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MECKLENBURG'S GOOD ROADS

Capt. S. B. Alexander, Author of the Law, Tells of Early Opposition Encountered and Overcome.

A distinguished author has said "The laying out of roads marks the emergence of a nation from barbarism, and their improvement keeps pace with its civilization." Why is it that North Carolina, in the twentieth century, is afflicted with such bad roads? The cause, in my opinion, is due to slavery. The slave-power, following the Feudal System, required the slaves and laboring whites to maintain the roads. With the abolition of slavery, the agitation for better roads commenced, but, as it is impossible to change the customs of a people in a short time, the improvement of the roads has been very slow.

Public roads must be built and maintained, either by the State, the county or the township; so the first thing necessary is to get a law that will raise the money to build and maintain them. Take for example the greatest of all roads, the railroad. The first thing that is done is to get a charter, with the power to condemn land for the right of way, and to raise money necessary to construct and equip it. After this, engineers and contractors are employed and the work completed. So with the construction of dirt roads. If a road law was passed granting power to condemn a right of way and giving the county, or township, authority to levy a sufficient tax to build and maintain the public roads, engineers and contractors would soon apply; or the county, with the use of convict labor, could do much of the work.

When I hear people talk about building good roads without discussing the means, it reminds me of a meeting of Grangers that once assembled in the hall of the Catawba Grangers' Council. The building was inadequate for the number of delegates. One brother offered a resolution appointing two gentlemen and myself a committee to build or lease a suitable hall. No money was appropriated and at the next meeting our committee was called on and reported that "as no means were provided by the resolution they were unable to carry into effect its instructions"—and all were as silent as many "good road" talkers after the March winds have dried off the public thoroughfares.

CAPT. S. B. ALEXANDER.

Perhaps it would not be out of place to give a synopsis of the struggle we had for good roads in Mecklenburg county, and the wonderful change wrought by the good road. In 1878 the Democratic ticket practically had no opposition and no canvass was made. In the Legislature which met in January, 1879, we passed a road law taxing all of the people (including residents of towns) to build and maintain public roads. The surprise was very great when the people, and especially the town people, found they were to be taxed to this end. The opposition was so great that even the few who were known to favor good roads became silent, and some of those entrusted with the execution of the law spoke of it as "the obnoxious road law." The press of the town was also against it. When Governor Jarvis called a special session in 1880 a monster petition was gotten up, asking the Legislature to repeal it. The press lost its influence in this retrograde movement. The members of the House of Representatives introduced a bill for its repeal, accompanied by the petitions to receive the approval of the House and was sent to the Senate. When it came on for consideration I moved to postpone indefinitely. When the question was put, I was the only one who voted in the affirmative; no one voted in the negative, and the President of the Senate declared the measure indefinitely postponed.

The opposition in the county became more aggressive than ever, and a new delegation was sent to the Legislature to repeal it. This was accomplished in January, 1881. Fortunately it was in effect long enough for the people to see that under it they could have improved roads, and the clamor for re-enactment became as pronounced as the opposition had been. In 1882 I was unanimously nominated for the Senate to re-enact it. I passed it through the Senate, and although it only applied to Mecklenburg county it was defeated in the House, again the protest of our Representatives that it was too dangerous an innovation to be permitted in any county in the State. In 1883 I was re-elected to try again to secure its passage, and, as the great trouble appeared to be with the House, early in the session I requested Capt. W. E. Avery to introduce it in that branch of the Legislature. It passed and in less than ten days became a law.

Those charged with the execution of the law were inexperienced, and the first roads built were crude and expensive, but as the years passed, improved machinery and improved methods made better roads. In fact, the roads now being constructed are as good as those in any section of the Union. Many visitors from other States have come here to see and learn the methods of building roads. They are the pride of our people, and if there is a single person in the county opposed to good roads, he must be dumb, for no one has heard him speak.

