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HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT IN ONTARIO*

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Road Construction not simply a side line of Farming. The success of a system of road making depends largely upon the selection of a competent Road Commissioner.

There is no public work of greater importance, than the improvement of the rural roads. The question is one which may, for convenience, be considered under two divisions, although they are of equal importance, and closely interwoven. These are: (1.) The administration or management; and, (2.) The work of practical road construction.

ADMINISTRATION

Whatever may have been accomplished heretofore, in the work of road construction, it has become apparent that past methods of road supervision and management, are out of harmony with present requirements. Statute labor has undoubtedly done a great deal for the roads of this Province, but close observers affirm that at the present time little progress is being made; that, in some cases, the roads are becoming worse rather than better; that the qualities which in earlier years made statute labor so useful on the roads, are not in keeping with the present attitude of the ratepayers, nor are they adapted to the work now required on the roads.

Here and there throughout the Province, (and the number is constantly increasing), townships have done away with statute labor. It is found, wherever a proper system is energetically established in its place that much better results are produced by so doing. Some townships claim better results by commuting their statute labor at so low a rate as twenty-five and thirty-five cents a day. The main feature, however, is not the abolition or commutation of statute labor, but the system that is established in its place. Not only must the system itself be thoroughly efficient and practical, but it must be carried out with energy and good judgment. No system, however thorough, can be of use if left to itself. The future of road improvement does not resolve itself into a simple question of doing away with statute labor, so much as in establishing a proper system in its place, and the active working

out of this system by the men upon whom its administration falls.

A TOWNSHIP ROAD COMMISSIONER The central feature of every system for the management of road construction, is the appointing of a thoroughly efficient road commissioner, to act for the entire township. A feeling has grown up, during the past years, that road construction is simply a side line of farming, and that every farmer is able to direct the work of roadmaking. When any municipality, township, county, or town, attempts to establish



THE IDEAL IN MODERN ROAD-MAKING

It is a big mistake for councillors to spend the funds of the township upon patchwork. Some repairs are necessary of course, but the main efforts of the council should be directed towards building permanent stretches of road like this, which will prove a source of endless satisfaction.

an efficient system of roadmaking, and comes to the point of selecting a competent commissioner, they are apt to realize the mistake of this old belief. Upon the selection of a competent road commissioner, the success or failure of the new system will depend.

A municipality is fortunate if it is able to select from among the ratepayers, one man who is thoroughly equipped in all that makes to success. He must be a practical man, with an understanding of machinery, and the best principles of roadmaking. He must know how to manage men, and how to plan and carry out the work in an orderly and systematic manner. In other words, he must have the ability, at least, of a contractor's foreman, and contractors realize how difficult it is to find such a man. When a capable superintendent has been found,

the next important principle is to keep him in office as long as circumstances will permit, in order that he may be able to give the municipality the benefit of his experience, growing from year to year, both in the general principles of road making, and of local conditions. An experienced man can rarely be obtained at first, therefore too much should not be expected of a commissioner for the first year. Experience is expensive, but the municipality has been paying for it, at an extravagant rate, for many years, and the sooner they commence to train one man instead of half the ratepayers of the township, they will be decidedly better off.

ROAD COMMISSIONER'S DUTIES

It is not intended by this that the road commissioner should have the expending of all funds. He is simply the manager, acting for the council. He receives directions from, and reports to, the council in all his work. He is not an added expense, but takes the place largely of the councillors in a great proportion of the work for which they have been paid commissions. He also takes the place of the pathmasters, who have been so largely employed at the expense of the township.

While he is responsible to the council, all others employed on the road should be responsible to him. In him should be placed the sole authority for employing and discharging men, and teams. He should lay out all work undertaken, and on any works that he himself cannot remain, should place a foreman. He should act as inspector for the municipality on all contract work. For the opening of snow roads, and for the purpose of

acting promptly in cases of emergency, he should appoint foremen or overseers for each five miles or so of road throughout the township.

These are the germs of an efficient system. These are the principles that are followed in every other undertaking of a business nature. The township council takes the place of a board of directors in a joint stock company. The road commissioner is the manager acting for them carrying out their instructions, which may be general or detailed, as the circumstances require.

The necessity for a good manager and careful system of supervision, arises from the fact that the cost of roads is made up chiefly by the cost of labor, including teaming. Very little is expended on material alone. Grading and draining are almost wholly a matter of labor. Gravel pits cost very little; but teaming gravel, handling it

* The second part of this article dealing with the subject of Practical Road Construction will appear in our next issue.