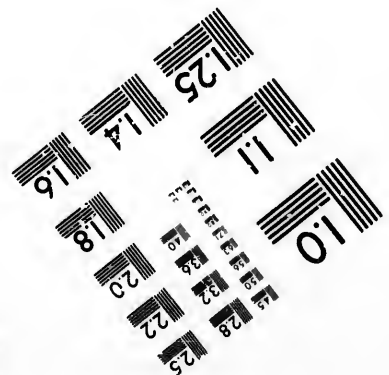
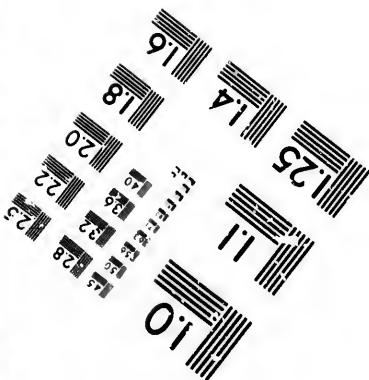
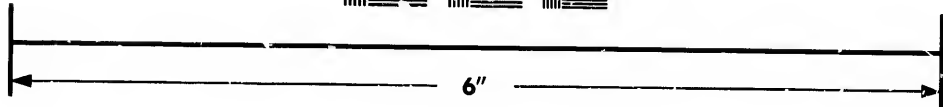
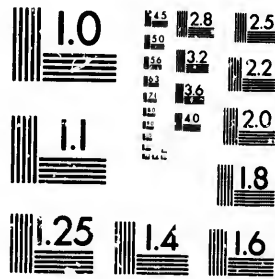


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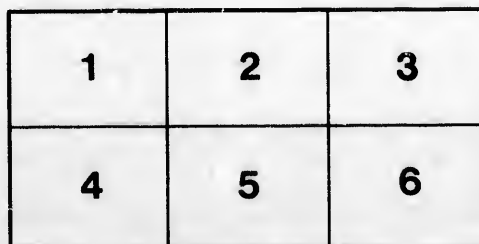
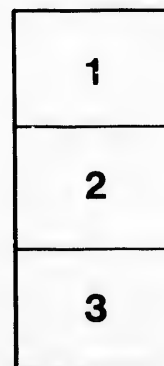
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Jonas Howe Pamphlet

PUBLIC ROADS

IN

NOVA SCOTIA

ON WHAT SYSTEM CAN THEIR

CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

BE BEST PROVIDED FOR IN

THE PUBLIC INTEREST?

"DELEND A EST CARTHAGO."

PRESS OF THE "ST. JOHN GLOBE."
1877.

PRESS OF
THE "GLOBE,"
ST. JOHN, N. B.

TO
COLONEL J. WIMBURN LAURIE,
WHOSE INTEREST IN THE EDUCATIONAL AFFAIRS OF THIS PROVINCE AND DESIRE TO PROMOTE THE PUBLIC WELFARE
ARE ALIKE MANIFESTED
IN OFFERING THIS PRIZE FROM YEAR TO YEAR
TO DALHOUSIE COLLEGE,
AND IN THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECTS CHOSEN BY HIM FOR
COMPETITION,
THIS ESSAY
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY AND HUMBLY INSCRIBED
BY THE WRITER.

N O T E .

It will be seen by the perusal of the following essay that we have merely *sketched out* the system which appears to us the most suitable for the "CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ROADS IN NOVA SCOTIA." Our aim has been to construct the skeleton—not to show the body perfect in all its parts; to erect the timbers and framework—rather than to complete the mansion. This we leave for those who have at their command more time, space, and ability.

January 1st, 1877.

PUBLIC ROADS IN NOVA SCOTIA:

ON WHAT SYSTEM CAN THEIR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE BE BEST PROVIDED FOR IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST?

WHEN agitating any moral reform—for example, temperance—there is no time that the orator pleads so eloquently or successfully as when the news of some poor brother having fallen a victim to the destroyer is fresh in the minds of the community. So, now, while the public mind is somewhat agitated about reform in a most important department of our political machinery, would we desire still further to agitate and expose, until agitation and exposure shall result in reformation.

In recommending a system for the expenditure of road monies, we would not for a moment have the audacity to suppose that we could frame one free from imperfections; but we entertain a feeble hope that from our discussion some ideas may arise suggestive of a better system than that which now exists.

