

POCOMOKE RIVER, MARYLAND.

LETTER

FROM

THE ACTING SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

With a letter from the Chief of Engineers, report of the examination of Pocomoke River, Maryland, with a view of uniting the waters of said river with the waters of Synepuxent Bay at a point above Snow Hill.

DECEMBER 9, 1892.—Referred to the Committee on Rivers and Harbors and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, December 5, 1892.

SIR: I have the honor to inclose herewith a letter from the Chief of Engineers dated December 5, 1892, together with a copy of a report from Wm. F. Smith, United States agent, major, U. S. Army, retired, dated August 16, 1892, of a preliminary examination of Pocomoke River, Maryland, with a view of uniting the waters of said river with the waters of Synepuxent Bay at a point above Snow Hill, made by him in compliance with the provisions of the river and harbor act of July 13, 1892.

Very respectfully,

J. M. SCHOFIELD,
Major-General, Acting Secretary of War.

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS,
UNITED STATES ARMY,
Washington, D. C., December 5, 1892.

SIR: I have the honor to submit the accompanying copy of report dated August 16, 1892, by W. F. Smith, United States agent, major of Engineers, U. S. Army, retired, of the results of a preliminary examination of Pocomoke River, Maryland, with a view of uniting the waters of said river with the waters of Synepuxent Bay at a point above Snow Hill, made to comply with the provisions of the river and harbor act approved July 13, 1892.

It is the opinion of the local engineer, concurred in by the division engineer and by this office, that the route is worthy of improvement by the General Government.

It is estimated that the surveys necessary for preparation of plan and project with estimates of the improvement proposed can be made for \$800.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

THOS. LINCOLN CASEY,
Brig. Gen., Chief of Engineers.

Hon. S. B. ELKINS,
Secretary of War.

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF POCOMOKE RIVER, MARYLAND, WITH
A VIEW OF UNITING THE WATERS OF SAID RIVER WITH THE WATERS
OF SYNEPUXENT BAY AT A POINT ABOVE SNOW HILL.

UNITED STATES ENGINEER OFFICE,
Wilmington, Del., August 16, 1892.

GENERAL: In compliance with instructions contained in Department letter of July 14, 1892, and the requirements of section 7 of the river and harbor act of July 13, 1892, I have the honor to submit the following report upon the preliminary examination of Pocomoke River, Maryland, with a view of uniting the waters of said river with the waters of Synepuxent Bay at a point above Snow Hill, made under my direction by Mr. A. Stierle, assistant engineer, a copy of whose report accompanies this.

The connection between the Pocomoke River and Synepuxent Bay is deemed of the greatest importance to the commerce between the Chesapeake and Delaware bays, affording a thoroughly safe route between these bays without the danger of ocean navigation, and would greatly increase the intrinsic value of the inland waterway between Chincoteague Bay and Delaware Bay.

The route is well worthy of improvement and a survey is recommended. The least amount required to make a survey and report with project and estimate of cost of improvement is \$800.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WM. F. SMITH,
United States Agent.

Brig. Gen. THOMAS L. CASEY,
Chief of Engineers, U. S. A.

(Through Col. Wm. P. Craighill, Corps of Engineers, Division Engineer, Southeast Division.)

[First indorsement.]

U. S. ENGINEER OFFICE,
Baltimore, Md., August 18, 1892.

Respectfully submitted to the Chief of Engineers.

Having in view the facts and reasons set forth in the report of the local engineer and the standard set by Congress in similar cases, I state, as required by the law, that this work is "worthy of improvement."

WM. P. CRAIGHILL,
Colonel, Corps of Engineers.

REPORT OF MR. A. STIERLE, ASSISTANT ENGINEER.

WILMINGTON, DEL., *August 13, 1892.*

SIR: In compliance with your instructions I have the honor to submit herewith a report upon the preliminary examination of Pocomoke River, Maryland, with the view of uniting the waters of said river with the waters of Synepuxent Bay at a point above Snow Hill.

It is understood from the promoters of the project that the idea of a connection between the waters named suggested itself and has been elaborated upon since the inland waterway between Chincoteague Bay, Virginia, and Delaware Bay has been commenced; the purposes of the improvement have therefore a wider scope than is indicated in the bill.

It appears also that Synepuxent Bay as an eastern terminus of the water connection is not, as first understood, the narrow bay generally shown on recent charts (especially on those of the Coast Survey Department) between Chincoteague Bay and Isle of Wight Bay, but includes, according to local traditions, the upper portion of Chincoteague Bay as far south as the Virginia State line. That always some uncertainty existed with regard to the exact line where Chincoteague Bay and Synepuxent Bay meet is shown by the fact that on older editions of the Coast Survey charts the sheet of water now generally known as Chincoteague Bay has two distinct names, the lower portion up to a line extended across from near Green Run Inlet, which is now closed, being Chincoteague Bay, and the portion north of it to Synepuxent Sound being Assateague Bay. (See chart of the Atlantic Coast from Cape Sable to Cape Hatteras, published in 1877.) The maps of Worcester County contained in an atlas of the State of Maryland, published many years ago, also gives Assateague Bay as the name of the upper portion, but the narrow strip of beach between the bay and the ocean is called Synepuxent Beach.

