

# NEW YORK AT PANAMA

FRANK G. CARPENTER TALKS WITH MR. SHONTS ABOUT THE SITUATION.

(Special Correspondence of the Desert News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

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New York—It was in the new offices of the Panama Railroad company, in the great new white stone building looking out upon New York harbor at the foot of Broadway, that I talked with Mr. Theodore Shonts, the new head of Uncle Sam's biggest new project, the Panama canal.

I saw the new head, because, since Mr. Wallace left, there has been no question as to who is the manager of the canal scheme. Where Theodore Roosevelt sits, as we all know, is always the head of the table. That goes without saying. But even our mighty president cannot be in more than one place at a time, and Mr. Shonts, under him and Congress, is supreme. He has the direction and the control of the chief engineer, Mr. Stevens; he is the chief over the governor of the Ten-Mile Strip, Mr. Magoun; and he is the president and general manager of the Panama Railroad and Steamship company. Every man in the ten or twelve thousand who now make up the canal forces has his work and his responsibilities, but all are subordinate to Theodore P. Shonts, and to him the president looks for results. In other words, the canal work is at last under one head, and that head is Mr. Shonts.

## THE MAN AND HIS JOB.

Before I give you our interview I want to say a word about the man and his job. We all know something of the job. It is one of the biggest ever attempted by any nation. It is to gouge out the earth and rock through the lowest part of the backbone of the mighty mountain chain which runs through our hemisphere from the Klondike to the Straits of Magellan so that the leviathan vessels of our age may steam through from ocean to ocean. It is to move out of the way from thirty to one hundred million cubic yards of earth, to build mighty dams to hold back the floods of the Chagres, which rise at times almost 30 feet in a night; to turn the course of rivers, and in short, to take the goddess of nature by the throat and force her to do her work in new ways for the benefit of man. All this must be accomplished in a tropical climate, in an unhealthy country, with labor that in the past has proved itself among the poorest that the world has to offer. The job will, of course, be a costly one. It will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. It may be not more than two hundred millions; it may be three hundred, or it may be more. It is a job of time. Bureaucratic, in the experience of his French imagination, talks of five years. The former chief engineer thought it might be done in ten, and other eminent authorities put the time at from 12 to 20.

So much for the job!  
Now for the man!  
Is he big enough for the job? I will answer that by telling you who he is, how he looks, and what he has done. The only real answer can be his work, and it will take time for that. In the first place, Mr. Shonts impresses one by his plainness and his sturdy simplicity. He has no frills. He does not part his hair nor his name in the middle, and he does not wear patent leather shoes nor spats. He is a business man, dressed in business clothes, who talks business, and does business in a business way. He is a worker. He is the son of United Presbyterian parents, coming from the east into Puritan stock of northwestern Pennsylvania, and educated in the United Presbyterian College at Monmouth, Ill. There is no better stock and no better training to make men.

Mr. Shonts began life as a bank clerk in Iowa. He made a reputation as a bank accountant, and, working along business lines, rose to be a builder and manager of railroads. He has the reputation of being a good organizer and a successful handler of men, and that in the west, which, after all, is the best business working part of our country, and which today is producing the lead-

ers of all branches of business.

Another big element in the make-up of this man is his health. He is 41, judge, about 50, but his eye is that of a man 10 years younger. His cheeks are rosy with red blood. He eats well, digests well and is the personification of vigor and vitality. He stands over six feet in his stockings, a big man, with a big frame padded with lean, muscular flesh.

The Lord has given him the physique for the work, his life seems to have furnished the training, and President Roosevelt has picked him out as the man for the place. It is now up to him to make good.

## HIS FIRST REAL JOB.

In my talk with Mr. Shonts I referred to the magnitude and complexities of the canal work, saying:

"You have now had your hands on the machine for more than six months; you have been able to study the situation in its entirety. I want to know how you like the job?"

"I find it both interesting and absorbing," was the reply. "It is so absorbing that it takes all my time, all my energies—everything that is in me. Indeed, it seems to me the only real job I have ever undertaken. I did not realize how big it was until I attempted it; but with time and work it will be accomplished."

"How about the red tape and government methods, Mr. Shonts? Can any business man handle the canal after modern business methods with the government in charge?"

