

BRIDGE ACROSS THE POTOMAC RIVER.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

*Information on the subject of the injury done to the Washington Bridge by the late freshet in the river, and an estimate of the expense necessary to its repair.*

JUNE 7, 1836.

Read, and referred to the Committee for the District of Columbia.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, June 7, 1836.

SIR: In compliance with a resolution, passed by the House of Representatives on the 3d instant, directing me to have an examination "made of the cause of the recent injury of the Potomac bridge, and to report the result thereof to that House, along with an estimate of the cost of repairing the said injury," I have the honor to submit the following statement.

In respect to the first branch of the inquiry—after two personal examinations of the bridge since the principal injury, and one made the morning of its occurrence, no doubt exists in my mind that the immediate cause of it was the breaking loose of the mud-machine, and scows or lighters, some distance above; and of the great violence with which they were driven by the current against the piers.

The force of the current was undoubtedly increased, not only by the unusual height of the water generally in the river, but by the solid embankment, extending near half a mile in length, across the centre of the river, which flung an additional quantity of water into the remaining parts of the stream, on each side, near the banks: but, notwithstanding this, it is very manifest that the concussion caused by the machine and scows, with the partial sinking of two of them, so as still more to dam up the water and increase the pressure against that portion of the bridge, was the immediate and principal cause of the injury sustained.

In respect to the other portion of the inquiry—the intelligent engineer, who aided in building the bridge, and who has carefully examined it during the last few days, thinks the whole damages sustained in all parts, and by all causes, can be fully repaired, and the necessary improvements made to strengthen some of its parts, for the sum of \$16,300.

The portions required for each of the purposes are specified in the document annexed, which contains his deliberate views on the whole subject matter of the resolution, and to which I beg leave to refer for further particulars, marked A and B.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

LEVI WOODBURY,

*Sec'y of the Treasury.*

Hon. JAMES K. POLK,

*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

A.

WASHINGTON, June 6, 1836.

SIR: The recent injury sustained by the Potomac bridge from the freshet can very readily be accounted for. On the morning of the 2d instant, when the freshet was at its full height and velocity, the mud-machine, (used to clear the Georgetown channel,) with six lighters attached to her, broke loose from their moorings, and came down against the bridge; struck about fifty yards south of the Virginia draw. The force was so great as to break two lighters in two, and broke off two piles and one spur shore, and turned two other lighters up endwise against the side of the bridge. These, with the accumulation of old logs, drift wood, and constant action of the machine, with the two other uninjured lighters, gained gradually upon the piers; the current being increased by damming up the water forced those piers to yield; one of which was carried away; the others, making in all six, were so much injured as to make it necessary to take them down. The bed of the river in the Virginia channel is composed of hard gravel and sand; the piles could not be driven more than eight feet on an average. The water is from twenty-eight to thirty feet deep, which makes the bridge much weaker at that place than at any other, and should have been supported by an extra number of spur shores and wharfing at the draws. I have inquired of some of the oldest inhabitants of this place respecting the late freshet; have been told by several, particularly Mr. Ches-seur, who was at the bridge for many years, that the water was higher than he had ever seen it; and Mr. Jacob Payne, of Georgetown, told me it was three feet higher at the Chain bridge than he had ever seen it, and had observed every freshet of any consequence for twenty to twenty-five years. All that part of the bridge north of the Virginia draw remains uninjured. The causeway has received little or no injury, except some settling of the filling, which is of little consequence, and was expected until all the cavities in the stone filling is closed.

I am, most respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

A. B. McCLEAN.

Hon. LEVI WOODBURY.

B.

WASHINGTON, June 6, 1836.

SIR: Agreeable to your direction, I herewith give an estimate for repairs necessary at the Potomac bridge to make it passable; an estimate, also, for the wharfing to strengthen the draws, and to complete the causeway. I would also suggest the propriety of adding in the cost of the principal timbers for a new draw; should any accident happen, it would cause great delay, unless those timbers were at hand.

I am, most respectfully,

Your obedient,

A. B. McCLEAN.

The honorable LEVI WOODBURY.

*Estimate.*

Repairing the bridge :

Materials	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,000	
Workmanship	-	-	-	-	-	3,500	
							\$5,500

Wharfing at the draws, 60 feet out, by 30 feet wide, one on each side of the bridge :

Materials	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,000	
Workmanship	-	-	-	-	-	2,500	
							4,500

Washington draw, 30 feet by 30, one on each side of the bridge :

Materials	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,100	
Workmanship	-	-	-	-	-	1,200	
							2,300

For new set of principal draw timbers - - - 500

For repairing the causeway, replacing side walks, and raising parapets to their height - - - 3,500

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\$16,300

A. B. McCLEAN.

