinion; he wrote that Philadelphia and Baltimore would both prosper from the canal together with his own little "city in miniature." It remained, however, for the canal Company to wrestle with the difficulties of financing and constructing the canal before any of the prophecies could be fulfilled.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, XLVIII, 136.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, XLVIII, 136. Reprint of article from the *Baltimore American*.

<sup>38</sup> *Niles' Register*, XLVIII, 113.