
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 359

1930 January 16

New York City, NY - Holland Society Dinner

p. 686

At Dinner of Holland Society, New York City, January 16, 1930
*Official Co-operation of State of New York and State of New Jersey for
Greater Unity and Development of Port of New York*

It is perhaps fitting that I should choose a dinner of the Holland Society to speak of the present needs of the great territory which lies at the mouth of the Hudson River and which was the first scene of the colonization of New Amsterdam by our Dutch forebears.

It is well for us to remember that when, after the discovery of our River by Hendrik Hudson in 1609, the first settlers followed, their settlements and homes were not confined to Manhattan Island but almost immediately were extended to Long Island, Staten Island and to the west side of the River, now known as the State of New Jersey. We must not forget, either, that for many generations, even after the English had come, the government of the Hudson River colony was one government and not separated. It was many years later that the Colony of New Jersey became separate from the Colony of New York, and even then for many years one royal Governor administered both colonies.

In other words, the point I am stressing is that for many generations after the white men came to these shores there was no practical differentia-

tion between New York and New Jersey. The communities which sprang up at the mouth of the Hudson River grew gradually into what might have been called, even in those days, a metropolitan area—dozens of little villages and settlements in close contact each with the other, with the same point of view and with close economic and social ties. This is borne out by what you and I know to be true, that the families of our ancestors lived perhaps for a time in Brooklyn and then moved to New Jersey, or started in New Jersey and then moved to Long Island. There was a complete intermingling between the many small communities. This made for excellent relationships and for a growing civilization that laid the foundations for our present prosperity on sound economic lines.

It was not until after the independence of the United States, and especially after the populations had grown, without an equivalent development of transportation facilities, that the Hudson River gradually became a new kind of barrier between New York and New Jersey. We went through what might be called a temporary era of separation, an era which was bound to come to a close, because it was based on false economic principles.

Science has given us the way out of this difficulty. To have talked of tunnels under the Hudson River or bridges across it 50 years ago would have been impossible, and it is only within a very few years that we have been using science to do away with an unnecessary barrier.

Once more the people of New Jersey and New York can look forward to adequate communications which will result in economic and social advantages for the populations of both States. The Hudson Tunnels are an old story; so is the Pennsylvania Railroad Tunnel, and now the Holland Tube has in two or three years established its complete success; the great Hudson River Bridge majestically joining the historic points of Fort Lee and Fort Washington is already ahead of construction schedule and in financing is well within its estimated cost.

The government of the two States have cooperated splendidly in past years in planning these new facilities. Two agencies of the States, one the Bridge and Tunnel Commission, which has so successfully completed the Holland Tunnel, and the other the Port Authority, which has completed the bridges from Staten Island to New Jersey and is now completing two other magnificent bridges; both of these agencies are still in existence. They came into separate being at different times to fill different needs, but as the years pass it becomes more and more evident that for a dozen reasons there should be a concentration of authority for the best interests of the people who live on or near the lower Hudson in the years to come.

It is true that an unhappy situation, I hope a temporary one, has developed in our relations with our sister State in regard to a transportation problem involving the separation of railroad line haul from lighterage. Many people—I hope the majority on both sides of the River—believe that the theory of creating two ports instead of one on one single natural bay and harbor would be a bad thing economically, commercially and financially for the best interests of all the people. It is, of course, necessary for us to contest this new theory of some people in New Jersey which is directly opposed to the whole spirit of the unity of the Port, and I am personally very confident, both as a lawyer and as a business man, that the new contention will not hold water either in the courts or at the bar of public opinion.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this purely temporary difficulty, we must continue to view the problem in its larger aspects, without prejudice and without being angered or annoyed by the lighterage issue.

In other words, we must still work for the unity of the Port and for better communications by all sections in and around that Port.

The time has come for the people on both sides of the River to see the need for additional tunnels or bridges between the two States. There are two public bodies, one of which has specialized in the building of tunnels, and the other in the building of bridges, in addition to the many other problems of Port unity. Both bodies have fine staffs of engineers, and yet from

a practical business point of view it would be better if we could in the near future combine and consolidate these two official bodies.

I am, therefore, suggesting to the people, to the business men and to the commercial associations of New York and New Jersey that in both States we should consider a wedding between the Bridge and Tunnel Commission and the Port Authority. I do not mean that the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be thrown into the discard and all its functions transferred to the Port Authority. I mean rather that by official cooperation between the two States the members of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be added to the membership of the Port Authority.

