

Executive Speech  
of  
Cornelius P. Van Ness  
As it appears in the  
RECORDS  
OF THE  
GOVERNOR AND COUNCIL  
OF THE  
STATE OF VERMONT.

Volume VII.

1825

October, 14, 1825.

SPEECH OF GOV. VAN NESS— 1825.

Gentlemen of the Council and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives: —In assembling to discharge the duties of the respective trusts confided to us by our fellow-citizens, we should not delay the acknowledgment of our sincere gratitude to Almighty God, for the happy circumstances, and the flattering prospects, under which we are permitted to meet.

Our country steadily and rapidly advances in her march to that elevation, which she appears destined to reach, and which constitutes the highest happiness, as well as greatness of a nation. The administration of her government has, indeed, passed from the hands of the last revolutionary patriot, who will probably ever direct her course.<sup>1</sup> But it is a source of great felicity, that the succession has fallen on a statesman and patriot of the present day, whose transcendent talents, extensive experience, and purity of character, furnish an unflinching pledge, that, under his guidance, her progress, to say the least will be unimpeded and untarnished.<sup>2</sup>

In confining our view to this state—our constitutional sphere of action—we are then by no means destitute of solid grounds of gratification, and of pride. There is abundant evidence of her increasing progress in wealth and population, and in the cultivation of the mind, and the morals; of the improvement of her agricultural, manufacturing and commercial interests; and of the prevalence of an unusual degree of harmony and good feeling, throughout the whole community.

As the representatives of the state, to whom are entrusted, for the time being, the protection of these interests, and the preservation of these blessings, let us not lose sight of the confidence reposed in us, or the responsibility we have assumed. Regardless alike of every consideration of fear, or favour, we should pursue the way marked out by the constitution, prompt in our decisions, though not rash, and firm in our purposes, but not stubborn; aiming only at the main objects of our appointment—the permanent prosperity, respectability and happiness of the state.

The views which I have heretofore expressed to the legislature, on the subjects of education, of the militia, and of imprisonment for debt, remain unchanged. These important interests are referred to, as deserving your particular attention.

I do not perceive that we can, with propriety, at this time, adopt any measures for a further increase of the funds annually raised for the support of schools; but it is worthy of consideration, whether the regulations for the expenditure of those funds, cannot be improved, so as to lead to results more extensively beneficial, than are at present produced. A proposition was before the legislature, at the last session, to commence the creation of a permanent school fund, and was postponed to the present. If such an object could be effected, though it were but a small beginning, and with a distant prospect of actual usefulness, the state, at some future day, might be greatly benefitted by it, and have reason to bless the memory of those, who shall have laid the noble foundation.

When we find that the very first clause in the constitution of the United States, pronounces it one of the principal objects of its establishment to “promote the general welfare” and when we reflect that this welfare is inseparably connected with the diffusion of knowledge, we cannot but be struck with astonishment, that the General Government, with such ample means as it possesses, should so long have delayed to lend its direct and efficient aid to the general purposes of education. In this era of peace, and of increasing attention to the internal condition of the country, may we not be permitted to hope, that the present administration will not suffer to go ungathered so rich harvest of glory, as would spring from the adoption of measures, by which all the states would be enabled, without pressure to their inhabitants, to impart, to every useful extent, the inestimable blessings of education.

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<sup>1</sup> James Monroe

<sup>2</sup> John Quincy Adams.

As it regards the militia if nothing more should be done, there are some difficulties in the execution of the existing laws, which, in my opinion should be removed by an additional act. These I will point out to the military committee, instead of swelling this communication with their details. I would likewise observe, that, on account of the addition to the number of companies since the act of 1819, which provides for furnishing the officers with the system of military discipline, adopted by law, a further provision of the same nature has become necessary. And as it respects that provision, permit me to suggest the importance of directing that each commander of a company be furnished with a copy of the system, instead of an abridgment of the work merely.