That reform is necessary needs no demonstration. The people feel it, and the government acknowledge it, as was clearly shown from the opinions elicited while discussing a highway bill introduced into the House last session ('77).

The question which now claims our attention is one of paramount importance. It concerns not merely the welfare of a few individuals, but directly affects the personal comfort and interests of 390,000 people. This is evident, first—from the fact that all are accommodated more or less by the public roads; secondly—because all contribute to their support.

Our problem is not how can the *cheapest* roads be built and provided for, nor yet how can we secure the *best* roads.

Either of these could with little difficulty be provided for, but the problem that we have to solve is "How can we secure the best roads with a limited treasury?" or, "Upon what system can the construction and maintenance of public roads in Nova Scotia be best provided for in *the public interest?*"

In discussing this subject, one or two things are to be taken into consideration. We must be conditioned by the fact that Nova Scotia is a new country. Our population is scattered, and the majority of the people are in very moderate circumstances. Our expenditure must be limited by the revenue. A system which would work well in an old country like Great Britain would be a total failure here. The consideration of this question now is very timely, inasmuch as the system which now exists—if indeed it can be called a system—is faulty in almost every particular. Indeed, in this centennial year of America it is disgraceful that a province claiming so much intelligence as Nova Scotia should tolerate such a system. It should now, at least, be shelved, and preserved in the Museum to be exhibited at the next centennial as a public monstrosity. In our treatment of the subject we shall, for purposes of argument and comparison, notice the weak points in the existing system, and endeavor to recommend a better one.

We may now briefly sketch the system which we propose as most suitable to meet the requirements of Nova Scotia. We will then to the best of our ability show wherein this system, when adopted, is in every respect superior to that which now exists, and well calculated to meet the great end in view; viz., to secure the best possible roads with a limited expenditure.

I. That the whole province be divided into sections or districts similar to or the same as those now existing, and known as *polling districts*.

II. That the maintenance of the public road or roads in said districts be sold by tender to the lowest contractors.

III. That the tender be accompanied by such bonds and

securities as may be deemed necessary by the Court of Sessions.

IV. That a Highways Board be appointed annually by the Sessions, which Board shall be composed of three Justices resident in the district or section, before mentioned, whose duty and powers shall be as follows:

(a) To make an estimate of the amount of money required for road purposes in the district, and file the same with the Clerk of the Peace on or before a certain date, which date may be fixed by the Sessions.

(b) To advertize and receive tenders for the maintenance of the highways in the district, as mentioned in clause number two.

(c) To draw on the County Treasurer for the amount required for road purposes, not to exceed the amount placed to their credit in the hands of the Treasurer by the Assessors.

(d) To give bonds, with proper sureties, to faithfully perform their work, and to account for all monies under their control.

V. That the contractor be held responsible by the Board for the faithful performance of his duties.

VI. That the advertisement for tender specify the class of roads to be maintained.

(a) That a first-class road be at least sixty feet wide (as now required by law); that it have thorough drainage; sufficiently oval in shape to carry off the water readily into the ditches; be kept clear of stones and other obstructions; and be built of gravel or other material suitable to the soil upon which the road is constructed.

(b) That a *second-class* road be as wide as will suit the public convenience; that it be kept free of stones and ruts; and provided with a good drain where practicable and necessary — in fine, to be kept in such condition as not only to be passable, but suitable for driving and teaming purposes.

VII. That the estimated amount of funds required for road purposes, as mentioned in clause IV (a), be placed by the Clerk

of the Peace in the hands of the Assessors, to be assessed and collected by them as follows:

(a) An equal poll rate of one dollar upon every rateable man in the district.

(b) The remainder to be raised by a tax on real or personal property and income.

(c) The whole to be collected in the same manner as other county taxes.

We will now proceed to show the advantages of this system over the one which now exists, and its suitability to meet the requirements of this province.

First, The existing system of statute labor, with its attendant evils, would be removed.

Second, It would be the means of educating a class of men, who, giving much of their time to road making or repairing, would soon become proficient in that department of science.

Third, By making these contractors responsible to the Highways Board, the people could make complaints of bad roads with some hope of a hearing, and a removal of the grievance.

Lastly, It would prevent the granting of commissions to secure political ends. Let us briefly discuss these advantages separately.

