

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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SEVENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

SENATE

NO. 148

In Senate, February 28, 1919.

Ordered, that fifteen hundred copies of the stenographic report of the hearing before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs on resolve relating to the People's Ferry Company of Bath be printed for the use of the legislature.

P. F. CRANE, Secretary.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND
NINE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN

Stenographic report of hearing on Resolve relating to the
People's Ferry Company of Bath.

PEOPLE'S FERRY.

Senator Baxter:

I want to take this opportunity to thank the committee for allowing this matter to come before it. When the resolve was referred to the committee on ways and bridges, I felt that it was too large a proposition for that committee under present circumstances. You very courteously and kindly allowed it to come back to your committee to hold a hearing on it.

Walter S. Glidden:

The importance which this matter has assumed, Mr.

Chairman and Gentlemen of the Committee, or rather the growing importance, seems to be indicated by the fact that it now comes before the most important committee of the legislature. The ferry between Bath and Woolwich is owned partly by a corporation known as the People's Ferry Company, which was chartered by the legislature in 1872, succeeding two other ferry companies which operated at this spot since 1836. People of Bath and Woolwich owned the stock. In 1877 Bath and Woolwich acquired the People's Ferry Company, Bath owning three-fourths and Woolwich one-fourth. The actual subscription of capital was for Bath \$42,000 and for Woolwich \$14,000, a total of \$56,000. Now, gentlemen, the People's Ferry Company in 1877, and for a great many years subsequent to that, was a proposition operated entirely as a local utility, to accommodate traffic and trade between the towns of Woolwich and Bath. You can readily understand that if that were not the fact, neither Bath nor Woolwich, as municipalities, would have undertaken to own stock therefor, and operating the ferry for gain or loss as the case may be. It has always served the state's, as well as local traffic between the towns of Woolwich and Bath. I want to say right here that there is no marked change of the quality of the travel between Bath and Woolwich which we can pick out as local travel. The records of the ferry company and the reports of the ferry company to the municipalities will show that in the last 30 years there is no material change in the number of foot passengers, wagons, foot traffic, etc. The ferry has never been a paying proposition, but in spite of this

fact, I do not know that either the city of Bath or the town of Woolwich ever felt that that was all there was to it, because if they were running a utility to meet their own needs, and if it fell behind, they would look to make up the deficit without looking for the aid of any outside source. The root of the whole matter, as you gentlemen know, is a revolution which has been wrought in traffic by the automobile. You know that this ferry is nothing but a connecting link in the state highway stretching between Portland and Rockland, and the increase in traffic over this ferry is immense. I cannot picture it to you; you have got to be down there in the summer season and see it with your own eyes. It has been brought about by a state wide change; nothing of a local change. The fact of the case, as gentlemen here who use the ferry really more than I do can testify, is that this state traffic actually crowds out the local traffic which the ferry was built to subserve. It requires nearly all of the summer season, a traffic policeman. The completion of the state road system has caused a state of affairs there which Bath and Woolwich are totally unable to cope with. That this is true was realized by the last legislature, which, as you gentlemen know, passed a resolve of \$30,000, in consideration of a ferry boat two years ago, but before the appropriation became available, conditions arising from the war rendered it impossible for the ferry company to avail themselves of the appropriation, and it lapsed. Now the ferry company has done its best to cope with this situation, and to provide as good a service and as effective a service for all commerce as it was

possible to do. They have been assisted by appropriations of \$2,000 a year, and these have been employed for the purpose of maintaining a boat crew service. That is, a two shift service running to 11.00 o'clock at night, so that there would be a day crew and a night crew in charge of the boat. That has been voluntary on the part of the corporation, but during the last year this has been made compulsory by the Public Utilities Commission. For two and one-half months during 1918, when full service was maintained, careful record was kept, and it showed a loss of \$1700 for that item. And during other years the loss has been on an average about \$3,000 a year. Indeed, gentlemen, since these two municipalities have operated this ferry, there has been a deficit up to February 1st, 1919, an actual deficit of \$68,123.99. Of this Bath has contributed \$51,000 and Woolwich the remainder. In 1917 there was an apparent profit of \$4,071, but it was only apparent, because it was obtained by neglecting absolutely necessary repairs, which simply had to be taken care of the following year. Deduct this, which is not a real profit, and there is a deficit of over \$64,000, and when you consider that they are operating on capital stock, you can see that this must mean some hardship on the owners of that stock. I want to say that these figures were taken from the John O. Rice Audit Company.