In a special communication, during the last session. in relation to the arms belonging to this state I adverted to the propriety of collecting, and placing in the custody of the quartermaster-general, all that might remain of 2500 stands of arms received from the United States, and directed by the legislature in 1822, to be apportioned among the several towns and deposited with the selectmen. I am fully confirmed in the expediency of this measure, and recommend that provision be made, the present session, to carry it into effect. The public arms should be kept together, that their number and situation might at all times be known, especially since measures are in progress for the erection of an arsenal.

The report of the commissioners appointed to designate the town in which the arsenal should be located, and to purchase a lot of land on which to erect the same, was received about the first of August last. The town of Middlebury has been fixed on, and five acres of land, selected by the commissioners, have been procured at the expense of individuals, and duly conveyed to the state. The season, however, being so far advanced, I considered it prudent to suspend any preparations for the commencement of the building, and advised the quarter-master-general accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

Being authorized by the act which provides for printing the compilation of the laws of the state, to appoint an agent to contract for the printing, and likewise a person to superintend the work, in conjunction with the secretary of state, I appointed Daniel Kellogg, Esqr. to perform those duties. Of the circumstances and progress of the business, you will be informed by the agent.

Under the resolution of the last session, relating to the education of the deaf and dumb, Horace Everett and James Elliot Esquires, were appointed commissioners to carry the same into execution. A report from Mr. Everett will be transmitted to you without delay. Mr. Elliot, in consequence of his disposition, was not able to attend the meeting of the commissioners and the directors of the asylum, at Hartford.<sup>4</sup>

Having given General La Fayette an invitation to visit this state, in pursuance of the resolution on that subject, he accordingly passed through the state of latter end of June last, entering it at Windsor, and leaving it at Burlington. His time was so limited, that it was not in his power to present himself in any parts of the state, not on the route between the two places mentioned. But as it was, every practicable arrangement was made, to favour the people of the state with an opportunity of beholding this beloved friend and patriot. A particular account of the expenses incurred on this part of the state, will be laid before you.<sup>5</sup>

Much anxiety has been manifested, the year past, with respect to the improvement of the navigation of Connecticut river, and the junction of its waters with those of Lakes Champlain and Memphremagog. That these are truly schemes of vast importance, will not, be questioned. Our interest is great in all, but in the two latter, it is more exclusive than in the first. The consideration, however, that the state only borders on that river, I trust, will not deprive that part of the subject of a general solicitude throughout the state; as it should always be remembered, that a benefit to any one part of the state, without an actual deprivation to the other parts, is a benefit to the whole. But the connection of this plan with the other two, if they should all be executed, at once renders it of immediate interest to other important parts of the state, than those in the vicinity of the river.

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<sup>3</sup> The act of 1824, providing for a state arsenal, was repealed in 1825. Champlain arsenal, at Vergennes, was built by the U.S. government in 1828.

<sup>4</sup> For Mr. Everett's report, see printed *Assembly Journal* 1825, pp. 35-27.

<sup>5</sup> The amount was \$564.77, mainly for transportation and express messengers. – See printed *Assembly Journal* of 1825, p. 99; and *Acts of 1825*, p. 44.

At this period of internal improvement and enterprise, it is certainly incumbent upon us to take some measures to forward the accomplishment of such public works, in this state, as it would be practicable and expedient to execute. The great advantages of canals where there is no natural navigation, appear now to be universally acknowledged. The expediency, however, of constructing them is only admitted, where the circumstances of the country through which they are to pass, or the extent of the navigation with which they are to be connected at the two extremes, will justify the application of the necessary means. Instead, therefore, of wasting the public or private resources of the state, by embarking in, or encouraging projects requiring large funds, and affording doubtful evidence of utility, for the honor of imitating others, more favorably situated, and possessing more ample means, we should proceed with caution – always keeping in view the advantages of the work proposed, if practicable, the means necessary for its execution, and the sources whence those means are to be derived.

