

Municipal Affairs in Alberta

S. B.

The following is a partial report from Deputy Minister John Perrie, of Saskatchewan's Growth in Municipal Affairs Last Year.

"The year ending December 31, 1914, was a year of development in municipal affairs throughout the province. The abnormal financial conditions brought about by the outbreak of the war and other economic conditions has, of course, interfered with progress to a certain extent in some municipalities, but on the whole they have come through the year very successfully. Unfortunately in portions of the southern part of the province there was almost a total crop failure and this has placed the municipalities affected in a rather difficult position. We trust, however, that the year 1915 will bring conditions which will relieve the situation.

The year 1914 was the second year since rural municipal organization was provided for, and the progress that has been made by the rural municipalities that carried on business during the year 1913 was very marked indeed. It is noted that our rural municipalities appreciate the self-governing powers of dealing with local matters, conferred upon them by their organization, and while it is a new system of organization, and many of the electors are not only strangers to each other, but strangers to the country and to our forms of government, the results have been very satisfactory. The work of taking over the financing of the school districts, dealing with questions relating to stock running at large, public health, and so on, have brought before them new and sometimes difficult problems, but the councils of the different municipalities are taking hold of them in a manner that will no doubt bring successful results.

During the year 1914, I visited a number of our rural municipalities and was much impressed with the earnest and businesslike manner in which the different councils were dealing with their work, and as long as they do this, and as long as the electors take an active and intelligent interest in the work of the municipality, there is bound to be a good condition of affairs. The great source of trouble in connection with any municipal form of government is the indifference of electors, and as indications point to the fact that in our rural municipalities at least, interest is being well sustained, we are justified in hoping and expecting a very successful future for these organizations, not only in the shape of improvements in roads and bridges but also in the shape of increased facilities for the proper care of public health and in the general safety and welfare of the people. It is very pleasant indeed to note in this connection that more and more attention is being given by local and general welfare of the people of the country. This is as it ought to be. Good roads and bridges are very necessary, but attention to these alone will never bring about the conditions we ought to have in our rural communities.

In the small local improvement districts conditions have been steadily improving, and while these organizations are limited in their scope and cannot deal with many questions of local interest, yet they have been producing better results than they formerly did and with close attention to the method of expenditure of their revenue in the improvement of roads and bridges, there is room for them to do a good deal of work in connection with the development of the province.

In our urban municipalities the abnormal conditions in the past year have been felt more severely than in our rural municipalities and, therefore, the financial condition which is always a big question in connection with these municipalities has been more difficult to deal with than at any time in their history. This state of affairs may be traced to two conditions, the unusual money stringency, and the rather too optimistic spirit that prevailed in some of these municipalities in past years, inducing them to incur very large liabilities. While the most of our urban municipalities will be able to weather the financial storm, it would appear advisable that some action be taken in the near future whereby more control will be exercised by some central authority, to prevent the incurring of a large indebtedness which will afterwards form too heavy a load for the municipality to carry. There is always a time in the life of any urban municipality when there is a very rapid growth, and the optimism which this brings leads to the belief that it will become one of the large centres of population. The tendency under these conditions is to mortgage the future

and to incur heavy indebtedness which may become too great a load for the future bona fide residents of the municipality to keep up since the expected growth is frequently not realized. The failure of the municipality to reach the size expected is not usually because of any unfavorable conditions in the locality but simply because the majority of our urban municipalities being located in what is strictly an agricultural country can never be large centres of population. This idea of future greatness is, I am sorry to say, too frequently fostered by irresponsible parties who have something to gain and nothing to lose by the municipality going into larger indebtedness than is warranted by actual conditions, and some measure of control whereby all requests for debenture indebtedness must be approved by some independent authority before such indebtedness can be incurred would, I think, be of great assistance to these municipalities and to the credit of the province as a whole.

WOMEN JUDGES.

Calgary, Alberta, has now two women judges. The first appointed was Mrs. R. R. Jamieson, widow of the late R. R. Jamieson, former Superintendent of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The second judge is Mrs. Langford, widow of the late Rev. Fred. Langford, and daughter of Dr. John Burwash of Victoria University. Calgary women are hoping soon to have a woman's court and women jurors.

UNION OF SASKATCHEWAN MUNICIPALITIES.

The tenth annual convention of the Union of Saskatchewan Municipalities was held recently at Humboldt, when the following officers were appointed: President, O. J. Godfrey, Indian Head; vice-president, J. E. Argue, Swift Current; and W. P. Real, honorary sec.-treasurer. A resolution was passed at the convention urging that legislation be made giving urban municipalities control over expenditures of school boards, and to insure this that the municipal councils have the appointment of the school boards. Next year the convention will meet in Swift Current.

TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN WESTERN MUNICIPALITIES.

A novel way to improve trade relations with the towns of the West has been adopted by the Board of Trade of the City of Regina. At intervals of a few months the Board of Trade organize special business mens excursions over the various railway lines leading from the city and the points along the line are advised in advance of the intention of the party to make a stop at their station. It is now proposed by the Board of Trade to run an excursion to Empress which will occupy several days.

STREET PAVING IN THE UNITED STATES.

"Street paving in American cities has not kept pace with the other departments of municipal public work. This is principally due to the fact that the theory and practice of paving city streets has not been developed along scientific lines, and this condition is in turn largely attributable to the fact that the work has not been sufficiently under control of competent engineers. The public does not understand or appreciate that street paving is a branch of municipal work requiring for its proper conduct the knowledge and experience of able engineers. The engineer has been ignored and unappreciated, and his function has been assumed by other civic authorities. The results, painfully obvious in most of our cities, are what might be expected. . .

"It may be confidently asserted that the first and most important step in any successful attempt at reform in American street paving practice must be the recognition that it is a branch of municipal work which requires the services of the high-class engineer, whose advice and authority must be accepted and allowed to control. With the first step taken, the others necessarily will follow automatically. . . ."—Mr. Samuel Whinery, consulting engineer, of New York.

MISNAMED.

"Sometimes," said Uncle Eben, "a man gits de reputation of bein' terrible industrious when he's only fidgety."