

land costs and unforeseen contingencies. This estimate, according to Sanderlin, "fell like a thunderbolt on the hopes of the canal supporters," who called for a second convention to discredit the report. One of the delegates to that convention was Philip E. Thomas, then president of the Merchants' Bank of Baltimore, who became convinced "of the absolute futility of the canal enterprise, especially as one affording any commercial relief to Baltimore."¹⁴ It was at this point that the attention of the legislature shifted to a new invention called the railroad.

According to John Latrobe, counsel to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company for sixty-four years, the first serious consideration of a railroad as an acceptable alternative to canals developed at a dinner in the fall of 1826 at the home of Col. John Eager Howard. Evan Thomas had recently returned from England, where he had inspected the Stockton and Darlington Railroad, and he described that enterprise to the group. Especially interested in the scheme was his brother Philip Thomas, who, according to Latrobe, "was associated with men who, like himself, were prosperous merchants and whose confidence in him was unbounded." Among his colleagues Philip Thomas touted the idea of drawing carriages upon iron rails, whether by steam or by the more reliable horse.¹⁵

On 2 February 1827 a meeting was held at the home of George Brown, a banker who had received from his brother in England a number of documents pertaining to the railroad between Liverpool and Manchester. The two Thomas brothers led a discussion of the advantages to Baltimore of a through trade route to the West. Another meeting was called for ten days hence, to which twenty-five of the city's leading merchants were invited. Included in the assemblage was William Patterson, a well-known merchant whose daughter had married Prince Jerome Bonaparte. After further discussion a committee was appointed to report on "the practicability of a railroad from Baltimore to the Ohio." The committee reported back a week later, recommending that immediate steps be taken to incorporate a railroad and build a line to the Ohio River.¹⁶

The group adopted the report and a resolution "that immediate application be made to the Legislature of Maryland for an act incorporating a joint stock company to be styled 'The Baltimore and Ohio Railway Company,' and clothing such company with all the powers necessary to the construction of a railroad, with two or more sets of rails, from the city of Baltimore to the Ohio River." The resolution further suggested that the capital of the company be \$5 million, with the states, the United States, corporations, and individuals able to subscribe.¹⁷

A committee was appointed to prepare a formal application to the General Assembly. Its members included Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Patterson, Alexander Brown, Philip Thomas, and others from the elite of Baltimore. Though not a member of the committee, the services of John V. L. McMahon, an attorney and delegate from Baltimore City, who also happened to be chairman of the House Committee on Internal Improvements, were acquired in drafting a charter for submission to the legislature. When the draft was presented to the group, one of the committee members, Robert Oliver, was said to remark, "You're asking for more than the Lord's Prayer," to which McMahon responded that "the more they asked for, the more they would get."¹⁸

14. Sanderlin, *Great National Project*, p. 55; Edward Hungerford, *The Story of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, 1827-1927* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 1:17.

15. Hungerford, *Story of the Baltimore & Ohio*, p. 18.

16. William Prescott Smith, *A History and Description of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, By a Citizen of Baltimore* (Baltimore: J. Murphy & Company, 1853), p. 10; Hungerford, *Story of the Baltimore & Ohio*, pp. 19-20.

17. Hungerford, *Story of the Baltimore & Ohio*, p. 25.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 29.