I referred to the opposition of the town people to the road law when first passed. The mechanic and laboring classes were very hostile, believing it unjust to tax them for country roads. They have long since become the very best friends of good roads. They find that they more than save their tax on wood alone; they find furthermore that everything that enters into the expense of living is more abundant and cheaper; and I am satisfied that our improved roads have had much to do with making Charlotte a great manufacturing town. It has also improved the condition of our farmers, and land "on the Macadam" is always in demand.

The people of other counties in the State are like the people of Mecklenburg, and all they need is a good road law, and a "little patience."

Roads neglected for one hundred years cannot be made good in five, ten, nor twenty years. The longer the commencement of improving is deferred, the longer will the people suffer with bad roads. In these days of railroads "the old frontier" is not in the West, but it is fifteen or twenty miles over bad roads from the railroad.

In concluding, I would emphasize the one thing needful—secure a law that will raise the money—and good roads are assured.

S. B. ALEXANDER.

Charlotte, N. C., Feb. 4.

ROADS IN EDGECOMBE.

I think road improvement is the most important question that the people of the State have been called upon to consider.

The question of good roads and public education go hand in hand, and I might say, that the civilization and progress of any community may be measured by the condition of its public roads.

It is impossible for the children of the State to get the full benefit of the school advantages that were made possible by our wise and liberal Legislature, and the untiring zeal and efforts of our chief executive, with the present condition of the roads of the State, and I am quite sure that any judicious expenditure for the permanent improvement of our public roads, our farms and other real estate would be increased in value twofold, and if the roads and public highways of the State were put in proper condition, the farmers of the State could market their produce and other things which they might have for sale with just one half the cost with present conditions.

The public roads of Edgecombe have been worked by taxation and by convict

E. L. DAUGHTRIDGE.

labor for several years, but no permanent road work has been done, and while they are not good, they are above the average of our eastern counties.

Our people will have to be educated upon the question of good roads as upon all other public questions. I am sure if the proper effort was made to show them the advantage of good roads, and the personal benefits that would be derived, it would be but very little trouble to get their hearty co-operation in this great movement.

Very respectfully,

E. L. DAUGHTRIDGE.

Rocky Mount, N. C., Feb. 6.

ROADS IN ORANGE.

First question. Yes, there is a special tax of 30 cents on the poll and 10 cents on real estate. I have been working the roads in our county about eight (8) months. Average hands about (8) eight. Have worked or improved about (15) miles of road. Have made a good summer road. What we need now is machinery. We have the material, more, I think, than any county in the State. I think good roads are what we need. Good roads would increase by 25 per cent the value of our real estate. Also 25 per cent the value to the preservation of our vehicles, horses, etc. Will now say in conclusion that I hope to be in Raleigh the 13th and 14th of February.

Thanking you for the kind interest you have taken for the success of our roads, I am.

Very respectfully,

W. P. RILEY.

Hillsboro, N. C., Feb. 7.

THE WEATHER BUREAU'S USE OE GOOD ROADS

By Willis L. Moore, Chief U. S. Weather Bureau.

To the Editor: This is an age of progress and the farmer has felt the influence of the tide. The arts and the sciences have not passed him by, and year by year his work is being placed upon a higher plane. Scientific agriculture is not a fad but a necessity, and he who would have his land give forth the greatest yield with the least expenditure of energy and the least drain upon the resources of the soil must work in harmony with Nature. Science alone is futile unless coupled with a practical application of knowledge. Three things are essential for a farmer's prosperity: good crops, good prices, and good roads. The first two are affected by so many conditions that they can be only partly controlled by a community, but the third lies entirely in the hands of a county or State. In farm economy nothing is more important than good roads. Whether the growing season be favorable or unfavorable the man who works along the lines that the scientist has demonstrated to be nearest to Nature's laws, accomplishes the best results. But in the making of good roads individual effort cannot be depended upon. Concerted effort is the key note: It is essential that county or State officials be selected who will take as much concern in keeping the public roads in good condition at all times, as are the schools, the jail and the machinery of the law. What matters it how high prices may be if the farmer cannot get his products to the markets because of

HON. WILLIS L. MOORE,
Chief U. S. Weather Bureau.

roads that are either impassible or in such condition as to preclude the hauling of anything like a proper load.