I. ON THE ABOLITION OF STATUTE LABOR.

There are few arguments in favor of this system as a means of maintaining the public roads. The only thing it appears to have in its favor is the fact that people prize money more than their labor, which is equal to saying that in many cases it is difficult to convert labor into money. But this, as we shall see, is merely an *appearance*, not reality.

What is the system of statute labor as it now exists? In the first place there is a poll-tax of two days' labor, for which all males over 16 years of age are liable. In addition to this a property tax is imposed according to the following scale:

\$100 to \$200,	liable to perform	1 day.
\$200 to \$400,	“ “ “	3 days.
\$400 to \$600,	“ “ “	4 “
\$600 to \$1000,	“ “ “	5 days, &c.*

The law now provides that instead of working on the roads the prescribed number of days, a man may pay a commutation of fifty cents for each day that he is assessed. He may then, if he choose, redeem his money by engaging with the overseer at the rate of one dollar per day, although we know of many cases in which the overseer paid one dollar and fifty cents per day, in the latter case the days being ten hours, and in the former eight.

It is evident, under these circumstances, that no man who could pay the cash would “work in” his time at fifty cents per day, when he could as well have one dollar for working ten hours. In either case the day is lost, and the man may as well work the ten hours as eight. This system is therefore virtually reduced to an additional property tax. We have no fault to find with the alternative. It is no doubt an advantage both to the laborer and to the government, for it is a well known fact that a man never exerts himself working at statute labor; hence a good overseer will get more work from a man in one day of ten hours than in two days of eight hours each.

It is a fact, however, that in many country places, people do “work in” their statute labor. This we consider a great loss to the community; not merely because men are working at the starving rate of fifty cents per day, minus board, but from the fact that a loss ten times greater is sustained on account of this labor not being expended on the farm, to say nothing of the habit of laziness acquired from working four or five days for “the Queen” and finding themselves.

Another loss suffered by the farmers in working on the roads is the destruction of farming implements. Ploughs and shovels

* See Revised Statutes, p. 258.

are to be used, and in most cases these are not suitable for such work. Light, and made only for farm work, they become badly strained and broken when used on the hard, stony roads.

Again, it often happens—especially in the case of masons, carpenters, and sailors—that men are at some distance from their district when the time arrives for the performance of the statute labor. They are then compelled either to abandon their regular employment and go to work on the roads, or pay the commutation “on or before the day appointed for the performance of the statute labor.” This they may or may not be in a position to do.

We are inclined to believe that the substitution of fifty cents for the day's labor is paving the way for the complete destruction of the system, and the introduction of one attended with fewer inconveniences.

II. Another benefit derived from the adoption of our system would be the education of a class of men in this important department of science. One of the principal causes of the deplorable state of our roads in many parts of the country, is owing to the fact that the labor is performed under the direction of incompetent overseers and commissioners. These officers are generally appointed, not on account of any peculiar fitness or qualification for the work, but for other reasons which shall be noticed as we proceed.

A man may be a first-class foreman in a ship yard, or on a farm, and be able to employ every man to the best advantage. Give the same man charge of a number of men to repair or construct a road, and in all probability his effort will prove a failure. The reason is obvious. In the first instance the man understood his business, he had served an apprenticeship; in the latter, he was like one trying to read without having learned the alphabet.

There seems to be a general opinion that road making is a science to which every man has served an invisible apprenticeship. Hence, where the road should be macadamized, it is “cast

up;" where the soil is heavy and requires gravel, it is plastered up with clay, and rendered impassable for the remainder of the season. How can it be otherwise?

The question as to how the labor can be most advantageously expended is seldom discussed. The class is ordered to assemble on a certain day, a certain individual is indisposed, and wishes to bring his horse and cart, another wants to furnish a plough, and another a pair of oxen. On the morning agreed upon to commence work, the overseer finds himself the commander in chief of a miscellaneous heap of horses, oxen, ploughs, carts, shovels, spades, kettles, men, and boys, all of which must be kept in motion for a certain number of hours. Orders are given that the road nearest the gravel pit shall be *well* gravelled, the oxen and ploughs are set to work on the softest places on the road, while the boys are set to work carrying water, or, acting under secret orders from employers, are stationed as outposts to signal the approach of the overseer. This is no overdrawn picture. Money can never make or repair roads. You might give some of our overseers or supervisors enough silver to pave a road, and yet, so ignorant are they of the first principles of road making, that with this they would fail to make a passable or at least a good road. The truth is, there is money enough expended, but it is laid out in such a careless and inefficient manner that the roads do not receive the benefit of much more than the half of it. Were our system adopted, it would tend to remedy this state of affairs. By giving the full charge of a district to one man, he would thus be compelled to think upon and study up the subject.