I want to say a word about the boat itself. The present ferry boat, the Hockomock, is 18 years old. It was put on the route in April, 1901. It cost \$25,000. Twenty-three thousand five hundred dollars was carried by a series of notes extending

over a period of ten years. The deck measurements, as given to me, are 90 feet in length, and the width of the driveway is 14 feet. Assuming the average length of an automobile to be about 15 feet, you will see that there would be an average of about 12 automobiles. I have seen myself, automobiles lined up to go on the ferry, extending almost down to the postoffice, which is quite a distance. It is built of wood, is obsolete, and is wearing out and it must be replaced. By dumping money into it, you can undoubtedly make it last three or four years more, but it is simply a waste of money. Now if anything is going to be done, gentlemen, it should be done at once. You would not undertake to build a bridge, and build one-half of it this year and the rest three or four years later. The ferry company has now a very inconvenient approach from the Bath side. We own a piece of property directly south of the present slip, which is available for a slip, which will give us a straight run.

Gentlemen here this afternoon will tell you more particularly their ideas about a new boat, but it does not require any particular knowledge of ship-building, or any particular knowledge of vessels, to realize that the cost of operating a boat, the cost of fuel, the opposition of the water which has to be overcome, depends entirely upon the size of your boat under water, and not what appears above. I think it can be shown that a new boat not very much larger on the water line than the present boat, but built in a more modern style, with deck space used to better advantage, will be a very practical proposition at no practical increase of operation over the present cost, with an

increased capacity of 100%. Of course when you come down to the question of cost, that is something which can only be estimated, but it can be estimated very closely by those familiar with such things. I am told that the cost of building a boat such as I have described, with the necessary slips and approaches to make it a thoroughly good job in every respect, will be about \$150,000.00. Or putting that down at the maximum figure, with the present price of labor and material. You can see from what I have said that this is a proposition which has got beyond the limit of these two municipalities. It is an especial burden on the town of Woolwich, which is a comparatively small town, with a valuation of less than \$400,000. It is a condition brought about by nothing which this town is responsible for, or can control. It is a condition brought about by state wide conditions, and it is beyond the power of these two municipalities to continue to operate this ferry. It seems that it will appeal to every man of natural justice that they should not be compelled to bear the burden of what are state wide conditions. It is a question of progress, a question of growth, and a question which we cannot contend with. We have asked for an appropriation for the building of this proposed boat, slips, etc., \$130,000, and the resolve contains a proposition that the cities and towns are authorized to guarantee the payment of notes which the ferry company may be obliged to negotiate, in order to raise the balance of the money, whatever it may be, in order to build this structure. It does not seem to me that there could remain very much doubt in the minds of any of you that this

situation has got to be relieved. There is of course no opposition developed at this hearing. It is simply a question of how this is going to be made. In the first place, how is it going to be financed? This is a question of which the legislature is the sole judge. I think you will find that so far as the two municipalities are concerned, that they are ready to do anything in their power within reasonable limits, to bear their part of the burden so far as they can, but it is simply up to the legislature, as it seems to me, to afford some relief to the situation which is unique in the state of Maine. There is no method of crossing the Kennebec river from Gardiner to its mouth, except this ferry boat at Bath. Bath gets no benefit, nor Woolwich gets no benefit from this traffic. If the traffic stopped there, and spent money there, it would be a different proposition, but they are simply a connecting link.

