

ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN ONTARIO*

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THE roads of Old or South Ontario have developed from bush trails and portages to the present state. Traffic was originally confined to the waterways and gradually trails were opened up over portages between navigable streams and lakes. Food and material used by the natives and early settlers were carried over these trails. Year by year the main trails were extended and improved and eventually resulted in some of our main through highways, such as Dundas Street from Toronto to Dundas which was in early days the head of navigation for southwestern Ontario; that the Dundas road was laid out before any surveys were made is evident from the wandering route that it takes. Other examples may be found in the famous Talbot Road from Niagara Falls to Windsor, Hurontario Street and the Toronto and Sydenham Road from Port Credit to Owen Sound, and the Kingston Road running east from Toronto through Kingston, Cornwall and Prescott to the Quebec boundary.

As traffic increased, the trails were gradually widened and horses and carts introduced to provide transportation for heavier loads. It was then rendered necessary to make passable roads through the soft places in swamps and low-lying lands, and an attempt was made to pave such places with logs. The logs were of variable size laid on an uneven bottom, and the result was a most uneven surface. Many miles of this type of road were afterwards built, known as corduroy.

Many of the main through roads of the province were surveyed in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Dundas Street, to which I have previously referred, was surveyed about the year 1792, but was not bridged and fully completed for traffic until after the war of 1812, although the work of construction had been commenced some years previous to this time. This road adjoining Toronto may be taken as a concrete example of the development of our main roads. As stated before, it was originally a bush trail, afterwards surveyed and opened up as a main highway. The surface was built of broken stone and gravel. For years this had been added to as occasion demanded. Some years ago, to meet the increased traffic, a portion was resurfaced with waterbound macadam and a few years later the traffic became so intense it was necessary to apply a bituminous coating. A further increase in the volume of traffic has rendered that form of surface inadequate and last year a bituminous surface, known as asphaltic concrete, similar to that used on some of the well-known streets of Toronto, was constructed.

The first highway legislation of Upper Canada, enacted in 1793, authorized justices of the peace to be highway commissioners with overseers elected at parish meetings, who were under orders from the commissioners to repair roads, bridges and streets. It was also their duty to see that landowners fulfilled what had been known in England as "statute duty." This was the beginning of what is generally known as "statute labor," and under this system the most of the roads providing transportation for the early settlers were built and maintained. The statute labor law provided a means of opening up the original roads of this country when money was scarce and settlers few and far between, and although it was not without its limitations it solved most of the problems of land transportation for the greater part of last century. But the

road laws that were suitable and worked out more or less satisfactorily in the province of Upper Canada in the nineteenth century are not suitable for the twentieth century conditions now surrounding transportation in the province of Ontario. The statute labor system has outgrown its usefulness. Township councils have been slow to acknowledge the disadvantages of this system for present-day road building and still cling to it at the sacrifice of good roads and economy, but many townships now appreciate the advantages of the later systems and as a consequence statute labor has been abolished in seventy-five of the most prosperous townships in the province. In thirty-five of these, road overseers have been appointed to take charge of the roads, as provided by the Ontario Highways Act, and 25 per cent. of the salaries of such overseers is paid by the government.

The old system in vogue had not been able to keep pace with the need for well-built post roads and about the year 1830, to meet this problem, toll companies were formed to finance this work. Thus the day of the toll-bridge and toll-road were ushered in. During the next twenty-five years many toll-bridges and toll-roads were built. The toll companies, whose duty it was to maintain the roads, were more inclined to pay dividends than to spend the money in making necessary repairs. Nothing was laid out on the roads that could be avoided; they were allowed to become in a deplorable state and were described as being an imposition upon the people and a great nuisance.

In 1874, county councils were authorized to take over township roads with exclusive jurisdiction over the same. Municipal councils could take toll to defray the expense of building or repairing plank, macadam or gravel roads. In 1889, an act was passed to facilitate the purchase of toll roads by municipalities. On roads so purchased all tolls were abolished and the roads maintained by the country. But until the Highway Improvement Act was passed in 1901 there had been no satisfactory solution of the toll-road question, a number of these roads were still in the hands of private companies, but have since been embodied in the county road systems assumed under the act.

The Highway Improvement Act was enacted after an agitation for improved roads carried on by the Good Roads Association.

The control of roads by the townships alone has not been satisfactory in building up an adequate system of public highways and there was for years a spirit of unrest in connection with the administration of the Statute Labor Law. A general agitation was commenced in favor of counties assuming the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of main market roads and for larger expenditures for highway improvement. This resulted in the organization of the Ontario Good Roads Association in 1894. A campaign of education was inaugurated. Farmers' Institute speakers were designated to introduce the question, and public meetings were held in different parts of the province. So numerous were the demands on the resources of the association that the government at its request in 1896, appointed a provincial instructor in road-making. This was the origin of the present Department of Public Highways in Ontario. As first created, it was a branch of the Department of Agriculture. In 1910 it had a staff of only three; since that year the growth has been more rapid, and in 1916 it was converted into a separate department under W. A. McLean, C.E., deputy minister, and has now a staff of about fifty employees.

The administration of the department covers provincial highways, county road subsidies, township road superin-

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