

# Engineering Department

A. W. CAMPBELL, O. L. S., C. E., M. C. S. C. E.

## STATUTE LABOR

The system of statute labor was established in this Province more than a century ago under the regime of General Simcoe, the first Lieut.-Governor of the newly formed Province of Upper Canada. The population was then very scattered, about 70,000 in all, while Toronto was merely an Indian camping ground. Statute labor was in keeping with pioneer life, when the need for roads was urgently felt, when the work consisted of cutting down trees, clearing the road allowance of logs and stumps, corduroying swamps, and throwing up a dirt grade.

To-day circumstances are very different. The pioneer work has been done on the roads as well as on the farm. On the latter we have dispensed with the cradle and the flail, and are using self-binders, steam threshers, and many other efficient farming implements. For road-work, machinery has been provided—graders, stone-crushers, steam rollers—all a means of economy, just as much as modern farm machinery. It should not be difficult for the people of this agricultural Province, progressive in all that pertains to farming, to understand that improved methods are needed for road-making, and that a system in keeping with these methods should be adopted.

### Responsibility is Divided.

Under the statute labor system responsibility for all work is not centered in one man. No one officer can be held responsible for the condition of the roads, nor for the expenditure of money and labor upon them. Responsibility is first distributed among the members of the council, and by them among fifty or one hundred pathmasters. When work is improperly done, or money misspent, there is no one whom the ratepayers can call to account with any degree of effect.

### Does Not Meet Present Conditions.

The payment of a road tax in labor is too vague and clumsy to meet present conditions. The need of roads is not so keenly felt as in the time of early settlement, and there is not the same incentive for hard and careful work. Men work on the roads very much as they work on their farms. Some are shiftless, some lazy, some stupid, some careless, and so the list might be carried on. Each works, plans the work, or oversees it according to his own ideas. The statute labor system in this respect is not so much a system as an entire absence of system.

There is not, to-day, a united effort put forth by all to do good work on the roads, as was done under pioneer conditions. Even if there were, it would not be efficient in the operation and management of machinery, and in laying the quality of roadbed demanded by those who use the roads.

### Money Appropriations Are Not Economically Expended.

Township roads are not kept up by statute labor alone. The ratepayers of many townships who know only of the grants for small repairs, scattered here and there over the townships, do not realize how much money is, in the aggregate, spent on their roads in the course of a year. The amount is in no sense objectionable, and if the money were applied to the best advantage there are few townships which could not spend even more than they are now doing on road improvement.

The difficulty arises from the fact that this money is spent on the statute labor basis. The making of money appropriations was commenced many years ago with a view to supplementing statute labor. They were then very small amounts, but with the growth of the Province this practice has increased, until in many instances the total money appropriation exceeds the statute labor for the year valued at one dollar a day. Thus the money spent has constantly increased until it is of greater consequence than the statute labor, but the latter is permitted to govern the expenditure of the former. It is a case of the tail wagging the dog.

### Repairs Are Not Made When Needed.

Under statute labor, work is done at one time of the year only, and for the remainder of the year the roads are neglected, and repairs are not made when first needed. In the maintenance of a road there is nothing more economical or more satisfactory to the users of the road than to have repairs made as soon as signs of wear appear. When roads are kept in a smooth condition they are pleasant to drive on, and in a term of years cost much less than a road that is allowed to get rough. A rough road wears out much more quickly than a smooth road does. It is the hammering and pounding of a wheel on a rough road that does most damage—not the even roll of a wheel on a smooth road. When a depression starts on the surface of a road, the hammering of wheels as they drop into it very quickly creates a deep rut. Statute labor does not provide for the constant maintenance of a road.

### Improvements Are Not Made Systematically.

Road improvements, under the statute labor system, are not carried out systematically from year to year. Instead, it is understood that the pathmaster for the year will do such work as he desires in front of his own farm. No matter how urgently grading or ditching may be needed, if it is more convenient for the farmer to haul gravel he does so, or vice versa. The wishes of the man who is to do the work, not the work itself, are the first consideration. While one road section may be good, and statute labor properly performed, there are other sections in the township where work is only half done. It is almost useless for one section to keep up its roads when those who do the work on them are certain to drop off at the end of them into bog holes and impassable mires of the surrounding sections. The work of one year can have no connection with that of the following year, in carrying out a well-defined plan. The work of one pathmaster may even be rendered useless by the work of a new pathmaster the following year, while there is no unison between one road-beat and those adjoining it.

### Statute Labor is Not Equitable.

The difficulty of maintaining a road may increase or diminish half a dozen times in crossing a township, according as the soil is clay, loam, sandy, gravelly, dry or swampy, yet there is not, under statute labor, a proper means of equalizing the work of keeping up the roads, and it is therefore inevitable that a road cannot be kept in a uniformly good condition. This is unfair to many of the users of the roads, as well as to those who are required to build and keep in repair the difficult sections.