Mayor J. Edward Drake:

I think that Judge Glidden has covered points pretty carefully, and the details regarding pass and slips will no doubt be taken up by other members who are here. There is no question to the fact that we need a new boat and slips. We do not need them for the city of Bath and for the town of Woolwich, we need them for the through travel that is going on there, and it is only fair that the state should help us solve the problem.

F. W. Carleton of Woolwich:

Gentlemen, Mr. Glidden has covered the ground pretty thoroughly. We are a little differently situated than Bath. We pay more according to our population and valuation. Often

this deficit has raised our tax rate five mills. (Mr. Carleton here referred to the expense of the Wiscasset bridge.)

I will speak of the expense of this boat pretty thoroughly. As Mr. Glidden says, the expense of the boat will be about \$150,000. That was just for the boat. It seems as though the slips and approaches would be \$30,000 more, which would be \$180,000. We have here a tentative plan and a few pictures of the boat, if you care to see them. The boat is 25 feet longer and 8 feet wider, doubling the capacity. Then we thought if we got a boat with pretty good power and convenient slips, we might make the trip in 20 minutes. It now takes 30 minutes to make the trip. We can add very much to the length of a boat without increasing the resistance. As far as we are concerned, there is quite a feeling about the state taking it over. If the fares could be reduced, our town would be in favor of losing whatever they have put in there. I think they would want to know if the fares were going to be reduced to a reasonable fare. We have now a fare which calls for 50 cents for a little Ford automobile. For some men running milk routes, this makes quite an item.

Mr. Holley: Do you think the people of Woolwich would be in favor of giving their share to the state?

Mr. Carleton: If the fares were to be reduced.

Mr. Holley: Do you think before they would agree to a proposition like this, they would want some fixed rate?

Mr. Carleton: I should think so, or they would want some disinterested party to fix it.

Sen. Gannett: On the boat, you have taken prices at the very highest price?

Mr. Carleton: There was never a time so hard to tell what things will cost six months from now, as it is now. This is estimated at the present time high prices.

Mr. Eaton: How wide is the river here?

Mr. Carleton: A little less than one-half mile.

Mr. Glidden: Mr. Carleton has opened up the question of whether or not the state itself would eventually, or perhaps now, take over this ferry boat. Mr. Carleton has expressed his opinion, speaking as a citizen of the town of Woolwich, as to what stand the town of Woolwich would be likely to take. I think you realize the justice of his statement that the rates should be lower. If the state takes this ferry over, it does not take it as a money-making proposition. It would take it as a utility. It would not expect to make money out of it, and it ought to mean a reduction in fares. They should not try to make this ferry a paying proposition any more than the highways or a toll bridge. Now with regard to the attitude of the city of Bath, it is impossible for me to speak with certainty, but I think I am justified in saying this much: The city of Bath is in a different position than the town of Woolwich. In the first place it is larger, and instead of being an exporter, it receives exports from Woolwich. Tolls do not effect the city of Bath anywhere near as much as they do Woolwich, and the other towns on the opposite side of the river. Bath realizes that it is a losing proposition. Stock has never paid. I think,

judging from the opinions of such members of the city government as I have talked with, that there would be practically no opposition on the part of the city of Bath if the legislature should see fit to take over this proposition. There would be no opposition on the part of the city of Bath in making over to the state, its interest in the ferry, although I think that they would feel it was their duty and their proper interest to work with the town of Woolwich in saying that the tolls between the two towns should be reasonable.

But while the burden is upon the producers in Woolwich who bring products into Bath, still it is the consumer who pays in the long run. I think you will find the people of Bath with the town of Woolwich in expecting some definite assurance as to reasonable fares, but I do not think you would find any opposition as to the advisability of turning over their interest in the ferry.

Sen. Grant: Would you assume that if you had a new boat and new slips, you would have more traffic?

