

## MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

### THE STATUTE LABOR SYSTEM.

Mr. A. W. Campbell, Instructor in road-making for Ontario, in presenting a report on the streets of the County of Oxford, referred at some length to the statute labor system. His remarks, which we give in part below, may prove interesting to municipal clerks:

#### LABOR AND ROAD EXPENDITURE.

The roads of your township are built and maintained under the statute labor system, supplemented by grants from the municipal funds. The statute labor system has some commendable features. Under it good work can be done, and has been done, at less cost to the tax-payer than could perhaps have been obtained otherwise. It is, however, peculiarly subject to neglect and evasion, and this has been taken advantage of to such an extent that the roads of your district have suffered in consequence. The manner in which road work is slighted is too well known to need description. The waggons, horses and implements often brought out for use on the road make up an assortment that would disgust any intelligent farmer if he had to pay for them by the day at  $\frac{1}{4}$  rates for work on his farm. The work is too frequently done in a spiritless way, and a great part of the time is spent in talk. Some townships in various parts of the province commute the statute labor at such a reduced rate as is practically an acknowledgment that statute labor has been shamefully neglected and thus brought into disrepute. The experience of one municipality is that, commuting at 35 cents per day, better results are obtained. That such could be the case is certainly a reflection on any municipality, and rather than commute at so low, or even at a reduced rate, it is worth a struggle on the part of a township to make each day of statute labor worth one dollar in actual results on the roads. Were the statute labor system economically administered, it would take only a short time to work a complete transformation in the condition of your roads. The true spirit in which statute labor should be performed was exhibited in the work of the pioneers in road-making. In their day, population was sparse and the road allowance had to be cleared of forest. Stumps had to be grubbed, bogs burned, and the roadway had to be graded; swamps had to be corduroyed, and streams bridged. Drainage was exceedingly difficult, and there was no municipal fund from which to draw for mending a culvert or filling in ruts. Labor was then concentrated, and good, honest labor was given. Now, however, with the increase in population and wealth, roadwork is scattered in patchwork, and is done in a half-hearted way. Statute labor is performed at a period of

the year when the time of every farmer is of great value to him on his own farm. If the work of improving the roads is neglected, and a portion of the time spent in statute labor is wasted, it must be apparent to every citizen of the province that there is a tremendous amount of energy lost to the country. We are obtaining our roads at an enormous expense, and if they are still to be bad roads, the expense is many times increased indirectly. Sufficient money is now being expended in your townships for material, if it were carefully prepared and skilfully applied.

#### NUMBER OF PATHMASTERS.

In order to bring the roads to a proper condition, the operation of the statute labor system in your municipalities must be placed on a more systematic basis. One of the first steps would be to reduce the number of pathmasters. In each of your townships there are about 100 pathmasters, and, in consequence, as many different ideas of road building. The result as shown on the ground is that one pathmaster has considered 16 feet sufficient width of roadway; another 18; another 20; and so on up to 40 feet; one thinks a roadway should be flat; another that it should be rounded up a few inches; another a few feet. Instances of these different opinions might be multiplied to almost any extent. Certainly all cannot be right. And this points to the fact that the control of the roads should be concentrated in fewer pathmasters under one central head. One man should have general oversight of the pathmasters and all work and expenditure on roads and bridges; and he should be required to report to the council at each meeting. He should have charge of all township machinery and materials. He should be a man specially adapted to the work, and his tenure of office should be as secure as that of the clerk or treasurer.

Besides being encumbered by the number of pathmasters, none of whom have sufficient means at their disposal to do permanent work, each pathmaster is surrounded by a few neighbors, and rather than incur disfavor by insisting on a fair day's work, frequently invites popularity by allowing or even encouraging neglect of work. Were the beats enlarged, every pathmaster would become more independent, and would have a sufficient number of days of labor under his control to undertake durable and complete work. But with their limited knowledge and experience in roadmaking, it cannot be in the interest of the townships for each pathmaster to be given the power to carry out his own ideas and experience on the road.

Pathmasters should be chosen from among the most respected, intelligent men of the community, and they should be kept in office. Even then, their individual opinions and plans should be subject to revision by the council, which body should exercise a direct oversight of the roads and their improvement by statute labor.

That there are men who would fill the office of pathmaster in a creditable manner is apparent from the fact that in driving over your roads, there were several sections which have been well done, and good pieces of road constructed by statute labor alone. That many are poor pathmasters is indicated by other sections, which show no evidence of results except those produced by the expenditure of municipal taxes, contributed very largely by those who had worked with a will in performing their own statute labor on other beats.

When men of suitable ability, knowledge and experience have been once obtained, they should be retained in office. By the present system of annual rotation, as soon as the pathmaster has learned something in his year of apprenticeship, his experience is lost and another is appointed, who begins in his term to take lessons in road-making, at the expense of their condition. In other occupations an apprenticeship of some years is necessary before a person is qualified to practice, but a pathmaster the moment he is chosen is thought fit to direct a work requiring much science at the expense of the townships' capital of time, labor and money. Men are taken from the occupation in which they are skilled, and transferred to one of which they know nothing. An honest man knows this, and immediately strives, from his personal experience, from the advice of others trained by practice and instruction, from experts, and from every available source, to properly qualify himself. In this way and with continued experience he can become a most valuable officer. Such a man realizes the responsibility of his position and the duty he owes his fellow citizens whose property is placed in his charge, the expenditure of whose money he directs, and whose interests he is expected to advance. He commands the respect of those who have to serve under him, his order is obeyed, public interest is created and maintained, and the question of making good roads is rendered simple, requiring but a small outlay of money.

Some men look upon their appointment as an acknowledgement by the council and community of their special skill as road-makers. The solicitations or acceptance of any advice from experienced men would be looked upon as confession of unfitness, and certainly any suggestion to accept instructions from an expert would be regarded with contempt. The competent pathmaster, as well as the competent business man, is he who eagerly seeks from every source the fullest possible information pertaining to his special line, believing that his knowledge never can be too perfect.

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