

WHAT IS BEING DONE FOR BETTER ROADS?

Much has been done and is being done to improve the condition of country roads in this Province. In 1796, when the first Parliament of Ontario (then Upper Canada) assembled at Niagara-on-the-Lake, among the first Acts was one establishing a system for opening and maintaining roads. From that day to the present, road-making has been one of the chief concerns of municipal government. Unfortunately, much of the effort and energy applied to the improvement of roads has not been systematically directed, so that the condition of the average country road is, by no means, what it should be. This is unfortunate in many ways. But the recent activity in regard to "the good roads movement" has accomplished much, and is most encouraging. A general reform of road-making methods is gradually being brought about, with a corresponding improvement in the condition of the roads.

In the past, road-making has been by many too lightly regarded. Its importance has not been seriously realized. Yet the result of a careful summing up of all facts pertaining to the problem leads to but one conclusion. The development of any, of every country, is absolutely impossible without good country roads.

Good or bad country roads are not merely a matter of convenience or inconvenience to the farmer and his family. They affect the annual income, and the value of the farm, many times what the cost of a good road would be. Millions of dollars have been spent upon railways and their equipment, canals, harbors, lake and ocean steamship lines, yet without common country roads all this vast expenditure would be futile. Every ton of freight has to be carried to or from the railway or steamer over the common roads. At a period of bad roads, railway and steamship traffic is reduced to a minimum, and the current of trade is much impeded. No public work would contribute more to the individual prosperity of citizens of every class than would the general improvement of country roads. While farmers would be most largely and most directly affected, all would feel the benefit. A country of good roads is invariably a country of good houses, good barns, and a contented and prosperous farming community.

The organization of the Ontario Good Roads Association in 1894 was the first step towards a campaign for road reform. It was felt by those interested in this Association that the existing systems of road maintenance, almost wholly dependent upon statute labor, had outlived their usefulness, and that the adoption of more modern and efficient methods should be urged. Delegates were selected to address Farmers' Institutes, Dairymen's, and other conventions held in the Province. In this way the subject was first brought before the public, and a more active interest aroused.

Two years later, in 1896, the Ontario Government created an office, that of the Provincial Highway Commissioner, for the purpose of further stimulating an interest in the improvement of country roads. By means of literature on the subject, township councillors and others having supervision of road-building throughout the Province, have been instructed as to the best means to adopt in obtaining economical and permanent results. Public meetings have been held in a large number of townships, addressed by the Commissioner of Highways, at which road-making in all its branches has been discussed. These meetings, with rare exceptions, have been largely attended, and a strong interest in road improvement has been aroused, which, directly and indirectly, is turned to practical account on the roads of the districts thus visited and in the system of road management. Throughout the Province there has been a

general improvement as regards methods of draining roads, grading them, applying gravel or stone, construction of culverts and bridges, and the road-making implements used.

By the end of 1902, about one hundred and twenty townships had abolished or commuted statute labor, and in its place (with more or less modification) had adopted systems whereby fewer and more permanently appointed road overseers take the place of the pathmasters of the statute labor system, and by which all work is paid for in a business-like way. Proper road-making machinery is being employed, definite methods of doing the work have been established, and altogether, new life has been infused into road improvement wherever the new plans have been adopted.

The Eastern Ontario Good Roads Association, formed in 1901, has been active in the eastern portion of the Province in advancing the cause of better roads, and has rendered exceedingly valuable service, the "good roads train," operated throughout the eastern counties in 1901-2, being the most noteworthy of its efforts.

The Western Ontario Good Roads Association, formed in 1902, on a basis similar to the Eastern Ontario Association, has held two very interesting conventions, while more active measures are in view.

As is to be expected, municipalities are everywhere, with the growing wealth and requirements of the country, making more generous appropriations to the work of road improvement. This is as it should be. The saving effected by good roads, the loss resulting from bad roads, are such as to satisfy every citizen who studies the question that the more permanent improvement of the roads cannot be too soon brought about in the interest of true economy. The cheapest in first cost is rarely the most economical after a term of years. Had the councillors of ten years ago expended money upon the roads with a view to the requirements of to-day, as well as their temporary needs, the good roads movement would not have so great a task before it. Councils of to-day should not forget that good roads will be needed ten years hence, and by working to this end, they will render a vastly greater service to the present interests as well.

Legislation with regard to roads has been progressive, but without incautious haste. Toll roads, the purchase of road machinery and the appropriation of a million dollars to aid highway improvement, have been the principal matters for governmental consideration. It has been urged by some that the Legislature might take action with regard to statute labor. On the other hand, it has been felt that the individual townships are so rapidly, of their own accord, making a change in this respect that further legislation in the matter is unnecessary. Every township has for many years had the power to do away with statute labor and to establish such a plan for road management as they may consider best suited to local requirements. The spirit of most municipal legislation has been permissive rather than compulsory, and it is doubtful if it would yet be in the best interests of road improvement to make any exception as regards statute labor in spite of its many unfair features. Instead, by carrying on a campaign of education, the people will better understand the reasons for a change, and will make it with a greater willingness to make the new methods a success. The best system that can be devised for making and repairing the roads may be injurious rather than beneficial if it is not intelligently and faithfully carried into effect. To ensure the success of new methods it is necessary that, at least, the interest and enthusiasm of a certain portion of the people be first aroused.

The by-law to grant \$10,000 for waterworks extension was carried at Lindsay.