

Argument of Henry Addison in behalf of the corporate authorities and almost the entire population of Georgetown, D.C.,

F202 5342 Geo. Shoemaker.

Argument of Henry Addison IN BEHALF OF THE CORPORATE AUTHORITIES AND ALMOST THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF GEORGETOWN, D. C., AGAINST THE PETITION OF COL. ROBERTS AND TWELVE OTHER CITIZENS TO CEDE AWAY A LARGE PORTION OF THE TERRITORY OF SAID CITY.

POLKINNORM, PR., 9 ST. BET. 6TH & 7TH, WASHINGTON.

LC

5342

Gift W. L. Shoemaker 7 S '06

Argument.

Mr. Chairman, —Your honorable committee having decided not to cede as much of our territory as was requested by Mr. Roberts and a few other persons, but only that part of it which lies north of Road and Eighth streets, I desire very briefly to state our objections to the measure in that amended form.

The Potomac river and Rock creek present impassable boundaries to the eastern and southern portions of Georgetown. We advance but little towards the west before we are met by a boundary as practically impassable, in a range of possessions owned by the Georgetown College and “The Academy of Visitation”—which are retained in a state of seclusion, which is appropriate to the educational and religious purposes to which they

Library of Congress

have been devoted for more than fifty years. These possessions are not likely ever to be disturbed, or appropriated for any municipal purpose whatever. At the north, nine-tenths of the property on the north side of Road street has ever been within our limits. It will, then, be seen, by reference to the map and plat, now before you, that Mr. Roberts proposes to take from us almost entirely the only remaining territory over which our population can hereafter expand. That is simply the proposition before you, and to which we are opposed, for reasons which I shall now proceed to state.

You are asked to separate a people who earnestly desire to remain united, and abide a common destiny. Those who are to be disannexed are a frugal, industrious and most respectable people. Most of them are natives of the town, with whose laws and institutions they are familiar, and to which they are devotedly attached. They have felt the degradation incident to the anomalous political condition of the District of Columbia, but they cling with pertinacity to the few remaining rights, and almost imperceptible symptoms of self-government which are supposed to be guaranteed to them in the charter of Georgetown. Mr. Roberts has told you, in his memorial, something about the peculiar blessings of "self-government," which, by this measure, he intends to confer upon them.

Why, sir, these people have sense enough to know that they will not be turned loose and allowed to do as they please; they know that they will be governed or misgoverned by somebody. They have sometimes read the acts of Congress, which were approved May 1st, 1802, and July 1st, 1812, and know that these will hand them over to the government of a body of men, who reside far away from their limits, many of whom they don't know, and never saw, and with Whose selection and appointment they will have nothing to do. That very body of men, sir, from whose intervention in their affairs, the people of Georgetown have long desired to be released, and for which purpose a bill has recently passed the Senate. Mr. Roberts would soon learn, from the presentation of tax bills, that there was a very dignified body of gentlemen, assembling once a month in the City Hall of Washington, whose business it is to tax everybody upon whom they can lay their hands.

Library of Congress

The extension of municipal authority and wholesome police regulations over that section of the town is a matter of indispensable importance to our whole population. You have seen that High street is our only northern outlet, and that it terminates in a junction with the turnpike road which leads to Maryland. It would never do to let our main thoroughfare pass out of our hands—it would never do to allow disorders to prevail there, or allow it to become dangerous or impassable from any kind of abuse or neglect.

It is known, too, that every city needs suburban accommodations, where are generally localised all such establishments as would be insufferable nuisances in the midst of a more crowded population. Thirty years ago, our slaughter-houses and butchers' pens, were, by an ordinance of the Corporation, confined to that distant section. Police regulations have to be strictly enforced to prevent them from forming dangerous evils and loathesome nuisances, even there. Comply with Mr. Roberts' request, and can any body tell how long it will be before he will find such establishments within a few yards of his premises? There is at least one large lot just behind him which is peculiarly eligible for such business, and would, in all probability, be thus occupied before the end of the present year.

It is there, too, where the Corporation purchased nearly twenty 5 acres of land, on which we have a large establishment for the comfortable accommodation of the destitute poor of the town, and for the confinement and employment of vicious and disorderly vagrants. Unless we can command that establishment, and preserve it from annoying influences, we would have to abandon it.

As the streets which bound Mr. Roberts' premises have all been finished, he cannot dread any imposition of taxes for their repairs for many years to come. The only tax to which he can refer is the general one, for general purposes, and which everybody pays just in proportion to the assessed value of their property, real and personal. Mr. Roberts complains of the exorbitant rate at which his property is assessed, and prays to be put outside of the corporate limits, mainly, if not exclusively, on that ground. It is a very easy

Library of Congress

thing for a person to suppose himself to be harshly treated, and vexatiously oppressed, without reason, as it will appear from the following statement of his assessed taxes:

His real property is assessed at \$8,600

His personal estate " 1,300

Whole assessment, \$9,900

The tax upon that assessment is at the rate of 87 cents for the \$100, which amounts to the sum of \$86 13, and which can be reduced by him, if he paid the bill when presented, to the sum of \$81 13. Now, the question is, to what extent is he oppressed in his own estimation? Suppose his assessment ought to be reduced one-third—his tax would then be \$51 03, and then it would be clear that his whole hardship resides in the payment of twenty-seven dollars and four cents more than he thinks he ought to pay.

