

Report relative to

Occacock Inlet.

Raleigh, 1827.

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[No. 12.]

**REPORT**

RELATIVE TO

**OCCACOCK INLET.**

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**1827.**

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## REPORT.

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The committee, to whom was referred the memorial of sundry citizens of Newbern, Washington, Plymouth, Edenton, Murfreesborough, Elizabeth City and Hertford, have considered the subject to which the memorialists invite the attention of the Legislature, and respectfully report:

That your committee have long been aware that the trade of a very large portion of the State laboured under serious inconveniences and sustained heavy losses, by reason of the shoals which obstruct the passage of vessels through Occacock Inlet. But of the extent of these inconveniences, and the enormity of these losses, they had formed a most inadequate conception until their attention had been drawn to this subject by the memorial under consideration. It appears that Occacock affords the only outlet to the Ocean for the products of the industry of nearly half the State. Near the mouth of this outlet exist numerous and extensive shoals, to which is applied the general term of the Swash, and through which winds a difficult channel, so shallow as not to permit vessels to pass of a greater draft of water than seven feet. Every vessel navigating the Neuse, the Trent, the Bay, the Tar, the Pungo, the Roanoke, Cashie, Chowan, Meherrin, Perquimons and Pasquotank rivers, and the noble Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, in going and returning from Sea, has to pass through this tedious and obstructed channel. Every vessel of respectable size must be lightened of a part of her cargo before this passage can be effected, and is thus not only subjected to heavy charges of lighterage, and still heavier costs of detention, but to the most imminent perils in a situation of peculiar exposure. Vessels of a large burthen fit for transporting heavy products to distant ports, are now almost unknown to the navigation of this part of the State, and therefore such products, when designed for distant markets, are transported coastwise, to be re-shipped in other vessels for the places of consumption. Many vessels of small burthen, at a vast additional expense, are employed to perform what, but for these obstructions, might be performed by one. When intelligence is received of a favorable market, the ship owners, by reason of the unavoidable delays at the Swash, are anticipated by others having no such impediments to encounter, and cannot avail themselves of the information. These evils, added to the charges of lighterage, detention and increased rates of insurance, have raised the price of freight to a ruinous amount.

Upon those, by whose industry the products are made, fall with aggravated force the consequences of high freight and of

double shipments. It is impossible to compare the ordinary prices of the staple commodities of our country in the ports connected with Occacock and in those which have an unobstructed outlet to the ocean, without being struck with the enormous difference. Staves, shingles, lumber obtain in the former about two thirds of the price, which they command in the latter—Naval Stores about three fourths—and the more valuable articles about seven eighths. It is then clear that the stave, shingle, and lumber-getter pays to the Swash an annual tax of one third of what his labour produces; the maker of Naval Stores pays one barrel in four, and the grower of cotton, one bale in eight.

By reason of the badness of the home market, a vast quantity of our most valuable products is carried by expensive land carriage to the towns of other States. Of thirty-eight thousand bales of cotton exported from Petersburg in the last year, thirty thousand were brought thither from North Carolina. The expenses of this transportation are, of course, a tax upon the producer, while the products themselves swell the exports, add to the commercial activity, and increase the importance of a sister State, to the injury of our own.

The productive industry of the country not only is thus taxed in all which it makes for sale; it is taxed again, in all which it consumes of imported articles. The prices of all commodities imported through Occacock are higher by reason of its obstructed navigation. The memorialists state, and your committee believe they are warranted by the fact, that in the article of salt alone, this section of the country pays an annual tax of more than ten thousand dollars to the shoals of Occacock.

If to the taxes upon industry, by reason of the diminished price of products sold at home, and of the expenses attending the tedious land carriage of those conveyed to the market towns of another State, and of the increased cost of imported articles, we add the annual destruction, as worthless, of the timber of our forests; all of which would be in immediate demand for ship-building, spars, cabinet work, carpentry and fuel, the moment this blockade of the coast was relieved; your committee believe themselves within bounds when they state that North Carolina every year sustains from the Swash a pecuniary loss of a million of dollars.