"*Fit fabricando faber*" is not less true of road making than of any other business. For, to use Macaulay's phrase, every school boy knows that if all the knowledge of all the overseers in Nova Scotia on the subject of road making were concentrated, it would be about sufficient to construct a road from Enfield to Shubenacadie.

III. The third advantage derived from our system would be to afford the travelling public a chance to be, in some measure, the judges of their own roads, since they could lodge complaints with the hope of having their grievances redressed. It is remarkable how people will drive from day to day and from week to week over rough roads, will submit to be jolted and pitched about in any shape or form, yet never think of notifying the overseer that the road under his charge is needing repairs.

No doubt this forbearance on the part of travellers is due to the fact that there is no one to whom he may apply with any hope of having the grievance removed. By making this contractor responsible to the Board, it would be for his advantage to have as few public complaints as possible.

IV. We have now to consider a very important advantage resulting from the adoption of our proposed system.

We believe that the control of the funds for the support of the public roads should be placed beyond the control of members of parliament. Often, under the present system, commissions are granted to persons utterly incapable of expending the money judiciously, merely to procure political influence. Need we ask is this right? Need we say that it is public robbery of the most scandalous nature.

An elector applies to the member for his county to grant money on a certain piece of road, which probably is not needing repairs nearly so much as many other parts of the road. We can easily imagine the position of the M. P. P. He argues thus: "Mr. — has applied to me for money on his road. If I grant this I am sure of his support at the polls. If I refuse, I am in great danger of losing his vote." As a matter of course, he grants his supporter a commission.

In many instances this money is little better than thrown away. Suppose a man receives a grant of forty dollars and that he expends this sum in six days. His own wages, at one dollar and twenty-five cents per day, would amount to seven

dollars and fifty cents; add to this his commission at five per cent, and the overseer pockets nine dollars and fifty cents, or nearly one quarter of the whole amount. This amount is lost, since of course the overseer is not bound to labor, anything further than to "boss the crowd."

It is true that the law provides that an overseer shall not have less than ten men employed. Seldom, however, is this provision regarded; for it is difficult, in many districts, to get ten men who are willing to work on the roads.

Examples are not wanting to show the frivolous manner in which hundreds of dollars of the public funds are thus thrown away. A famous instance of this "highway" robbery lately came to our notice of a man who gets an annual grant of from sixty to one hundred dollars for the maintenance (?) of a certain piece of road. Last year ('76), commencing to work as soon as the snow was off, he was able, by the time his returns should be lodged with the Clerk of the Peace, to have his whole commission, about sixty dollars, expended on himself. This we have received as a true statement from the chief magistrate to whom his return was sent. Were the public made acquainted with the sums thus squandered annually in the interests of politicians, it would awaken such a storm of indignation as would immediately lead to the abolition of the system, and the adoption of one where such scandalous abuses would be an impossibility.

Members of parliament say they are unwilling to give up their *privilege*. Undoubtedly they are. Who would blame them? They are but men, and not by any means the most self-denying *species* of mankind.

As long as the people are content to look quietly on while the public funds are squandered for political ends, so long will the members hold their privilege, and so long will the public roads continue to get worse and worse, until life and limb will be no longer safe upon them.

Surely our government cannot have the welfare of the country at heart. Do they not know that the development of the resources of a country such as ours depends largely on the opening up and maintenance of commodious roads? Perhaps they imagine that the resources of our province are already fully developed.

The ancient Incas of Peru put us to shame in this respect. Montaigne makes mention of a road, built by them, which was nine hundred miles in length, twenty-five paces wide, made of stones ten feet square, with a stream of running water and a row of trees on each side. The Romans well knew the value of roads; hence, their first care, after gaining a foothold on any new territory, was to make it accessible by opening up and maintaining good roads. In Italy, alone, they are said to have constructed not less than fourteen hundred miles of road. Many sections of this remain to the present day, having stood the traffic of over two thousand years. In England, also, their paved roads or strata are still to be found.

