

The County System in Michigan.

Kalaska county is but an average of Michigan's municipalities in the natural condition of its country highways. A few localities being well supplied with good road material while in others it is entirely wanting. As a result the roads of the county are equally varied in their conditions.

For a number of years agitation of the question of better roads was persistently kept up by a few citizens who had some little knowledge of the benefits accruing from good roads. As a result of this agitation it was thought best by those who had it in charge to adopt the system known as the "county road system." The announcement of this decision and the circulation of the necessary petition brought out a storm of opposition very largely from the farming communities. It was urged that the present township system was good enough, that the proposed plan would be too expensive, that higher taxes would be impossible to bear, that the cities and towns would get all the benefits, that it created another county board to be supported out of the general taxes, and more than all else, the county system was new and untried, giving no experience and no precedent to follow. But after repeated trials the board of supervisors were induced to submit the question to the people. By the small majority of seven in the total vote of the county, the people adopted the system and later elected a board of road commissioners, thus setting in motion what has proved in this county after six years' experience, to be a very popular and efficient system of road improvement.

That our people are well satisfied is evident in their constantly increasing demands for improved highways. The only objection to the amount of taxes is that the law does not permit them to raise as much as is desirable for this particular purpose. This is not the opinion of a bare majority but almost a unanimous sentiment. Careful comparison of the county system with the present township system shows conclusively the superiority of the former for all the main arteries of travel. It gives uniform and permanent roads, with less grades, better drainage, at about the same cost and oftentimes less than a common road under the township system.

Now what is it that influences public opinion and has brought about so radical a change in so short a time as six years? I met a certain farmer on the road not long since and, stopping him, asked, "Mr. Jones, why was it you so bitterly opposed the adoption of the county system some years ago?" "Why, I did not know anything about it, and I thought some of you fellows had a scheme on to fleece us farmers with high taxes. I thought the safest way was to have nothing to do with it." Well, now, Mr. Jones, I wish you would be just as candid and tell me why

you changed your mind? "Simply because there was money in it?" For whom? "Farmer." How? "Why, since you fellows have built that road out my way, my farm is worth at least twenty-five per cent. more than it was before, besides in time, wear and tear, and horse-flesh, I am only half as far from the post office, market and grist mill. I used to think I'd rather live in town, the sand, mud and corduroy made me sick of the farm, but I've changed my mind; I wouldn't trade the old farm for the best house in town if I had to live in it.—*The Roadmaker.*"

Radial Railways.

The electric radial railway idea is each year growing in prominence throughout Ontario, and nearly every city, and a number of towns have schemes of greater or less magnitude before them. Electric railways are undoubtedly destined to play a most important part in the development of agricultural districts, with a consequent benefit to the larger centres of population. One of the most recent projects is that at present being urged by Ald. Lamb, of Toronto, who has addressed a circular letter to all the municipal councils within a radius of seventy-five miles of that city, and sent them maps of the proposed routes, calling their attention to the advisability of constructing a system of radial railway lines throughout Central Ontario, and asking them to give the matter their consideration. The proposition is that the towns and townships through which the lines will be constructed shall aid in constructing them, under the powers of the Electric Railway Act. They would not be called upon to contribute any money, but to guarantee the bonds, or subscribe for stock. The lines of railway shown in the map are only prospective, and have not been permanently decided on, so that changes may be made at any time in the future, and the railways carried through all such towns and townships as will assist in the undertaking.

It is the intention that there shall be six main routes, with branch lines, the standard railway gauge being adopted. This system is to be equipped with vestibule cars, at least 75 feet long, having a separate compartment for mail and another for parcels and baskets. There is also to be a smoking apartment. The passenger part is to be fitted up with the most comfortable cushioned seats. There will also be small and suitable freight cars provided, which will be found very convenient to shippers for farm produce, etc. It is proposed that at least 500 miles will be constructed within five years—100 miles per annum.

An Act of Incorporation is being prepared for a company—the Toronto and Central Ontario—with a capital of \$5,000,000, to construct and operate the system in conjunction with the different municipalities:

Suggested Legislation.

The Ontario Municipal Association, at its recent convention in London, made but comparatively few recommendations for legislative amendment which had direct bearing on the engineering department of municipal government. Clause 2 of the report of the legislative committee, as adopted, reads:

"In cities and towns not adopting the local improvement system under section 682 of the Assessment Act that notwithstanding any petition against the laying down of any sidewalk as local improvement, the council should have power to proceed with the work, if in the opinion of the city engineer and two-thirds of the whole council such work is desirable or necessary in the public interest, and to provide for the cost thereof by special assessment on the property benefited."

In view of section 677 of the Municipal Act, which gives councils of all cities and towns this power with respect to plank sidewalks, it is not fully apparent what object was entertained by the convention. It may have been intended that this power should be extended to permit concrete or other permanent material as well as plank.

Clause 16 of the report, "That the legislature be asked to define and limit the meaning of the term 'non-repair' of highways," will meet with pretty general commendation. The vagueness and uncertainty which has attended the word "non-repair" has been the cause of endless, costly and unsatisfactory litigation. While it is becoming more and more the conviction that unnecessary legislation and such as adds to the extent of verbiage surrounding our laws, should be avoided, yet this is an instance which certainly should justify a more extended definition. A strict and literal interpretation of the law as it now stands does not justify the existence of open drains at the roadside, and as these are a practical necessity in nearly all cases, in this respect particularly, there should be a prescribed standard, or standards adapted to varying conditions of traffic.

Port Arthur is this year laying granolithic sidewalks on their main street. If Port Arthur cannot afford to use plank for this work surely those places in older Ontario, out of the timber region, still clinging to the old practice, must be very extravagant.

Says the *Beeton World*:—There is no sense in the annual visits of Grand Juries to the House of Refuge, but they cost the ratepayers a goodly number of cents. The juries have a nice pleasant jaunt and no doubt are invigorated by the healthy atmosphere of this section, but they cannot accomplish any good for the county or the House of Refuge. The frequent inspection by the county councillors, the inspector and doctor should surely be sufficient to give the public all the information regarding the House of Refuge.