Mr. Glidden: I am not an automobilist, but I know this: I have frequently heard from friends of mine that they avoided Bath on account of the difficulty of crossing the ferry, and if they have time, go around by Gardiner, or further up the river to go through. I think without any question, that it would increase the through traffic between Portland and Rockland through Bath. It, as you know, is a very pleasant route, and a short route, and the only thing that keeps the traffic down now is the inadequate facilities.

Mr. Carleton: I have this year had to go to the Public Utilities Commission to keep the tolls down. We do not think it should be made self-supporting any more than the bridge that we have to help pay for. We do not think we should be called upon to maintain this either by tolls or taxation.

Dr. Clarence A. Peasley:

I used the ferry boat a great deal, and know quite a bit about it. I do know that very many people have said they will never come to Bath again, because to go across the ferry they have to wait so long. I will say that it is anywhere from two to four hours that some of them have had to wait. I have seen 75 automobiles in the line. This procession does not keep up during the middle of the day only, but keeps there until near night. We have done everything we can do. One of the very important assets of the state is to induce automobile travel, and a large number of automobiles going through a city cannot help being some benefit. They drop a dollar here and a dollar there, and very many times they get their dinner or their supper, and of course we are benefited by the travel. It seems to me that it is important that we consider the ferry a part of the state highway between Portland and Rockland. With our present boat it is impossible to give them any decent service. Why should the city of Bath have to maintain this at a loss? Originally it took on the boat for the purpose of accommodation of local traffic, and we were very well satisfied to maintain it at a small loss, but it has got so now that it is impossible for us to do. The present boat is getting old, and soon in order to accommo-

date even our own local traffic, we would have to get a new boat. You will readily see that if we are obliged to maintain it, we are going to make the old boat go just as long as she will. We do not want to spend \$100,000 or more to get a new boat. The older she gets, the fewer automobiles she can carry.

Henry R. White:

I do not think I can add anything to what Dr. Peasley and others have in a very clear manner presented to the committee.

Mr. Holley: Do you think the people would like to have the state take it over?

Mr. White: I have talked to a great many people, and I think they would like to have the state take it over.

Mr. Holley: Do you think the travel would increase if you had a new boat?

Mr. White: I do, yes. There is a good deal of travel that comes around Bath because of lack of facilities there.

Mr. Holley: Would they desire the Public Utilities to fix the rate?

Mr. White: Yes, I think they would be very willing for the Public Utilities to fix the rate, because I am positive that they would not make anything of an injustice.

Dr. W. E. Kershner:

I would like to look at it from just one more angle. That section of the country east of the Kennebec river has most beautiful scenic surroundings. Two or three years ago, in 1916 when the traffic was in nowhere near the condition it is now, there was a man looking for property to build a large summer

residence. He finally went up to Vermont, because he could not get a direct route without waiting at the ferry. If we have the interest of the whole state at heart, we must have at heart the interest of those people who are summer residents here. The season is a little longer than the hotel season, inasmuch as there are almost six months involved in this travel. About five months of the year are involved in that congestion. Another factor is this: It is brought out that it is necessary to maintain night service. I spent almost four hours of a perfectly good day's vacation to get from Woolwich to Bath. We call your attention to the fact that this is not a noon-day congestion; it is a matter of almost 24 hours a day.

W. S. Newell:

I really cannot add anything to the general statement of the case, but as a ship-builder and engineer, I can corroborate figures and statements made in regard to the present boat and the proposed one. It may be better that I simply stand here and answer questions that any of your committee may ask.

Sen Grant: I understand that the proposed boat is 90 ft. long?

Mr. Newell: The present boat is 90 ft. long. The proposed boat is 130 ft. long, I think. The present boat is 90 ft. in length, the beam is approximately 30 ft., but of that only 14 ft. is available for automobiles and teams. The remaining part is taken up with deck cabins.

Mr. Holley: The idea is to build a steel boat?

Mr. Newell: That would be the proper thing to do.

Mr. Holley: Because of its being more durable, I assume.

Mr. Newell: Yes, and it is easier to keep in repair.