Gentlemen, is a difference of opinion, as to a mere matter of fact, involving that inconsiderable sum, between three gentlemen appraisers of the highest respectability, acting under the solemnity of an oath, on one side, and Mr. Roberts on the other, a thing of such dignity and momentousness, as to demand an imposing act of Congressional interposition? Was it worth while to pester and worry those distinguished statesmen, who are our best friends in Congress, with a subject so purely trivial, when they have so many other and far more important matters demanding their hourly attention? We deplore the proceeding, because it is calculated to bring our affairs under 6 public decision, and excite the impatience and disgust of Congress itself, and for which we are in no way responsible.

It will not do for him to talk about the hardships of the imposition of street taxes. The part of High street, which runs the whole length of that northern section, has hardly even been taxed at all. The whole expense of its improvement, to this day, amounts to the sum of \$6,436 53, all of which should have been paid by the property by which it is bounded. But the whole town being peculiarly interested in the preservation of its only northern

Library of Congress

thoroughfare, we paid out of the common treasury, \$3,553 19 of the above expense. Sir, does that look as if the taxes imposed upon the heights “ *goes wholly to the improvement of the business streets in which your petitioner has no interest?* ” or does it not rather look like taking the “ *business town's* ” money, and expending it liberally on the broad avenues of “ *the heights?* ”

Now, sir, I will ask you if it would be right to inflict a great injury upon Georgetown produce, strife and confusion, and permanent discontent among ten thousand people, to put about forty dollars in the pocket of Mr. Roberts? It would be a mistake, perhaps, to say that that was his only or principal object. How far a certain fact may influence him I cannot tell; but it is proper that it should be brought to the notice of this honorable committee.

From inattention to street boundaries, and the carelessness of builders, some of the people who reside in the northern part of the town have encroached seriously upon the streets by enclosing land to which they had no earthly title. Public attention has been somewhat called recently to that fact, and a good deal of uneasiness has thereby been created in the minds of those who have strong reasons to believe that their own lots are in that unfortunate condition. It is simply a matter of justice that no one should invade the public streets and appropriate portions of them to their own private use. Such encroachments deform the outlines of the streets and seriously injure adjacent property. To what extent Mr. Roberts is in that unfortunate category I am not precisely informed, but a late surveyor tells me that the person who originally owned that gentleman's residence did trench about three feet upon the whole line of his southern front, and how much upon the other two streets, by which he is bounded, he does not know. Now there is no other way of avoiding the consequences of these inconsiderate aggressions than by having the whole of that part of the town ceded to the adjacent country where *narrow roads* can be substituted for *broad streets*. It is to be presumed that the Corporation of Georgetown will take proper measures to ascertain the extent of these misappropriations of portions of the public thorough-fares, and have their lawful lines defined and maintained for the future.

Library of Congress

In the mere item of taxation, it is seen that Mr. Roberts, by being transferred to the country, would save about sixty dollars. For that small sum, and the tax upon his furniture, he secures all the compensating advantages of a city government. He has the uninterrupted use of the whole of our paved streets, and one of them illuminated to his very door. He is in hail of the police, night-watch and fire-companies; and is so peculiarly located that he enjoys all the advantages of city life with almost perfect freedom from any of its annoyances.

This proposition, too, is one to sunder the bonds by which we have long been held together in a common union and most congenial fellowship. It is to disturb associations with which we were contented and which we thought were to be perpetual. Such a scheme is certainly worthy of the careful consideration of Congress. In the whole proceeding we have been taken by surprise, and with but little opportunity to oppose it with becoming seriousness and formality. We have a most profound respect for this honorable committee and the illustrious body of which it is the organ. We feel safe in appealing to your magnanimity, and humbly ask, if agreeable to you, that the usual forms of legislation may be observed in a matter which so deeply concerns the welfare of those who are entirely dependent upon your protection. We would be glad of the opportunity to approach the house committee upon this measure, should it be recommended by you and adopted by the Senate. We will have that opportunity if you will kindly consent to report it, if you should deem it your duty to do so, in the usual form of a bill. I allude to this particular in consequence of having been informed by our esteemed friend Governor Hamlin, that the measure is to be presented in the form of a short amendment to be appended to one of the appropriation bills. I am by no means conversant with parliamentary law or the rules which govern the proceedings of Congress, but if I am not greatly in error, the measure, if placed in that position, will never be considered by the District 8 Committee of the House, and may eventually become a law, even should it be unanimously rejected by the House itself. It would then, probably, in the last hours of the session, go to a committee of conference, with scores of other rejected amendments, and for the mere purpose of

Library of Congress

conciliation and the prompt despatch of public business, it might be found necessary to let us slide. For that, and other reasons which I have not time to state, we would, should you still determine to grant, in part, the prayer of those petitioners, greatly prefer that you would adopt the form of a bill, that we may have secured to us all the usual and legitimate opportunities of opposing it.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I beg leave to tender you, and the other gentlemen of this honorable committee, my thanks for opening this subject again at my request, and to apologize for the tedious and imperfect manner in which I have endeavored to explain our views in regard to it.