**1864 Report of the Board of Public Works of the State of Ohio**

**Context:**

Each year, the Board of Public Works of the State of Ohio published its report to the governor on all the revenues and costs accounted for by the public infrastructure of the state: roads, canals, bridges, port facilities etc… with recommendations for the future. While no mention of the Civil War or the upcoming presidential election is made in this report, there is a clear concern about the decision made in 1861 to lease the canals to private owners to maintain for 10 years as a cost saving measure for the state. Infrastructure is costly, and a balanced combination of private, along with public state and federal investment needs to be found. There are also suggestions for both the State and private entrepreneurs to consider in regards to the future viability and profitability of Ohio’s network of canals. Residents of Peninsula almost entirely depended upon the canal for their livelihood, and these considerations would have bearing on their voting decisions in local, state, and federal elections.

**Questions:**

1. Why doesn’t the Board have any specific numbers about the trade that has been carried out on the Ohio and Erie Canal this year?

2. What problems does the board suspect will result from the current arrangement for running the canals?

3. Which state’s canals are named as being better run?

4. What resources in Ohio are suggested as being most important to the future profitability of the canals?

5. What improvements are suggested for extending the profitable life of Ohio’s canals, and what combination of private/ public investment is suggested? (What should the state take on, and what might private investors / entrepreneurs take on?)

**Reading / Text:**

**The canals were leased under the law passed May 8, 1861, the lease money being paid into the treasury of the State. The Board know nothing respecting the payment of this money, nor anything as to the amount of trade one on the canals, as the law does not provide for the return of trade reports. Neither is the Board informed as to the profits, if any, resulting to the lease company, as they keep this part of their business to themselves. It has been thought that, owing to the high price of labor and the low rates of toll, according to the toll sheet of 1858, it will require all that they have made in years past to pay for current repairs.**

**If New York has done so well with her canals, why is it that Ohio cannot do something with hers? Ohio is a young and growing State, and contains many thousands of acres of land yet untouched by the hand of the husbandman. Many of the counties are also underlaid with fields of coal, of which numerous large deposits have never been disturbed. Prof. Briggs, in his Geological Report of Ohio, says that the county of Tuscarawas is supposed to contain three billions three hundred millions (3,300, 000, 000) of tons of coal, an amount sufficient to supply the people of this State for several centuries; and there are many other such counties. A number are also underlaid with iron ore. The vast amounts of timber, bark, salt, coal oil &c., must likewise find a market; and they would do so, mostly, by canal if the facilities were adequate. If the canals were five feet deep, so that steam could be used to propel boats carrying one hundred tons, there would no longer be a question as to their success. They would be crowded with boats laden with the agricultural and mineral wealth of the State.**

**The State of Ohio was said, in time past, to have thirty-three” canal counties” but we claim now that there are eighty-eight canal counties for as the canals belong to the State, the citizens of all the counties own them, and ought to feel an interest in each and every branch. The income received from the canals is not very great, it is true- only twenty thousand and seventy-five dollars, the amount paid by the lessees for the use of them- yet what would the Miami and Maumee valleys be without the Miami and Erie Canal, what the Scioto, Licking, Tuscarawas, and Cuyahoga Valleys without the Ohio Canal? And what the Hocking Valley, with its thousands of acres of coal, without the Hocking Canal? The railroads are crowded with business, and yet there is enough for the canals. They should therefore be carefully guarded by the State officers, and, when the lease expires, if not sooner, have them made more efficient. Boats drawing three feet of water will not pay on long trips. But those drawing four feet six inches will; and such can be propelled, in deep water, with the same power that is required for such as draw three feet upon our canals as they now are.**

**Source:** Peninsula Library and Historical Society copy of Twenty Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Public Works for the Year 1864 Made to The Governor of the State of Ohio- Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer-1865