Mr. Eaton: What would be the difference in the cost?

Mr. Newell: Practically no difference. But there is no question in my mind as to the advisability of a steel boat.

Sen. Grant: How long would a boat of that kind last?

Mr. Newell: No reason why a boat like that would not last for 20 or 30 years, with proper up-keep.

Sen. Grant: Is that very much longer than a wooden boat would last?

Mr. Newell: No, I do not know as it is, but a wooden boat would have to have more money spent on it to keep it in shape.

Mr. Holley: Would it be advisable to purchase a second-hand boat?

Mr. Glidden: I would like to ask Mr. Newell what his ideas would be relative to purchasing a second-hand boat?

Mr. Newell: I doubt very much if a second-hand boat could be obtained that would be satisfactory. There might be about one chance in a hundred of getting a boat we really need. But I think the only proper thing to consider would be the building of a boat and slips properly designed by competent parties to fit the needs of that situation. I think it would be a wiser expenditure of money, instead of casting about and trying to find a second-hand boat to meet the needs there.

Sen. Grant: Do you think the boat which you propose would take care of the traffic in the rush hours?

Mr. Newell: I think it would.

Sen. Grant: How many trips an hour would it make?

Mr. Newell: One trip in 20 minutes.

Sen. Grant: A larger boat, accommodating more automobiles, would take longer time to load and unload?

Mr. Newell: Yes, but you must remember, gentlemen, that with a straight run, considerable time could be saved in discharging and loading up.

Sen. Grant: Could they go on two or three abreast?

Mr. Newell: The matter has not been gone into far enough for me to say. With a boat of the width proposed, I am not prepared to say whether or not three abreast could be accommodated, but the extra length would make quite a difference in capacity. That is all a matter of design, of course, and could be worked out later.

Sen. Grant: Is it fair to assume that the traffic will increase during the next five or ten years?

Mr. Newell: I do not think there is any doubt about that.

Sen. Grant: Could the boat now there be used with the new boat to help out during rush hours? A landing could be made to accommodate the new and the old boat too?

Mr. Newell: Yes, it could. The Maine Central Railroad does that. They use their old boat with the new one.

Mr. Holley: Of course you would have to have larger slips. They would have to be larger than they are now. Does the city or the People's Ferry Company own land enough to increase the size of the slips without buying more land?

Mr. Glidden: Yes. Quite recently the city has been able to purchase a little land at the foot of Ferry Street, so that the new slips could be built so that it would give a straight run from Ferry Street right down to the boat.

(It develops that the city has not purchased the land yet. It has an option on it. It costs \$1,000.00)

Mr. Eaton: What is your estimate of the cost of the slips?

Mr. Newell: I can speak only of the boat. I know nothing of the slips proposed, but a boat the size proposed would have a displacement of approximately 500 tons with its fully loaded condition. Perhaps you realize that at the present time it is rather a ticklish thing to talk about prices, but \$150,000.00 is the only sum that it would be wise to consider. For instance, the Standardized Merchandise Fleet Corporation cargo boat runs at the rate of approximately \$225 to \$250 to a ton dead weight ton. And that is in larger quantities. A boat of this size if anybody was figuring on this job to take it, they would probably consider not less than \$290 or \$300 a ton dead weight. The fixed charges, so to speak in tonnage prices in the United States at the present time, are, as I have said, anywhere from \$225 to \$250 per ton dead weight, on that type of ship to which this ferry boat would be as nearly comparable as anything. This does not apply to every kind of boat construction. Torpedo boats cost \$1500 per ton. But it would be much better for one to fool himself on a price now, than to estimate too low. We think it would be only safe to give that figure at \$150,000. I am not saying that this boat could not be built

for less, and of course a lot more money could be put out. It should be put into the hands of people who are competent to design this project.

Sen. Grant: In your judgment will prices drop?

