

## PREPARING FOR OTTAWA CONFERENCE

**T**HIRTY representatives of Toronto firms associated with building industries attended an open meeting on Wednesday, November 6th, in the rooms of the Builders' Exchange in order to promote interest in the conference of Canadian building industries that will be held November 26th to 28th, in Ottawa. Among the organizations represented were the Toronto Builders' Supply Association, the Sanitary and Heating Engineers' Association, the Toronto Builders' Exchange and the Master Painters' Association. The meeting was called to order by W. E. Dillon of W. E. Dillon & Co., Ltd., who explained that the idea of holding a conference had originated with the president of the Montreal Builders' Exchange. He requested Mr. Maxwell, the president of the Sanitary and Heating Engineers' Association, to take the chair.

### Want All to Attend

Mr. Maxwell called upon Arthur H. Dancy, of H. N. Dancy & Son, Ltd., to report what had transpired at the preliminary meetings held September 4th in Toronto and October 7th in Ottawa. Mr. Dancy also read the proposed list of subjects to be discussed at the conference (see *The Canadian Engineer*, page 219, September 5th issue) and the tentative program (see *The Canadian Engineer*, page 390, October 31st issue).

H. Elgie discussed the prospects of contracting as a business in Canada, and urged that as many as possible should attend the Ottawa conference. W. E. Dillon strongly urged co-operative effort by all the different trades and their branches. R. L. McIntyre, of McGregor & McIntyre, Ltd., approved of the new organization, and agreed with Mr. Dillon that more co-operation in the building industry is urgently needed. The president of the Master Painters' Association spoke on behalf of that association and pledged its support of the conference.

### To Improve Contractors' Status

The problem of raising Toronto's share of the required money for organizing the conference was raised by Mr. Thomson, of Thomson Bros., and it was decided to solicit private subscriptions from the various interested firms.

When a suggestion was made that delegates to the conference be selected, it was pointed out that the object of the conference is to improve the status of all contractors in Canada, and that everyone who is interested in that object will be welcome at the conference.

### General Committee

Following are the members of the general committee in charge of arrangements for the Ottawa conference:—

J. Penrose Anglin, Montreal (chairman); David K. Trotter, Montreal (secretary); G. A. Crain, Ottawa (Treasurer); W. E. Ramsay, Montreal; J. D. Johnson, Montreal; W. E. Dillon, Toronto; H. Elgie, Toronto; J. Davidson, Toronto; W. A. Mattice, Ottawa; T. D. McFarlane, Ottawa; Harry Hayman, London; H. Hazelton, Winnipeg; T. Hooper, Winnipeg; E. A. Sanders, Halifax; A. H. Dancy, Toronto; J. E. Stocker, Toronto.

The Dominion Bridge Co., Ltd., Montreal, has received an order for two 5-motor, 40-ton-capacity, 60-foot-span electric travelling cranes from the British America Nickel Corporation, Ltd., of Sudbury, Ont.

## ESTIMATING SEWER SYSTEM COSTS\*

By Stanley D. Moore

**B**EING connected with the contracting business, largely in a financial way and not being an engineer, I have been able to observe the operation of the construction of municipal improvements from a semi-detached point of view. It has often occurred to me that there has been a deplorable lack of co-operation between all of the elements entering into the execution of a successful engineering project.

A sewer system successfully constructed, might be described as one that properly meets the present and immediate future needs of the community, conceived and designed by an engineer who is competent and whose remuneration is commensurate with the service he should render; built by a competent and responsible contractor, under a contract that is fair to all concerned, and at a price that makes it possible to carry out the intent and spirit of the undertaking without friction or litigation. Many projects will not come under such a classification. The fault is not all with the contractors, nor all with the engineers, or the communities, but each contributes a share.

### Co-operation Needed

Trouble could largely be avoided if each of the elements mentioned could recognize that their interests are mutual, and if the work was undertaken in a spirit of co-operation instead of the too often prevailing attitude of antagonism.

There has been too much secrecy on the part of contractors, lack of frankness and a failure to give real information; too much suspicion on the part of communities, and a regrettable lack of consideration of the rights of the contractors by both engineers and communities. There has been too much guessing as to cost on the part of both contractors and engineers. It has been customary among engineers to figure costs of labor and material, taken from actual observation, plus ten per cent. as a basis of estimates. Contractors being a little closer to conditions have been adding 15 to 20 per cent. to such costs. Hence the usual discrepancy between the engineer's estimate and the bids received. I say usual, because for the present I wish to ignore the ridiculous bids of irresponsible and uninformed contractors, and the misguided efforts of responsible men who feel it their duty to meet such competition. Responsible engineers should not allow contracts to be let below their estimate. They should be broad gauged enough to know the fallacy of attempting to get something for nothing and should protect the community from inevitable trouble.

### Overhead Is Very Deceptive

Recently the Federal Trade Commission conducted an exhaustive study of corporations in the United States and made the astounding discovery that less than five per cent. of them were profitable. A similar study of the business of engineering and contracting would show that less than one per cent. of those engaged are successful, or even solvent, and the answer to all this is "Overhead."

Overhead is very deceptive, because in this age of quantity production we have kept our eyes only on the lessened cost of the actual operation, and have forgotten that much of this saving is eaten up in overhead charges

\*Paper before Iowa Engineering Society.