The farmer is no longer a stranger in his own country. The railroads, the telegraph and the telephone have entered his county and even his own fields and have brought him into close contact with the outside world. News of any great event in this country or any other now reaches the farmer ere the echo of the event has hardly died away. But one of the greatest boons to people in rural districts is the recent introduction by the Postoffice Department of the rural free delivery service. It not only enables the farmer to receive and dispatch his personal correspondence promptly, but, what is far more important, he gets the daily newspaper from the city, and these keep him in touch with the world and give him the latest market reports. He, therefore, knows when to hold his products and when to send them to the markets. But in order to do this at all times good roads are essential. If the roads are bad he either cannot transport his products at all or else it must be done with such loss of time and energy to both man and beast as to take all profit from the effort. The illustration of what one horse can pull over a good road and what the same horse can pull over a bad one is too well known to be repeated, but it is a text and a sermon that carries with it conviction to every thoughtful person that has the interest of the agriculturist at heart.

Since the introduction of the rural free delivery the subject of good roads has become of more than passing interest to the Weather Bureau. Honorable James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture, is ever alert to extend the work of his Department in behalf of the farmer. This innovation by the Postoffice Department presented an opportunity that he was quick to grasp and by his direction the Weather Bureau began the work of distributing forecasts and warnings so that this important information might be placed into the hands of the farmer at work in his own fields. The mail carriers are furnished with slip on which the latest weather predictions are printed and one of these slips is delivered at each farm-house on the various routes. The many advantages that will accrue to the farmer by having this information daily are obvious. Whatever season of the year it may be farm operations can be regulated in accordance with the expected weather conditions.

At the present time there are nearly 700 rural free delivery routes in the United States whose carriers are furnished with the weather forecasts and in all about 75,000 families are served daily in this way. Extensions of the work are being made constantly as fast as new routes are established by the Postoffice Department. In many instances it is impossible for the carriers to deliver the forecasts because they must start on their routes before the forecasts can be issued and telegraphed to them. Unfortunately this is true to a considerable extent in North Carolina, so that the system has been put into operation at but few places. However, it is hoped that in the near future arrangements can be made to overcome this difficulty in most cases.

It is apparent that the question of good roads has a direct bearing upon this special work that is being done by the Weather Bureau. The carriers must make use of the public highways and the number of patrons that can serve and the expedition with which the work can be done is dependent to a large extent upon the conditions of the roads over which they must travel. The earlier a farmer receives his forecast the more valuable it becomes to him.

There are two voices in the land more powerful than all others—those of the laborer and the farmer. They are the rock upon which national prosperity must rest. Whatever tends to elevate them and make them more prosperous has a like influence upon those in other walks of life. The farmer occupies the unique position of being the most independent man in the country. He produces his own food, fuel, and, indirectly, the clothing that he wears. He is everybody's friend and nobody's enemy. But success in any line must be attended by agsressiveness. This applies as much to the agriculturist as to the merchant, or the capitalist. Good roads is a necessary element to the farmer's prosperity. They must be obtained by united effort, and once obtained they form a substantial item in the value of all the lands that have access to them.

The Weather Bureau has, therefore, a vital interest in the problem of good roads and in the extension of the free rural delivery along the public highway. Good roads enable the carrier to enter new and to cover larger fields, and the extension of the routes of the carrier enables the Weather Bureau to place its rain, frost and cold wave warnings into the hands of those who can make the most advantageous use of weather forecasts.

Washington, D. C., Feb. 6, 1902.

Willis L. Moore
Chief United States Weather Bureau.

WE ARE TOO POOR NOT TO BUILD GOOD ROADS

By Hon. S. L. Patterson, Commissioner of Agriculture.