"We hope to do things after the best of modern business methods, and at the same time not act contrary to government regulations. There are some things that might perhaps be changed to the benefit of the work. One rule is that all accounts have to pass through the hands of the auditors of two or three of the government departments. In the great railroad business of the United States, a business which in the vast sums involved equals, if it does not surpass, that of the federal government, one auditor is sufficient for each road, and almost nothing is lost. It would seem that if the accounts pass through the auditing branch of one great government department that might be sufficient. The chief thing with us in the canal construction is results; we should like any changes that will facilitate our work, and enable us to do it more quickly and more cheaply with due regard to careful government inspection."

## SITUATION IN PANAMA.

"What is being done at Panama?" I asked.

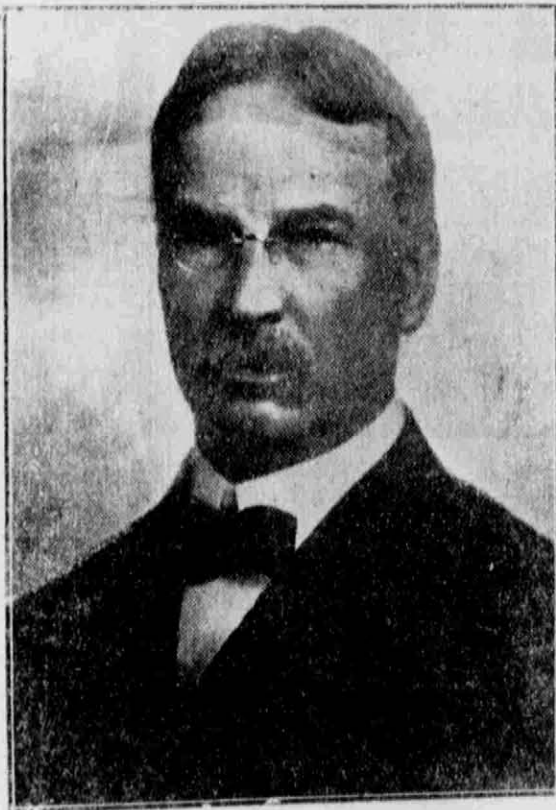
"We are doing everything we can to fit the isthmus for our working force. It is useless to try to push the canal excavation until we have food and houses for our workmen. We can only make haste slowly. The work we are now doing will hurry up the real work of the future."

"In the first place, we need yards for the Panama railroad and docks at which to land our supplies. We have hundreds of men at work constructing them. At Cristobal Colon we are building wharves and excavating so that we shall be able to load and unload a number of ships there at a time. This is also permanent work in the building of the canal. Instead of making a great breakwater from Colon to the mainland across the bay at a cost of millions we can build these wharves along the entrance to the canal. We shall have railroad tracks running beside them, so that the goods from the cars can be taken almost directly to the ships and vice versa. We are also improving the harbor at the Panama end of the canal, and are rapidly bringing in lumber for the new buildings."

## HOUSES FOR THE MEN.

"What are you doing in the way of providing homes for the workmen?"

"We have building going on everywhere throughout the zone," replied Mr. Shonts. "When we reached Panama we found the chief canal officers in the city of Panama, in unhealthy localities, and in most cases in buildings which were very unsanitary. We found no adequate quarters for the workmen along the canal route, and also that the



OUR NEW CANAL CHIEF IN 1905.

From a Copyrighted Photograph by Shonts Secured for the Desert News by Frank G. Carpenter.

American employees of Panama were living in the city. We decided to devote all our energies at the first to getting healthy working places. We are now building offices at Ancon, a hill which rises almost straight up from the sea, on the edge of Panama City, and we shall have the houses of the clerks there. It is one of the healthiest places on the isthmus, and far better than Panama proper.

"We are building hotels and lodging houses all along the canal strip. We are repairing the cottages and little houses which the French built, and putting up others. Many of these are for the common native laborers, who must be well housed if they are to do good work."

## IN PANAMA AND COLON.

"What are you doing in the cities?"

