
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Troy, NY - Friendly Sons of St. Patrick

Before Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, Troy, N. Y., March 18, 1929

Development of the Canal System of the State

It is always a pleasure to speak in the city of Troy. You have so mastered the graceful art of real hospitality as to make every stranger within your gates feel that he is among friends. And were I to compare the assets of our different cities I would rate their ability to be truly hospitable almost on a level with their commercial activities or their financial resources. Many a profitable industry has been attracted to a city by this feeling that it will be welcomed by their citizens, while, on the other hand, the growth of other cities has been checked to an incredible degree by the inability of their social and commercial organizations to make the prospective settler within their borders feel that he will be really welcomed and appreciated. And, I know of no annual social gathering in your city where this spirit of friendliness is more manifest than at the annual dinner of the Friends of St. Patrick. 694

This being the case, I can very sincerely and honestly say that your invitation to meet with you tonight would have been accepted with real pleasure if there had been no other reason than the assurance of an enjoyable evening, but, in addition, I am particularly glad to have the opportunity for a friendly talk with you about something in which we are both very much interested indeed.

I am speaking now of the development and improvement in the canal systems of the State. We hear a great deal nowadays about our becoming air-minded. Those who have watched the improvement in the tonnage figures on the Erie Canal will agree with me, I think, that we are also, in this State at least, becoming canal-minded. Canals were one of the earliest forms of transportation adopted in the march of civilization. Even the primitive mind could appreciate the enormous saving in energy in hauling supplies by water as compared with overland routes. I have not the exact figures available, but I remember a picture, which made a deep impression on me in my youth, showing transportation by a ship railway of a steamer across the Isthmus. There was the steamer blocked up on a gigantic railway car that spread over a multitude of tracks. It was a boat that required when loaded perhaps 500 horsepower to drive her through the water. To transport her overland the picture showed 24 locomotives aggregating thousands of horsepower tugging madly at the job.

In the early days of the nineteenth century our forefathers with a daring and forethought far beyond their ability, laid out the waterway route across our State known as the Erie Canal. And, in consequence, at the point of each junction with the mighty Hudson your fair city of Troy grew and prospered amazingly. I think the years that followed showed a distinct retrogression in our intelligence when our fascination at the speed of our railroads and the feeling that we could get the goods in as many hours as there had previously

required days, led us to favor so greatly this method of transportation as to lead to the neglect and almost abandonment of our canal system. We have fallen into the habit of insisting on having things move by fast freight whether or not we really need them in a hurry. Now the commercial airplane is attracting our attention in the same way, but I am glad to say as the railway no longer symbolizes the height of obtainable speed in transportation we are also realizing more and more that there is a very great place in our whole system of moving heavy weights from place to place for our canals. I feel assured that the time is rapidly coming when there will remain no doubting Thomases in regard to the need of improving and extending our canal systems. Our forefathers, I think, were wiser in this respect than we have been until very lately. We must encourage airplane development. It is needed. We must not neglect the improvements in our railroads. They are needed also. But we must also remember that our canals for economic and scientific use are vital factors.

It is my hope to make a personal tour of our whole canal system this summer in order that I may see for myself its condition and needs. I want to take up with the Legislature next year a forward-looking program to improve the usefulness of our canal system, and I want to urge you members of the Friends of St. Patrick to do all in your power, if you find my recommendation sound and the need apparent, to support me in my efforts to secure favorable action by the next Legislature.

I have spoken of the Erie Canal, but I am referring also to our entire waterborne system of transportation, all of which practically finds its outlet to the sea past the gates of your city, including of course the deepening of the Hudson River so that it can and will be used for its entire length by ocean-going steamships of large tonnage.
