

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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NEW DRAFT.

SEVENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

HOUSE

NO. 383

House of Representatives, March 2, 1911.

Reported by Mr. Hastings from Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and ordered printed under joint rules.

C. C. HARVEY, Clerk.

STATE OF MAINE

RESOLVE in favor of the town of Norridgewock.

Resolved, That there be and hereby is appropriated the
2 sum of seven hundred fifty dollars for the year nineteen
3 hundred eleven and a like sum for the year nineteen hun-
4 dred twelve for the repair of the covered bridge across the
5 Kennebec river in the town of Norridgewock, said sums to
6 be expended under the direction of the State Commissioner
7 of Highways.

STATEMENT OF FACTS IN THE MATTER OF THE NORRIDGEWOCK BRIDGE RESOLVE.

The charter of the Norridgewock Bridge Proprietors expired in 1905. The company asked the Legislature of that year for a renewal of the charter for twenty years. Several Norridgewock citizens opposed the renewal, appearing with a remonstrance before the committee. Finally, as the town of Norridgewock was not then financially able to take over the bridge, a compromise was effected by which a renewal for twenty years was granted, but with the express right on the part of the town to take the bridge by purchase of stock or by appraisal at any time, without paying anything for the franchise.

At the Legislature of 1909, a resolve was passed appropriating \$3500 to aid Norridgewock to get a free bridge. The stockholders who had the controlling interest had only a year or two before offered the bridge to the county commissioners of Somerset county for \$15 a share. There were 381 shares, so that the bridge would have cost the county the sum of \$5,715, had they accepted the offer of the bridge company. The county commissioners refused to take over the bridge.

The chairman of the selectmen of Norridgewock advocated the resolve for \$3500, on the supposition and belief that the bridge could be bought by the town for the same sum, to wit, \$15 a share, making a total cost of \$5715. The State would have paid \$3500 and the town the balance of \$2215.

Up to the time of the passage of the resolve for \$3500, the principal stockholders of the bridge company verbally signified their readiness to sell to the town for \$15 a share. Sidney St. F. Thaxter, who held as trustee some eighty shares, agreed by letter to take \$15 a share, if the Norridgewock stockholders who held largest blocks of stock would do the same. The Norridgewock stockholders were believed by the chairman of the selectmen to be men of their word, but just as soon as the resolve was a law, these gentlemen forgot their offer and Mr. Thaxter was induced by them to get into line with them to make a fight.

On the second day of October, 1909, the town voted to accept

the \$3500 from the State and authorized the selectmen to offer \$15 a share for bridge stock, and that if the stock did not come in to call upon the chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, as had been provided in the last renewal of the charter and in the resolve, for commissioners to be appointed to appraise the bridge. The bridge company made a most vigorous fight to prevent this vote from being taken, but the vote stood 107 to 74 in its favor.

The selectmen advertised for stock at \$15 a share. Thirty-five out of the 381 came in at this price.

On November 13, 1909, the selectmen, as voted by the town, asked the court to appoint appraisers. Fred Emery Beane, John A. Jones and John A. Greenleaf were appointed as appraisers. In February, 1910, the appraisers, after due hearing at Norridgewock, awarded \$7,794.22 for the bridge. The costs, which the town was by law obliged to pay, amounted to \$1,320.96, making the total cost of the bridge \$9,115.18.

Of this sum the State had given, by the above mentioned resolve, the sum of \$3,500, leaving the total cost to the town of \$5,615.18. Had the bridge company taken \$15 a share as was expected and promised, at the time the resolve was passed, the net cost to the town would have been only \$2,215.

Thus the bridge has cost Norridgewock \$3,400.18 more than it expected to pay. Moreover the south span has settled so badly that immediate repairs are needed. The town is up to its debt limit by reason of an old standing railroad debt, which is now \$30,000. The town has had to borrow \$5,400.18 to pay up the amount of the appraisal and costs. The bridge needs a new roof and new planking this year. Some of the floor timbers are unsafe. With the town up to its debt limit and a cost of \$3,400 more than was expected for the bridge, no repairs can be made by the town in a thorough manner. Meantime the bridge is going down. The State has given only a little more than one-third of the total cost of the bridge. The State in most instances has paid a much larger proportion of the cost of long bridges of a similar nature. The bridge is located on a direct line of travel from Oakland and Waterville and Fairfield to Madison and the up-river country. A large amount of automobile traffic goes over it. The river at Norridgewock, as will be remembered, swings abruptly from a southward course

from Madison to a northeasterly course to Skowhegan. Hence travel by highway from down-river to the up-river country does not go to Skowhegan, but cuts across to Norridgewock where the river is crossed. It is not possible to go up the west bank of the river, because the Sandy river empties into the Kennebec just above Norridgewock on the west bank and there is no bridge across the Sandy river, nearer than New Sharon.

It seems to be all the town can possibly stand at present is the \$3,400 more than was expected. The bridge is more than 500 feet long. Unless the bridge is repaired before long, irreparable damage will result. The toll bridge company neglected the bridge for several years, before the town took it, not knowing how soon the town would take action. Had the town been able to buy it for \$15 a share as supposed and as agreed, it could have owned the bridge and repaired it in good shape for what the town has already had to pay for the bridge alone, in its poor condition.

The town is now compelled, by reason of the unexpected fight by the stockholders (who really made nothing and only made expense for their own town), and by reason of the financial condition of the town and in view of the dangerous condition of the bridge, to ask that sufficient aid be given to keep the bridge from so far getting out of repair as to become dangerous to crossing by the public or so far as to make ultimate cost of putting it into shape excessive.

It was estimated by Hon. John A. Jones, one of the railroad commissioners and who was one of the appraisers of the bridge, that it would cost not less than \$1,000 to bring up the south span into a level with the rest of the bridge. The principal foundation timber at the south end of the bridge is entirely rotted out.