If all the money expended on our roads during the past century had been judiciously applied, they might now be in first-class condition. They might be, but evidently they are far from it. And shall the same cry be echoed at the end of the next century? We are more hopeful. This, however, we do believe, that if no change be made in the system of maintaining them, they will not then be in the *same* condition, but greatly *inferior* to what they now are.

The cry comes to us from almost every section of the country. "our roads are fast going to destruction." The people are beginning to feel that reform is a necessity. This is just where reform in the matter must originate.

The people have a right to see that every cent of the public funds is expended to the best advantage. We think we have shown that our funds for road purposes are not thus expended. How then can they be economized? We answer, let them be

supported by contract. This is the only way in which public money can be profitably expended. Take, for example, the pay of mail carriers throughout the province. We believe that no mail carrier gets overpaid, while many are not more than half paid. Every cent which they receive, they earn. And so it would be with road money were our system adopted.

There is plenty of money expended, but it is misapplied or squandered uselessly. This will be more apparent if we examine the statistics furnished by the parliamentary journals. Take, for example, the year 1876, and county of Halifax.

Whole sum *granted* for Roads and Bridges, \$18,005.00.

Real sum expended, - - -	\$21,190 86
Amount expended on Bridges, - -	703 00
Balance left for Roads, - - -	\$20,487 86
Number of Commissioners, - - -	242
Average amount per Commissioner, -	\$84 66
Number of miles of Road, - - -	1300
Sum expended per mile, - - -	\$15 75

If we add to this the statute labor, the sum is increased to about thirty dollars per mile.

Amount paid to Commissioners, allowing that each has wrought eight days, at \$1.25 per day, - - -	\$2,420 00
Percentage on above, paid to Commissioners, at five per cent., - -	\$1,024 30
	\$3,444 30 *

Thus we see that one sixth of the whole sum is kept in the hands of the Commissioners. For this amount the roads get no benefit, since the Commissioner is not supposed to perform any labor, further than superintend the others, any of whom are probably as competent to oversee the work as himself.

Not many years ago, a gentleman, with his family, were travelling from New Brunswick to Nova Scotia by public road.

* Amount pocketed by Commissioners.

He remarked frequently that the roads were very smooth. This continued for some fifty or sixty miles, when all at once the carriage commenced to jolt and pitch about in such a manner that they could scarcely keep their seats. "I say, John! what is the matter?" "Oh," replied John, the driver, "you must remember you are in Nova Scotia now." The truth was plain. The smooth roads were supported by contract; the Nova Scotia roads by statute labor and commissions.

When Sir James Kempt was administrator of the government, he determined to do away with this system. He rode to Windsor on purpose to inspect the roads. He saw that time and money were alike thrown away. He used his influence to induce the members to give up their privilege, that he might introduce a better system. His efforts were in vain.

To those who object to this system we would say, "What other shall we propound?" All who give the subject any thought admit that reform is necessary. Shall we establish a toll system, and spread a net-work of turnpike over the country?

We may best settle this question by referring to the history of the system. It is so called from the turnpike or gate turning on an upright axis or pike, at which the tolls are collected. It was first used in England in the reign of Edward III, about the year 1346. A royal commission was appointed to collect tolls on all carriages passing from Saint Giles' to Temple Bar and Gray's Inn Lane, London. From this beginning the system gradually spread over the British Isles. Finding that it was attended with numberless annoyances, the Scotch, in 1669, succeeded in establishing a statute labor system, by which all persons over age were compelled to perform six days' labor for the benefit of the roads. This tax, either in personal labor or by substitution money, was the only way in which the roads—other than turnpikes—were maintained till 1845, when it was abolished by the General Statute Labor Amendment Act (*vide* 8 and 9 Vict., c. 41). Henceforth the roads were maintained

by a land assessment. In Ireland, since 1800, the public roads are kept up by a land assessment, and the system gives entire satisfaction: surely, therefore, it will succeed in any other country. England and Wales still groan under the self-imposed yoke; but the law, however, is now so amended that — if there be no new trusts created — the close of the nineteenth century will see very few toll gates in Britain. Surely, with these facts before us, no one would advocate a toll system.