In the beginning of May last I received a communication from the secretary of the war department of the United States, stating, that, in accordance with the wishes expressed by the people of the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, through their representatives in congress, orders had been given, to cause an examination and survey to be made, of the country between Lake Memphremagog and the Connecticut river at Barnet in this state, with view to ascertaining the practicability of constructing a canal to unite those waters and also an examination of the Connecticut river, from Lake Connecticut to the tide waters of Long Island sound, to ascertain the practicability and probable cost of improving the navigation of that river; and that an engineer would be at Barnet by the 10th of May, who would co-operate with any engineer or commissioner that might be sent to that place, on the part of the state. Although I felt anxious to evince to the national government our gratification that its attention was directed to objects so very interesting to this state, and our disposition to afford all practicable co-operation, yet I had no authority to incur expense. But arrangements having been made by individuals to avoid that, I appointed Horace Everett [of Winsor] and Nicholas Baylies [of Montpelier] Esqrs. Commissioners, for the purpose above mentioned. Of the progress of these surveys, I have not been advised.<sup>6</sup>

In the month of July last, I was furnished with the proceedings of a public meeting, held at this place [Montpelier,] on the subject of a canal to unite the waters of Lake Champlain and Connecticut river, in pursuance of which addressed a letter to the secretary of war, requesting that a survey might be made, under the direction of that department, to ascertain the practicability and probable expense of such a communication, previous to the next session of congress. This was declined on the ground that the number of surveys in progress, it was feared, would so nearly absorb the funds at the disposal of the department, applicable to such objects, that it was not deemed prudent to make any further surveys the present season. From the interesting connection, however, already alluded to, of all these objects, and which will exist even in a national view, we have reason to indulge the expectation, that this survey will be made by the United States, in the course of another season. But I am, of the opinion, that the state should provide for making it, in case the general government, contrary to our expectation should still decline to do it. A canal across the center of the state, by any route which probably would be selected, would penetrate, a considerable portion of the way, a fertile and well settled line of country, and form the most important connections at both extremes. The necessary measures, therefore, to ascertain its practicability and probable cost, should not, under the existing circumstances, be delayed. An examination has been for some time going on, between this place [Montpelier] and Connecticut river, by individuals who feel interested, the particulars of which, it is understood, will be communicated to you, and maybe of essential service in your deliberations on the subject.<sup>7</sup>

The time may not be far distant, when the attention of the state may properly be fixed on other enterprises of a similar kind; but I do not feel authorized to advise any steps of that kind, until it shall have been determined how far, and in what manner, it will become necessary to contribute to the great and paramount objects – the

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<sup>6</sup> For the report of Mr. Everett see printed *Assembly Journal* of 1825, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> For the report of Araunah Waterman and John L. Woods of various surveys in Vermont, see printed *Assembly Journal* of 1825, pp. 146 – 148. These early surveys for canals through central Vermont were useful in indicating the lines of railroads which have since been constructed.

improvement of the navigation of Connecticut River, and its connection with Lakes Champlain and Memphremagog.

With these views, I would respectfully recommend, that provision be made for the appointment of two commissioners, by the legislature, whose duty it shall be to co-operate and advise, when necessary, with any engineers employed in this state, under the authority of the United States, and to cause such examinations and surveys to be made as the legislature may direct, and also to correspond with the general government, and with other states, on subjects relating to their duties. A suitable appropriation to be placed subject to the control of the commissioners, and a reasonable compensation to be paid to them for actual services.

These are all the remarks which have occurred to me as necessary to be made at this time, and I have no doubt of their being received and treated with the same spirit of friendliness in which they have been submitted. And permit me, in closing, to assure you of my cordial co-operation in whatever measures you may, in your united and better wisdom, deem it proper to adopt, calculated to serve the public interest, however different they may happen to be from any which I have recommended.

C. P. VAN NESS.