Mr. Newell: In all probability the cost of materials entering into a ship will drop. We are on the verge of a drop in the market. Just what the labor situation will be, nobody knows. Of course at the present time we are right on the peak of labor expense.

Mr. Holley: The new boat, although larger, being modern, would it require much more for maintenance along the line of men, fuel, etc.?

Mr. Newell: No, sir. For instance, the proposed boat, 25 or 30 ft. longer than this boat, would not require any more in the way of engineers, deck hands, etc.

Sen. Grant: You would not have the repairs on a new boat?

Mr. Newell: No, the old boat is in such shape now that they had to make an immense amount of repairs on it. We have never repaired the hull at the Bath Iron Works, but we have had the machinery on several occasions. It is almost like pouring money down a rat hole. You never know just where the thing is going to break out, or just how much you will have to have.

Frank B. Nichols.

I will not take up any time, but I will simply state that I concur in all remarks made. I consider the present boat a disgrace to the State. We have in that vicinity one of the finest

highways in New England, but this ferry proposition disrupts the whole arrangement.

Mr. Holley: Do you think there would be any opposition in the city if the State would take this over?

Mr. Nichols: I have never heard the slightest.

Mr. Holley: Should it be left to the Public Utilities Commission?

Mr. Nichols: I should think so.

Mr. Holley: You would not anticipate any opposition?

Mr. Nichols: Not the slightest. We think if we come here and ask for \$130,000, we should not attempt to dictate the rates.

Mr. Holley: Would the traffic increase with a new boat?

Mr. Nichols: I have not a doubt of it. I know we are losing a tremendous amount of traffic.

Sen. Grant: You would advocate the State's taking it over entirely?

Mr. Nichols: Absolutely. We have been unable to run it.

Mr. Holley: You think that would be the attitude of the directors?

Mr. Nichols: From the talk of the directors, I would think so.

Mr. Holley: How many directors are there?

Mr. Glidden: Three. Two from Bath and one from Woolwich.

Sen. Grant: Could you give us an idea what it would cost the State to take this property over?

Mr. Glidden: The only idea I could give you would perhaps be a bookkeeping idea. I do not know how it would correspond with actual facts and actual values.

The records of the directors for the year just ended shows a statement of assets and liabilities:

Ferry boat	\$5,000.00
Ferry slip, Bath	2,800.00
Ferry slip, Woolwich	2,000.00
Coal shed	4,000.00
Lot of land, Bath	1,366.20

That may be simply a bookkeeping statement. I do not know whether or not it represents actual values.

Sen. Grant: You think the State would be expected to pay that amount to take it over?

Mr. Glidden: I do not know. On the other hand there are accounts payable for \$9,800.00. I do not think either the city of Bath or the town of Woolwich are in the market to make money out of the State. I think if they can be relieved of their liability and from the burden which is upon them, with the question of property values, that you are not going to find them profiteers. I think they would be willing to meet the State more than half way. There is no use of dickering about an old, obsolete, plant, growing more useless each year.

Sen. Grant: The liability is about \$10,000?

Mr. Glidden: That is the accounts payable.

Sen. Grant: I support if they can dispose of what they have, and liquidate their liability, they would be pleased?

Mr. Glidden: I should suppose so. The ferry today has small value. The coal shed and slips which are only valuable, or mostly so, in connection with the use for the ferry. So it would seem that the main item of value is the boat itself, from which something can be realized. I should say that if the municipalities could liquidate their liabilities with their assets, they would call it square.

Mr. Carleton: If the toll can be adjusted satisfactorily.

Sen. Grant: Do you mean a lower rate than your are now having?

Mr. Carleton: This is 50c. for a Ford automobile.

Mr. Glidden: Unless there is anything further that the committee would like to know, we will consider the hearing closed as far as the proponents are concerned.

Sen. Grant: As far as you know, there is no one to oppose the proposition?

Mr. Glidden: I know of no one.

Sen. Grant: I would like to ask if there is any citizen from Bath here who would oppose the State's taking it over. (There was no one.)