In some countries the roads are maintained by men hired at the public expense on fixed salaries, all the working utensils being provided by government. This system would undoubtedly give excellent satisfaction. Here, the difficulty is our limited treasury. In some of the New England States this is adopted and works well. When our province is older and richer such a system may be introduced but for the next century some more economical plan must be adopted. We know of none better than that now proposed.

The question now arises, "Is this system practicable?" We can see no weighty objections to its immediate adoption. We have spoken to men in different parts of the province on the subject, and have never yet found one to offer any objections. Many seem to feel that some change must be made.

The following paragraph from the *Presbyterian Witness* is very much to the point: "The reform which is perhaps most urgently needed in Nova Scotia is in connection with our road service. The money granted to counties has to a large extent been wasted. It is a temptation and a snare to the members of the House and to electors as well. The money should be voted and expended on purely business principles, and until such is the case it is vain to talk of purity, honesty, and economy."

Let the subject be thoroughly ventilated and frankly discussed for a few months in the leading newspapers, and so far as the people are concerned no opposition need be expected. And if the *people* are once thoroughly aroused, the government

will be forced to bring about reform. Why should Nova Scotia tolerate a road system which almost every other civilized province and country has abandoned as unjust and defective?

Having thus far discussed the system with reference to the *maintenance* of roads, we come now briefly to notice another part of our subject:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC ROADS.

This is by far the less difficult and less complicated part of the subject. Not that it is of little importance how roads are constructed, but the idea being simpler, it is easier to adopt a system.

We will allow the government to use their own means to ascertain where a road is required to be constructed.

Here we depend almost wholly upon government grants. As regards the manner of outlay, the same remarks apply here which have been already made in reference to the maintenance of roads. In almost every case the money should be expended by contract. Here, as in the repairing of roads, much money is uselessly wasted through the principle of granting commissions. Not long since, a gentleman in the County of Hants obtained a commission for the purpose of making an alteration in a road. When he had completed the change, he was told that he had made no improvement, but rather the reverse. His reply is significant: "I made no agreement to *improve* the road, all I had to do was to expend the money; that I have done."

Where roads have to be opened up through crown lands, it would be well for the government to offer liberal grants to settlers, in return for which they should be required to construct commodious roads. Thus, as cheaply as by any other means, would the road be built, and "public interest" at the same time served by developing the resources of the country. Large tracts of wilderness which are now the undisputed territory of the moose and caribou, want only cultivation to be

converted into smiling fields and cosy villages. The streams are idly dancing over the rocks and pebbles, whose power should be grinding the grain which this land might produce. Unknown treasures lie hidden in the rocks beneath, only wanting the drill and powder of the miner to cheer the hearts and homes of thousands. How, then, can this wealth be made available? The first step is the construction of convenient roads. Too much importance cannot be attached to this subject.

Another point deserving of some notice is the *time* in which road work should be done. This should be as early in the summer as possible. Road work done in the fall is as good as lost, since the frost and rains of spring not only render them impassable for the time, but uneven and rough for the whole season.

WINTER ROADS.

In a country like ours, where snow frequently lies on the ground for a third part of the year, and travelling is done in sleighs, it is of the utmost importance that every precaution be taken to render the winter roads commodious and comfortable.

The government should encourage the setting out of trees on the road sides where the snow is most liable to drift.

The system of breaking the roads, as it now exists, cannot, we think, be much improved. A justice, or the "road contractors," should have the power to summon the laboring men of the district when required. While this system exists, it is evident that it would be to the advantage of all to plant hedges, thus not only beautifying their farms but lightening their labor.

Many other points of importance connected with this subject might be noticed, and those which we have discussed might be enlarged upon *ad libitum*, but the object and scope of this essay does not permit.

We are aware that many points are open to discussion. Some may be surprised that we have made no mention of supervisors or inspectors. We believe that supervisors are a nuis-

ance, and their salaries little better than money thrown away. Let the people be the supervisors, and see that the contractor does his work faithfully.

Were our system adopted, we believe that in a few years we would not only have *good* roads; but the cost of maintaining them, instead of increasing, would very soon dwindle down to a merely nominal sum.

Thus, although we may never have a Macadam or a Telford to reform our road system, we may yet rejoice in the enjoyment of that which tends largely to advance the best interests of a country: A NETWORK OF PUBLIC ROADS IN FIRST-CLASS CONDITION.



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