I do not mean that the splendid engineering staff of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be discarded but rather that it should be retained by the newly constituted body and used for their special work of building new tunnels. A plan of this kind will, I am confident, appeal to the business sense of the community.

There are many objections to the continuation of two separate bodies. In the first place, they become unnecessary rivals on matters affecting the whole financial structure of tunnel and bridge development. For example, you cannot have a free tunnel at one point and a toll bridge at another point, nor can you have a free bridge within a few blocks of a toll tunnel. Financially and in every other way bridges and tunnels go hand in hand.

Furthermore, there is the great problem of raising the money with which to build new bridges and tunnels. Because of the mounting budgets of both States, it seems to be impracticable for either State to pay the cost of new tunnels and bridges out of current annual revenues or to issue State bonds for this purpose. Under its original treaty and charter the Port Authority is a joint State agency which can finance either bridges or tunnels without additional burdens on the budgets or bonded indebtedness of the two State governments. In other words, the mechanics of the present Port Authority plan will allow the building of future tunnels and bridges under and across the Hudson River in a practical way which is readily accepted by the bankers and investors of both States.

Two other brief points in favor of a wedding between the two bodies: First, there will be an undoubted saving in overhead, an important consideration from the point of view of the public. Secondly, there will be a removal of confusion or unnecessary friction and of unseemly rivalry between two bodies which should be striving wholly for cooperation and for a common objective.

I hope that within the coming year the two States will make definite and distinct progress along these lines. We are proud of the members of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission and we are proud of the members of the Port Authority. We take pride in the splendid engineering staffs and the excellent plans which both bodies have drawn. Now is the time to use practical business sense and get something done by mutual effort, and it is my judgment that this can best be accomplished by bringing about a joinder of the two bodies, using all that is good in each body and working toward a common end.

If, in this generation, we can accomplish this ideal, we shall have returned to the sound economic and social structure which the founders of New Amsterdam established at the mouth of the Hudson River three centuries ago. They were right in their plans and their hopes. We can do well by carrying out the principles which they first enunciated.

At Dinner of Holland Society, New York City

January 16, 1930

Official Co-operation of State of New York and State of New Jersey for
Greater Unity and Development of Port of New York

It is perhaps fitting that I should choose a dinner of the Holland Society to speak of the present needs of the great territory which lies at the mouth of the Hudson River and which was the first scene of the colonization of New Amsterdam by our Dutch forebears.

It is well for us to remember that when, after the discovery of our River by Hendrik Hudson in 1609, the first settlers followed, their settlements and homes were not confined to Manhattan Island but almost immediately were extended to Long Island, Staten Island and to the west side of the River, now known as the State of New Jersey. We must not forget, either, that for many generations, even after the English had come, the government of the Hudson River colony was one government and not separated. It was many years later that the Colony of New Jersey became separate from the Colony of New York, and even then for many years one royal Governor administered both colonies.

In other words, the point I am stressing is that for many generations after the white men came to these shores there was no practical differentiation between New York and New Jersey. The communities which sprang up at the mouth of the Hudson River grew gradually into what might have been called, even in those days, a metropolitan area—dozens of little villages and settlements in close contact each with the other, with the same point of view and with close economic and social ties. This is borne out by what you and I know to be true, that the families of our ancestors lived perhaps for a time in Brooklyn and then moved to New Jersey, or started in New Jersey and then moved to Long Island. There was a complete intermingling between the many small communities. This made for excellent relationships and for a growing civilization that laid the foundations for our present prosperity on sound economic lines.

It was not until after the independence of the United States, and especially after the populations had grown, without an equivalent development of transportation facilities, that the Hudson River gradually became a new kind of barrier between New York and New Jersey. We went through what might be called a temporary era of separation, an era which was bound to come to a close, because it was based on false economic principles.

Science has given us the way out of this difficulty. To have talked of tunnels under the Hudson River or bridges across it 50 years ago would have been impossible, and it is only within a very few years that we have been using science to do away with an unnecessary barrier.

