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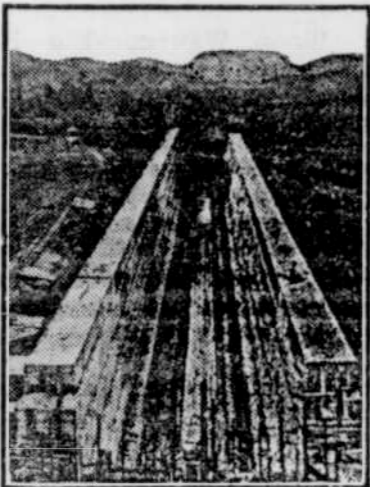
The Americans In Panama

Story of the Panama Canal From Start to Finish.

By Wm. R. Scott.

(Continued from last week.)

141,000 yards had been excavated and nine steam shovels were at work. The 357 renovated French buildings and forty-eight new structures housed the



Guide Walls Pedro Miguel Lock. employees, except those who provided shelter for themselves in Colon and Panama. There was no commissary and no hotels.

An executive order had made the civil service cover the canal zone on Nov. 15, 1904, but both Mr. Wallace and Mr. Stevens protested so earnestly against the restrictions of this order that on Jan. 12, 1906, President Roosevelt removed all employees except clerks from the scope of the act, thus allowing Mr. Stevens to employ any one he saw fit on any terms he chose. The eight hour day restriction likewise was lifted, but agitation in the United States caused the president later to reimpose both limitations, with whatever increase in time and cost of constructing the canal they might involve.

The Americans had been in Panama more than a year, and still the type of canal to be built was undecided. In the meantime Mr. Stevens rapidly was rounding into shape an organization of workers, getting suitable quarters erected for the employees, who were coming in large numbers, organizing the commissary and hotel systems, securing mechanical equipment and bringing the transportation facilities to a satisfactory standard. Governor Magoon simultaneously was organizing a civil government along the lines blazed by Governor Davis. Police, courts, schools, fire departments, post-offices, recreation clubhouses, churches—in short, duplicating on a scale suitable to the canal zone the civilization of the United States.

By June, 1906, the end of his first year as chief engineer, Mr. Stevens had made a remarkable showing in every phase of the work. There were thirty-nine steam shovels at work as against nine in 1905. The working force had increased to 23,901, of whom 3,284 were Americans. But as showing how closely his efforts were concentrated on preparatory work the total excavation for the year was only 1,400,562 yards, the highest figure for one month being in March, 1906, when 239,178 yards were removed.

Colonel Gorgas and his sanitary department got on top of the yellow fever epidemic in September, 1905, and in general so dominated the hitherto unhealthful isthmus that even the hostile press began to show a change in heart on this score, with the result that the immigration of workers largely increased. Recruiting agencies already had been opened in the West Indies, Europe and the principal American cities. More than 12,000 men were imported in 1906 on contract with the commission. The common labor was estimated by Mr. Stevens to be about 33 per cent as efficient as similar American labor. It was not until 1906 that the wives and families of the Americans began coming to the canal zone in considerable numbers, although there had been a heroic band of them throughout the trying days before the tropical terrors had been conquered.

Early in his connection with the canal Mr. Stevens discovered that practically all the material in the Culebra cut would have to be blasted before it could be handled by the steam shovels. He had to be careful in selecting dumps so as to insure that they would not become an obstruction to any type of canal or route that might be selected.

The high wages and salaries for which the canal zone is noted originated under Mr. Stevens. So had a name had been given the isthmus in the past that extra inducements had to be made to attract workers, free quarters, pay from 30 per cent to 60 per cent higher than in the United States and a rate of \$20 from New York to Colon on steamers operated by the government, with other perquisites, being some of the advertised attractions. Besides, in the latter part of Mr. Stevens' regime, the United States was enjoying unexampled prosperity, the rainy days before the panic of 1907. Mechanics and all kinds of workers could obtain employment at home at high wages and

would not come to Panama unless for the unusual inducements enumerated, and, in addition, vacations with full pay, sick leave on pay and cheap food and other necessities.

Although the French had abandoned the idea of a sea level canal in favor of a lock type, there still was a good deal of life in the idea among the American people. For one thing, a sea level canal was so much more easily grasped by the popular mind, and then all engineers concede that it is the ideal canal where it is practicable. In Panama division of opinion arose over this point of practicability.

A sea level canal aptly has been described as "a wide and deep passage navigable at all times, day or night, at all seasons and in all weathers by all sorts and sizes of vessels." The lock type involves operations not readily portrayed to the lay mind, but eminently simple when seen in practical use.

The Walker commission of 1901 had estimated the cost of a sea level canal at \$145,000,000. The commission of 1905 recommended a sea level type to cost \$230,500,000. Mr. Wallace later estimated the cost at sea level at \$300,000,000, exclusive of the \$50,000,000 paid for the canal zone and French property.

