

Engineering Department

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Street Improvement.

The inaugural addresses of the various Mayors of towns and cities throughout the province, at the first session of the year, have proven of unusual interest, and outline, in a great many cases, vigorous policies of improvement. The installation and ownership of electric street lighting plants are among the most prominent matters for consideration, while waterworks and sewerage systems are dealt with in large numbers of instances. Almost universally, however, street improvement is commented upon, and always with a strong upward trend. The people of Ontario, in town and township alike, are a unit in their desire for better streets and roads. It is impossible to quote from the many addresses, but the two following references, one from Eastern, and the other from Western Ontario, indicate the feeling that universally exists.

Mayor Minnes, of Kingston, said :

"As regards our streets I feel sure the majority of citizens would like to see a commencement made in paving our business streets. It of course would have to be done under the local improvement plan, but I have made it a point to ascertain the views of many of our business men in connection with street paving and every one whom I have seen is in favor of it. Our city engineer submitted a report on the cost of same some two years ago, but nothing has yet been done. There is nothing tends so much to beautify our city and give it a business-like appearance as having paved streets more particularly in the business section, to start with. I trust the Board of Works will take the matter as one of chief importance in their deliberations and that progress will be made in this respect.

Mayor Keating, of St. Catharines referred to street improvement as follows :

"Perhaps the most important matter to be dealt with by this and succeeding councils, is the improvement of our roadways.

"It has been frequently said by persons driving in from the country, that they found the roads good outside but very bad in the city. And we are compelled to admit that during a considerable portion of the year, our streets are in a disgraceful condition. Some very good work has been done on some of the streets during the last three years, since the introduction of good roads machinery, but as the amount that can be spared each year for this purpose, from current revenue is very small, the improvements that can be made from this source must continue to be very limited.

"Besides the business and residential streets, there are about ten avenues leading into the city, which should be thor-

oughly drained and permanently macadamized.

"We have heretofore incurred heavy indebtedness for purposes which we have very little to show for now, and while I would hesitate to increase our bonded debt for other purposes, I am so convinced that good roads would contribute so largely to the prosperity of the city, that I think it would be wise to adopt some plan by which they could be secured more speedily, even at the cost of increased indebtedness. It would be a permanent investment and form an asset that would not vanish as some of our other assets have."

The Road Tax.

How often councils are heard to proclaim condemnation of the statute labor system, but refuse to make any attempt to have it reformed or removed. They satisfy themselves by denouncing the system as a farce and a humbug, but say we can do nothing because our people do not share in this belief, or are not educated to the importance of a change. Councillors who talk this way make a very poor governing body. They simply mark time, they are servants, not legislators.

The chief function of a municipal council is to administer the affairs of the municipality in the most judicious and economical manner, to see that the tax levied against the people is equitable, fully collected and honestly expended. It matters not whether this tax be one of money or labor.

The statute labor system imposes a tax in labor for a particular class of work, building and maintaining public roads. For every other public work and service a money tax is levied and every cent must be paid regardless of consequences. A council that would allow the citizens to pay this tax in such a manner and in such proportions as they saw fit could not stand. Why then should not the payment of the road tax be looked after with the same fidelity?

Many ratepayers, true to their best interests, faithful to their obligations, and loyal to their municipal institutions, do discharge this tax to its fullest measure. Others do it in a half spirited way, while often the great majority absolutely ignore it. That such weakness should exist is a reflection upon our municipal administration and cannot be considered creditable to our system of municipal government. The township council of to-day that is not considering methods of road reform is shirking its responsibility and neglecting the interests of its people.

The municipal councillors being representative of the best minds of the township

should know what methods are best suited to their requirements, and if these do not prevail then it should be their duty to see to it that the people are educated to their adoption.

The average farmer is a busy man at all seasons of the year, looking after his private affairs. While he is interested in public matters yet he gives them but little study. He leaves them to the men anxious for public distinction. He casts his vote for the men whom he thinks will best serve the interests of his township, who will do all the thinking, study, acting and planning so to provide the best and most economical management and produce the greatest returns for the limited expenditure.

Where a council is of the opinion that a change of system or management is advisable in the interests of the people, but do not care to act upon their own responsibility, it should call the people together in a public meeting, discuss the whole matter with them, point out the defects of the old plan and explain the merits of the new, and it will be upheld in making the change. There is nothing to be lost by taking the ratepayers into your confidence, they like to be consulted and it is only fair that they should be. If they are not then prepared to support your measure, they will praise you for your interest and thank you for your sincerity.

The work of roadmaking is the greatest public work now going on in the province, upon it the greatest expenditure is being made and from it the greatest benefits should flow. Why then should not much interest be created? Call public meetings, urge better methods, let us have better roads.

Commutation in Orillia Township.

A by-law for the commutation of statute labor was passed by the township council of Orillia in November last and submitted to the ratepayers for approval at the municipal election. The usual discussion was created and soon a strong opposition was offered. The council very wisely convened a number of meetings for a public discussion of the question. These meetings were largely attended and much interest was taken. A. W. Campbell, Provincial Road Commissioner, upon the invitation of the council, was present and every phase of the question was discussed and considered. Every feature of the new plan was explained and every objection fully considered in a fair and friendly manner with the result that the by-law was endorsed by a substantial majority. The new council are unanimously in accord with the change. They are anxious for the experiment, and will, no doubt, soon convince the people that they made no mistake by their vote.

Too much is usually expected the first year. The people must be reasonable and give the new method a fair and honest trial. Much of an improvement cannot at once be made on all the roads, as the