When the country was young and sparsely settled the roads were usually located with reference to the convenience of families and to save work in constructing. In the hill and mountain country the road went over the hills instead of around them. Grades of 10 and 15 per cent were not uncommon, and many of them still exist. Roads were located over steep hills and around fields to save fences and as a matter of convenience to land-owners. The rule was to consult private convenience, rather than the good of the road and public necessity. The whole system of road location needs change and amendment. And the first principle of road location is the public good. If the present road is not in the right place, it ought to be changed and put in the right place, even if it does take some of Mr. Jones' land, or does not suit the convenience of Mr. Smith. The adoption of the no-fence law in most of the State simplified in great measure the question of road location. On the new roads that have been and are being constructed in the mountain country (I mean real roads and turnpikes) oftentimes in the most rugged places there is scarcely a grade of over 5 per cent—that is, one foot rise to twenty feet in height. This shows what can be done when a road is located by a competent engineer, as all roads must be, instead of in the old bungling fashion by a jury, who frequently locate the road almost anywhere to suit a neighbor's convenience, and with little or no reference to the good of the road or the advantage of the public travel.

WORK OF CONVICTS ON THE ROADS.

In the discussions it was evident that a strong and growing sentiment exists in favor of working convicts on the roads; and to the minds of some that seemed to be the solution of the whole question.

HON. S. L. PATTERSON.

Some of the larger and more wealthy counties have already adopted this plan, and are working the convicts to great advantage. In Mecklenburg, Forsyth, Caston, Buncombe, Iredell, Rowan, Durham, Wake, Guilford and others of the larger counties the plan is effective, and although progress is slow, the work done is permanent. This system is not adaptable to the smaller counties. In the first place, if all the State convicts were divided out for working the roads, only ten or a dozen would be allotted to the county—too few to be worked profitably—with the expense of guarding, feeding and clothing to be taken into account. But suppose the allotment of convicts to two or three counties were worked together, first in one county and then in another, how long would it take thirty hands to work the roads in three counties, to relocate when necessary, dig side ditches, put in drains, build bridges, blast rocks, etc.? The question, to one who knows about working a road, needs no answer.

This article is not opposing the idea of working convicts on the leading thoroughfares, but it is too plain for argument that the roads of the country will never be put into and kept in good condition by the use of convicts alone—even if every able-bodied convict in the State is set to work. The roads generally are in desperate condition, and it is now that work is needed. Farmers, lumber haulers, wagoners, and everybody who travel, are suffering and losing money every trip they make for want of better roads.

There is only one way to get them. The people must be brought to realize the absolute necessity of good roads, must understand their money value, must feel the loss they constantly suffer from having bad roads, and must set to work and make good roads themselves. And this is to be done by

TAXATION.

It is unjust, unfair, unreasonable and disastrous in results to expect to keep up a system of good roads under the old method of poll-tax—that is, of requiring the same amount of road service from one man as from another—from the man who doesn't own a tool fit to work the road with and who never uses the road except on foot, as from the man who owns lands and horses and wagons and buggies and who makes use daily of the roads. Every man is interested in and benefited by having good roads, whether he is a property owner or not, and should be required to contribute his share of work to the general weal. But this is not enough. The property of the county, the value of which is d[illegible]

ROADS IN WAKE.

There has been no special tax levied for road improvement in this the southern section of Wake. The public roads in this section are in passable condition but there is great need of improvement.

There is a sentiment here which favors working the roads by taxation, provided the people are relieved from working as now.

I am of the opinion that the need for good roads is very great, and a condi-

W. H. HOLLAND.

tion of the roads commensurate with the needs would be of inestimable value, but I am not prepared to offer any plan for the accomplishment of the ends sought. The people in this section, as a rule, are very sensitive on the tax question.

W. H. H[illegible]

Christie, N. C., Feb. 4.

First. There has been no special tax levied in this county for the improvement of public roads. We call a road tax, but it is not [illegible]

roads and we need them [illegible] have to work the [illegible] we ever get good roads and we must begin in a small way [illegible] well begin in a small way [illegible] there are several things that we will have to consider, and [illegible] is the condition of our roads, as such bad roads [illegible]

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ROADS IN CATAWBA.

First. The general talk for good roads [illegible] 2. The road from [illegible] to Claremont [illegible] the road bed is [illegible] The people [illegible] 3. I think [illegible]