Once more the people of New Jersey and New York can look forward to adequate communications which will result in economic and social advantages for the populations of both States. The Hudson Tunnels are an old story; so is the Pennsylvania Railroad Tunnel; and now the Holland Tube has in two or three years established its complete success; the great Hudson River Bridge majestically joining the historic points of Fort Lee and Fort Washington is already ahead of construction schedule and in financing is well within its estimated cost.

The government of the two States have cooperated splendidly in past years in planning these new facilities. Two agencies of the States, one the Bridge and Tunnel Commission, which has so successfully completed the Holland Tunnel, and the other the Port Authority, which has completed the bridges from Staten Island to New Jersey and is now completing two other magnificent bridges; both of these agencies are still in existence. They came into separate being at different times to fill different needs; but as the years pass it becomes more and more evident that for a dozen reasons there should be a concentration of authority for the best interests of the people who live on or near the lower Hudson in the years to come.

It is true that an unhappy situation, I hope a temporary one, has developed in our relations with our sister State in regard to a transportation problem involving the separation of railroad line haul from lighterage. Many people—I hope the majority on both sides of the River—believe that the theory of creating two ports instead of one on one single natural bay and harbor would be a bad thing economically, commercially and financially for the best interests of all the people. It is, of course; necessary for us to contest this new theory of some people in New Jersey which is directly opposed to the whole spirit of the unity of the Port, and I am personally very confident, both as a lawyer and as a business man, that the new contention will not hold water either in the courts or at the bar of public opinion.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this purely temporary difficulty, we must continue to view the problem in its larger aspects, without prejudice and without being

angered or annoyed by the lighterage issue.

In other words, we must still work for the unity of the Port and for better communications by all sections in and around that Port.

The time has come for the people on both sides of the River to see the need for additional tunnels or bridges between the two States. There are two public bodies, one of which has specialized in the building of tunnels, and the other in the building of bridges, in addition to the many other problems of Port unity. Both bodies have fine staffs of engineers, and yet from a practical business point of view it would be better if we could in the near future combine and consolidate these two official bodies.

I am, therefore, suggesting to the people, to the business men and to the commercial associations of New York and New Jersey that in both States we should consider a wedding between the Bridge and Tunnel Commission and the Port Authority. I do not mean that the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be thrown into the discard and all its functions transferred to the Port Authority. I mean rather that by official co-operation between the two States the members of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be added to the membership of the Port Authority.

I do not mean that the splendid engineering staff of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission should be discarded but rather that it should be retained by the newly constituted body and used for their special work of building new tunnels. A plan of this kind will, I am confident, appeal to the business sense of the community.

There are many objections to the continuation of two separate bodies. In the first place, they become unnecessary rivals on matters affecting the whole financial structure of tunnel and bridge development. For example, you cannot have a free tunnel at one point and a toll bridge at another point, nor can you have a free bridge within a few blocks of a toll tunnel. Financially and in every other way bridges and tunnels go hand in hand.

Furthermore, there is the great problem of raising the money with which to build new bridges and tunnels. Because of the mounting budgets of both States, it seems to be impracticable for either State to pay the cost of new tunnels and bridges out of current annual revenues or to issue State bonds for this purpose. Under its original treaty and charter the Port Authority is a joint State agency which can finance either bridges or tunnels without additional burdens on the budgets or bonded indebtedness

of the two State governments. In other words, the mechanics of the present Port Authority plan will allow the building of future tunnels and bridges under and across the Hudson River in a practical way which is readily accepted by the bankers and investors of both States.

Two other brief points in favor of a wedding between the two bodies: First, there will be an undoubted saving in overhead, an important consideration from the point of view of the public. Secondly, there will be a removal of confusion or unnecessary friction and of unseemly rivalry between two bodies which should be striving wholly for cooperation and for a common objective.

I hope that within the coming year the two States will make definite and distinct progress along these lines. We are proud of the members of the Bridge and Tunnel Commission and we are proud of the members of the Port Authority. We take pride in the splendid engineering staffs and the excellent plans which both bodies have drawn. Now is the time to use practical business sense and get something done by mutual effort, and it is my judgment that this can best be accomplished by bringing about a joinder of the two bodies, using all that is good in each body and working toward a common end.

If, in this generation, we can accomplish this ideal, we shall have returned to the sound economic and social structure which the founders of New Amsterdam established at the mouth of the Hudson River three centuries ago. They were right in their plans and their hopes. We can do well by carrying out the principles which they first enunciated.

- - - - -