While the resources of the country are thus swallowed up in these sands, it is impossible that the country should flourish. Although the wild woods abound with treasures of wealth, could they be cheaply transported to foreign markets, and the swamps, pocosons, and low grounds are not excelled in fertility by the rich lands of the Mississippi Valley, the hardy and enterprising population is going forth, in a steady and rapid stream to the West.

tern States. The citizens who remain—because they cannot break the ties of nature, and habit, and necessity, which bind them to their native land—are torpid for the want of excitement to exertion, and discouraged by the unsuccessful results of all their efforts at improvement.

It is impossible that your committee should not feel an anxious solicitude to relieve their country from this fatal impediment to her prosperity. That the channel through these shoals may be deepened, cannot be doubted. Your committee learn that the accumulation of sand and mud has been gradual for the last forty years, and what has been thus deposited, may certainly be removed by art. It is true that similar causes may hereafter occasion another deposition; but the means which can free the present obstructed channels, will be more effectual when applied in time to prevent their obstruction. If it should be too expensive to remove or deepen the shoals, the use of the contrivances to which the Hollanders have given the expressive name of "Camels," will carry vessels over them with ease and safety. It is the prerogative of intellect to triumph over physical difficulties. To skill and energy and perseverance few obstacles are insurmountable.

If the committee could state with precision the expense which would certainly effectuate this great object, they would not hesitate to declare their opinion that such an expense should be encountered if within the competency of the State to meet it. On this subject they are without exact information, and in the present state of the Public Treasury they are reluctant to recommend an appropriation of money, which may not produce the desired result. They believe that men of capital, feeling an immediate and deep interest in the subject, are willing to engage in the experiment of improving this navigation upon being permitted to receive a moderate toll on the vessels which they may enable to pass unobstructed to the ocean. This experiment they hope and trust will succeed. An enterprising individual has declared his readiness to contract to make three feet additional water on the Swash for \$60,000, and to keep the channel thus deep for an annual sum thereafter of \$8,000. Those who may embark in this praiseworthy undertaking are more competent than the agents of the State could be to judge of his ability to accomplish this result, and probably will be more exact in requiring the proper safeguards against failure, and more prudent and economical in their expenditures. In the mean time, under the authority of the Board of Internal Improvements, such information may be collected as will enable a succeeding Legislature to decide whether the public funds ought to be applied in aid of the undertaking.

To meet that provision of the constitution of the United States

which prohibits a State from laying any duty on tonnage without the consent of Congress, a provision for obtaining that assent is necessary. It cannot be doubted but that this assent will be yielded to further an object so interesting to the revenue, the commerce, and to the private and public marine of the United States.

In fixing the rate of tolls, the Committee have been governed by the precedent set in a former act of the Legislature, passed in 1821, for deepening Blair's Channel in Pamptico Sound. From the best calculations which they have been able to make, the charge which these tolls may impose, will not exceed one tenth of those which directly or indirectly the navigation now endures.

In the other details of the bill which accompany this report, the committee have endeavoured, with the utmost care, to combine two objects which are not easily made to concur. While it is desirable that the State should have the power to relieve this navigation from every burthen, it is absolutely essential that they should hold out to individuals such a prospect of remuneration, *in the event of success*, as may induce them to advance their money for the accomplishment of an object all important to the State, and to which the State is not at present disposed to appropriate the public funds.

Your committee trust that the bill herewith presented, is properly guarded to effect both these purposes. If it be not, its defects are not attributable to want of zeal or of diligence on their part.

In the humble but earnest hope that its enactments will have the effect to relieve our trade from an intolerable pressure, excite the enterprize of our merchants and reward the industry of our farmers, extend the resources, increase the population and advance the improvement, the prosperity and the consequence of North-Carolina, your committee report to the House the accompanying bill, and recommend that it be passed into a law.

Respectfully submitted.

WILL. GASTON, *Chairman.*



**REPORT**

ON

**BILLS, BONDS AND NOTES.**

The committee on the Judiciary, to whom was referred a bill regulating the time within which demand shall be made of the maker, and notice given to the endorser of a bill, bond or promissory note, have had the same under consideration, and report:

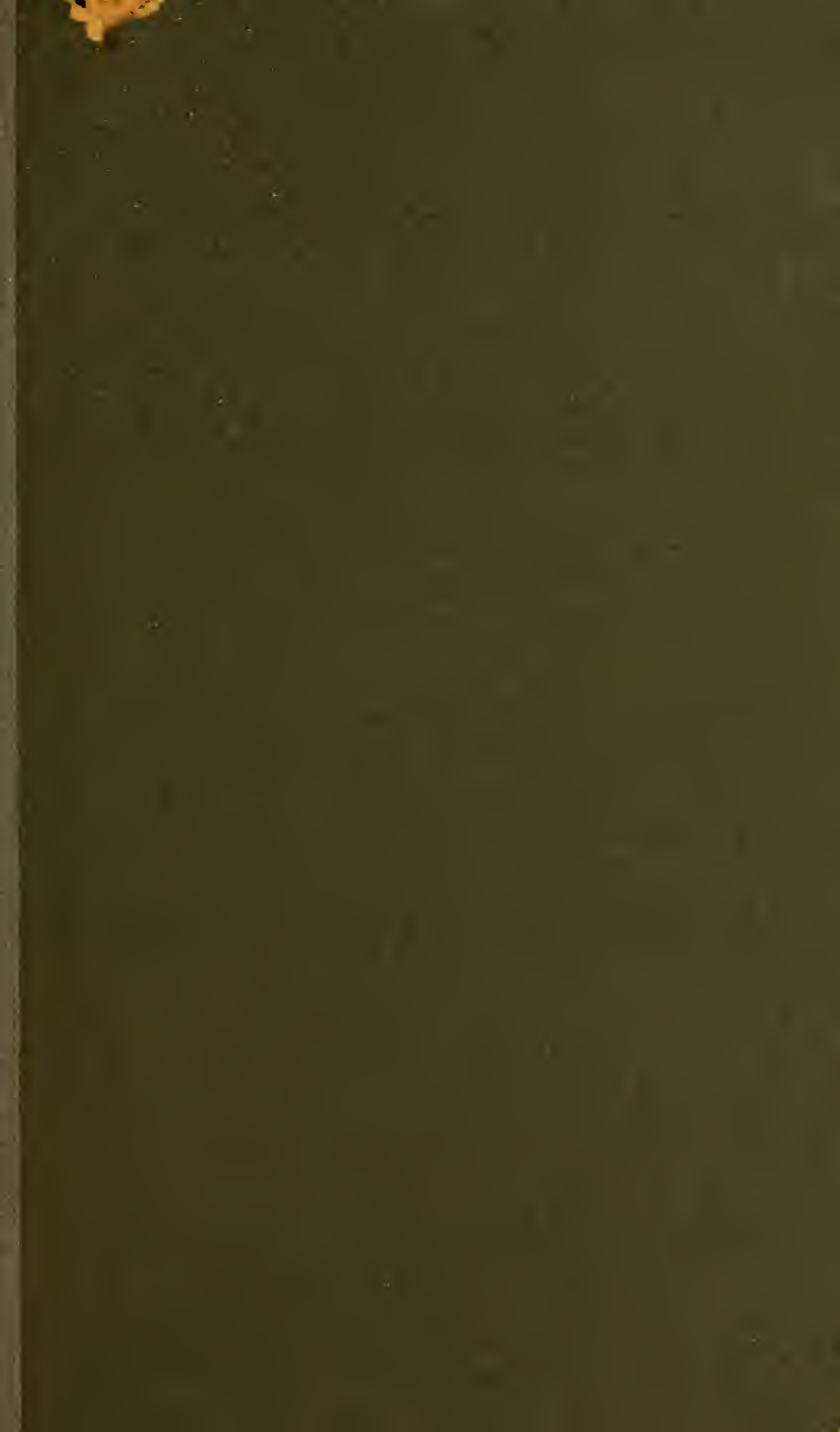
That admitting "the law merchant," which regulates the liability of endorsers of bills, bonds, and promissory notes, is not in every respect adapted to the pursuits, circumstances and habits of the people of this State, yet it is not perceived that the provisions of the bill under consideration are calculated to amend or improve that law, and render its application to the condition of the community more salutary. The law to which reference is made, has stood the test of experience and of time; and so far as your committee are advised, its principles are wise and just, and should not be varied or changed without the most confirmed conviction that an improvement is attainable by the Legislature.

A majority of your committee therefore recommend that the bill herewith returned to the House be rejected.

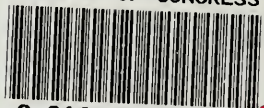
Respectfully submitted.

R. H. JONES, *Chairman.*





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