That these American estimates should come in the main, under the amount actually spent by the French, who did more than scraped the surface, shows, for one thing, that the Americans believed there had been gross extravagance and inefficiency in the French operations and, for another thing, that the Americans had no adequate grasp upon the task they were undertaking. This same insufficiency of estimates continued until 1908, when Colonel Goethals faced the situation frankly and announced the cost for a lock type to be \$375,000,000, which was far ahead of the highest estimate for a sea level canal. In 1909 Colonel Goethals said a sea level canal would cost \$563,000,000 and take six years longer to build than a lock canal, which was before the slides in the Culebra cut became so formidable and a sea level canal had been shown thereby to be all but impossible.

President Roosevelt took a characteristic step to end the dispute. On June 24, 1905, a few days before the appointment of Mr. Stevens as chief engineer, he named an international board of advisory engineers to recommend a type of canal.

Out of this board five were foreigners and eight Americans. The board visited the isthmus in October, 1905, and reported to the president on Jan. 10, 1906. The majority, composed of eight engineers and comprising all of the foreigners, recommended a sea level canal. Messrs. Davis, Burr and Parsons were the three Americans who signed the majority report. The minority of five Americans recommended a lock type canal with a lake at eighty-five feet above sea level formed by a dam across the Chagres river at Gatun. They estimated the excavation at 108,705,000 cubic yards and the cost, exclusive of sanitation and civil government, at \$130,705,200. Nine years, or until 1915, was the time estimated for completing the canal. There were to be three locks in flight at Gatun, each 45 by 100 feet usable dimensions and on the Pacific side one lock at Pedro Miguel and two at La Boca, at the entrance, the distance between Pedro Miguel and La Boca, eight miles, to be a second artificial lake. The Culebra cut was to be 200 feet wide for five miles and 350 feet wide for four miles.

Chief Engineer Stevens and all but one member of the commission concurred in the minority report. Secretary Taft's visits to the isthmus had converted him to the lock type, and President Roosevelt consistently had avowed it.

The situation was one where the choice would be decided by the weight the president should throw to either report. To reject the majority report favoring a sea level canal and to advocate the minority report for a lock type canal was a responsibility of unusual magnitude for an executive who professed to have no technical engineering knowledge. Yet President Roosevelt made the momentous decision without hesitation, sending a strong message recommending the minority report.

Congress debated the issue until June 21, when the senate by the close vote of 35 to 31 decided for a lock type, and on June 28 the house concurred, the bill becoming law on June 29, 1906.

Two years and two months had passed from the time the Americans came to Panama in May, 1904, to July 1, 1906, before this decision was made, and at least the commission knew what plan of canal was to be followed. In September, 1906, Mr. Stevens started the excavations in the sites for the Gatun locks, the Pedro Miguel lock and the Gatun dam spillway. Surveys were begun for relocating the Panama railroad, which for a considerable distance would be swallowed up by the completed canal. The fifteen months

preparatory work was beginning to tell in the increased excavations in the Culebra cut, as the organization was getting its stride. Commissaries, which sold everything the canal employee needed, were in operation in the principal towns, the hotels for the bachelors were well organized, quarters had been erected until all were jostled, though at times rather crowded; machinery, supplies and equipment were on hand or ordered to the extent of 80 per cent of what would be needed to complete the canal, health conditions were admirable, and the whole situation was shaping for the real work of building the canal.

President Roosevelt paid the canal zone a visit in November, 1906. It was a trip of exploration for him, and the way he ignored the formal plans for his entertainment delighted the employees. Subordinate officials were rather anxious that he should inspect just the things they had spick and span for him to inspect, but from the time he landed at Colon he ate and nosed in and out of every part of the canal and led them a merry chase. The enthusiasm for the "daddy" of the project was boundless, and the shortcomings he noted resulted in better conditions of employment for the men.

One evidence of the growing luxury of living conditions in the canal zone was the installation on Jan. 1, 1907, of electric lights in the quarters of the married and bachelor employees at Empire and Culebra. Other towns soon were furnished with electricity. The first public school had been opened a year before this event, or on Jan. 2, 1906. The summer and fall of 1906 and the winter of 1907 saw another great controversy raging around the canal, which, like the battle of the levels, was to be decided arbitrarily by President Roosevelt.

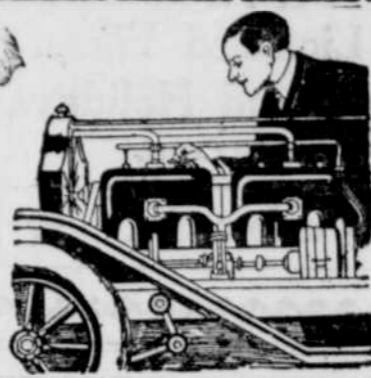
Chairman Shonts long had entertained the opinion that the canal should be constructed by private contractors. He pressed the plan so vigorously and the popular opinion of the inefficiency of the government was so strong that the president authorized Secretary Taft to ask for bids on Oct. 9, 1906.

Bids for constructing the canal by private contract were opened at Washington on Jan. 12, 1907, and selected

(Continued next week)

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