The characteristics of the bay shore on each side would indicate that immediately north of Green Run Inlet the bay was once divided by low marshy land through which narrows or thoroughfares flowed, which have gradually widened by the shore washing away. This may give a remote reason for the existence of separate names for the upper and lower portion of the bay. As the bill calls for the connection of Pocomoke River with Synepuxent Bay it became necessary to obtain all the information possible upon this point; in addition, the framers of the bill positively assert that the upper portion of Chincoteague Bay, locally known as Synepuxent Bay, was kept in view as the best outlet for the suggested water connection.

The Pocomoke River rises in the Great Cypress Swamp in the lower part of Sussex County, Del., and is about 60 miles long from its source to its entrance into Pocomoke Sound. Its course is southerly to Snow Hill, then southwesterly to the mouth, and generally parallel with the coast line, which lies about 16 miles to the eastward of it. The tide ascends the river for 33 miles to Porter Landing, where a slight daily rise and fall is still observable. At Snow Hill, which is only 5 miles below this landing and 28 miles above the mouth, the average rise and fall is about 2.6 feet.

This river has been improved by the General Government below Snow Hill. At the close of operations in 1888 a 7-foot low-water channel 80 feet wide was reported as completed to the town. There is no navigation above Snow Hill on account of the county bridge, which crosses here, having no draw. The depth in the channel for 2 miles above the bridge is fair, however, the least being 6 feet at low water, with occasional depths of 10 and 12 feet. Above tidal influence the bed of the river rises gradually, and is at many places bare during very dry seasons.

Chincoteague Bay is, through Chincoteague Inlet, connected with the ocean, and is from 4 to 5 miles wide. Its length from Killick Shoal light, near the inlet channel, to South Point, on Synepuxent Neck, is about 21 miles. It is connected on the north by the Straits of Synepuxent Bay, also called Synepuxent Sound, with Isle of Wight, Big and Little Assawoman bays, and by a canal, forming a section of the inland waterway, with Indian River and Rehoboth bays, the head of the latter bay being about 60 miles north of Chincoteague Inlet. A water way, giving a 6-foot low-water navigation in these bays, is now in process of construction and will eventually be extended to Delaware Bay.

The Pocomoke River approaches the bay nearest at and immediately above Snow Hill, where the distance, in a straight line across the intervening land, is only 6 miles. There are, besides, other physical conditions which are unusually favorable for a water connection. About 1 mile above Snow Hill, where the depth of water in the river is still ample and the tide considerable, a deep branch, the outlet of Purnells Millpond, empties into the river. Three smaller branches run into the millpond as feeders from an easterly, southeasterly, and southerly direction, which are of about the same length. On the bay side opposite two small creeks, Scarborough Creek, the most northerly, and Pow Pow Creek, the most southerly, about 1 mile

apart, flow into Chincoteague Bay. From the head of these branches and creeks low ravines extend into the adjoining high land.

There are two lines which present themselves as the most feasible for a cut or canal from the Pocomoke River to the bay. The first is along the easterly branch of Purnells Millpond to its head for about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles; then across the divide about one mile; then down Scarboro Creek to the bay 3 miles, a total distance of about $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The second follows the southeasterly or middle branch of the millpond to its head 3 miles; then across the high land about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles; then down Pow Pow Creek into the bay about $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles, a total distance of about 6½ miles. The average elevation of the bottom of the branches and creeks may not be over 4 feet above the low-water level of Pocomoke River; that of the intervening high land may not be over 15 feet; the necessary excavations along either of the two routes can not be very large or deep. The Pow Pow Creek route apparently offers the best water and harbor in the bay, but the advantages and disadvantages of each line can not be stated until an actual survey is made.

It is not expected that in the immediate locality commerce would be much increased by the improvement asked for, if made. The improvement is not a local one, as the benefits derived from it would affect the general commerce of the whole lower Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic coast from Cape Charles to Cape Henlopen, and also indirectly, the coastwise trade carried on by a large class of small vessels. It would form an important link and feeder of the inland water way between Chincoteague Bay and Delaware Bay, by drawing towards it a large amount of commerce from the westward which is now entirely cut off and which seeks an outlet by water, to northern markets in competition with Baltimore. It is impossible to estimate accurately what the amount of commerce would be passing through such a canal, if made, but it is safe to say that it would be not less than \$5,000,000 per annum after the completion of the inland water-way. The connection of the waters of Pocomoke River and Synepuxent Bay, so called, is worthy of improvement, in my opinion, and a survey is needed to prepare plans and estimates, the cost of which will be \$800.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. STIERLE,
Assistant Engineer.

Gen. WM. F. SMITH,
United States Agent.