"We are cleaning up Panama and Colon and completing the sewers and waterworks. Panama has now plenty of water which comes from a dam far up in the mountains. The water is very pure and better than that of many of our cities. We shall also supply Colon with good water. The sewers are rapidly being put into Panama, and we shall soon have the streets paved. We shall lay the chief thoroughfares with brick, and we are now taking brick there in great quantities. We are cleaning the city. It has not been in a sanitary condition for ages; we are wiping out the cesspools and we hope to make it as healthy as any town of our size. Heretofore Col. Georges and the other officers have been devoting themselves to trying to prevent disease by wiping out the mosquitoes and isolating the yellow-fever patients. These methods are good, but we also believe in the old-fashioned theory that cleanliness is next to health as well as next to godliness. We are doing some thorough cleaning on that basis throughout the canal zone."

## THOSE FOOD CONTRACTS.

"How about the food for the men and those food contracts which involved millions of dollars, Mr. Shonts?" I asked.

"There has been a great misapprehension about those food contracts. It was necessary that the contracts be

The Canal Chief and His First Real Job—Red Tape and Government Methods—What Is Being Done—12,000 Men Now at Work—New Wharves And Buildings—Health Matters—Increased Wages and Chances For Young Men—Those Food Contracts—Experimental Work—The Future.

similar classes of labor in the United States. We pay stenographers and typewriters \$15, \$125 and even more per month. Mechanics get 50 per cent more than at home, and all labor is proportionately better paid. As to whether it pays a young man to go there, I should say it does. He gets better wages, and when we have our commissary arrangements in force he cannot help but save money. He can do so now. Indeed, I don't see how a young man can possibly spend more than \$35 or \$40 a month.

## HEALTH—PANAMA FOR YOUNG MEN.

"But, Mr. Shonts, do you think you can make the health conditions at Panama such that one would risk sending his son there? If you had a son who was an engineer, for instance, would you dare send him to Panama?"

"Panama is not a health resort," replied the chief of the canal zone. "I don't think it ever will rank as such. I do think, however, that it will soon be as healthy as many of the cities of the United States. I have no boys, but had I one who was an engineer I should not hesitate to let him go to Panama in the course of a year or so. As for myself, I expect to spend a good part of every year on the isthmus, and I shall be there during all times of the year."

## EXPERIMENTAL WORK.

"What are the engineers doing at Panama?"

"They are working away, testing the different parts of the canal route, making borings and other experimental investigations."

"Is there any excavating going on at Cristobal?"

"No; that has been stopped. There is no use of wasting work, time and money there until we have the machinery, tracks and other facilities needed for the work. It was a mistake to

use the little French and Belgian engines and the baby dump cars. Each of these cars holds only about five cubic yards of earth. Our new steam shovels each take up five cubic yards at one mouthful, and when they drop it into such a car they are likely to break it or spill it out. If, as is sometimes the case, the shovel takes up an eight or ten ton rock, it may crush the car. They are worthless for a job like this. Another thing, as it is, 22 such cars make a train load for one of those engines. When you have a train load you are only carrying away 110 cubic yards of earth, and as we have only one track, you can see how fast the work goes on. Indeed, I think it was a calamity that we got that lot of refuse stuff with our French bargain. Had we started free, we would have bought the best of modern machinery. We must have that now. The best is by far the cheapest."

"How much excavation has actually been done since we took hold?"

"About 1,000,000 cubic yards, I should say."

"How much will have to be done?"

"That depends upon whether we have a lock canal or a sea level canal. We may have as little as 30,000,000 cubic yards, and we may have more than 100,000,000. We cannot tell until we know just what kind of a canal is determined upon."

"What is your opinion, Mr. Shonts, should the canal be one of locks or at sea level?"

"I have no opinion to express. The president has called together the most eminent of the world's engineers to pass upon that question. They are now investigating the different problems. They will go to Panama, and in due time will report. If their conclusion should be a unanimous one, there will be little doubt that it will be followed. If it should not be unanimous, we shall have to consider it in the light of the demands of the work and the people and be governed by what seems best."

"How much money has already been spent on the canal?"

"Several million dollars. We had to leave at the time I took charge, and hope this may last us until the end of the year, when Congress will be again in session."

"Are you buying much new machinery?"

"Yes, we are getting ready for technical work just as fast as we can. We have ordered cars, engines and rails for the new Panama railway. We have about 11 steam shovels on the isthmus and 12 more under way. We are having excavating and hoisting machinery made and are making preparations to get under way at the earliest possible moment."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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