

## The Future of Our Common Highways

THE present year marks the practical completion in Oakland County of what were known as the Schedule B roads, being those roads which were planned to be built under the million dollar bond issue. This bond issue, it will be recalled, was entirely inadequate to build the roads planned and in order to keep faith with the people of the County a two (2) mill tax has been levied each year and from the proceeds of this tax roads designated by the Board of Supervisors have from time to time been completed until the Schedule B roads are practically finished.

The great majority of the roads, which can be built under the Covert Act, at least for some years to come, are now completed so that the question which confronts the residents of Oakland County is the very important one of determining what shall be the program of road construction in the future.

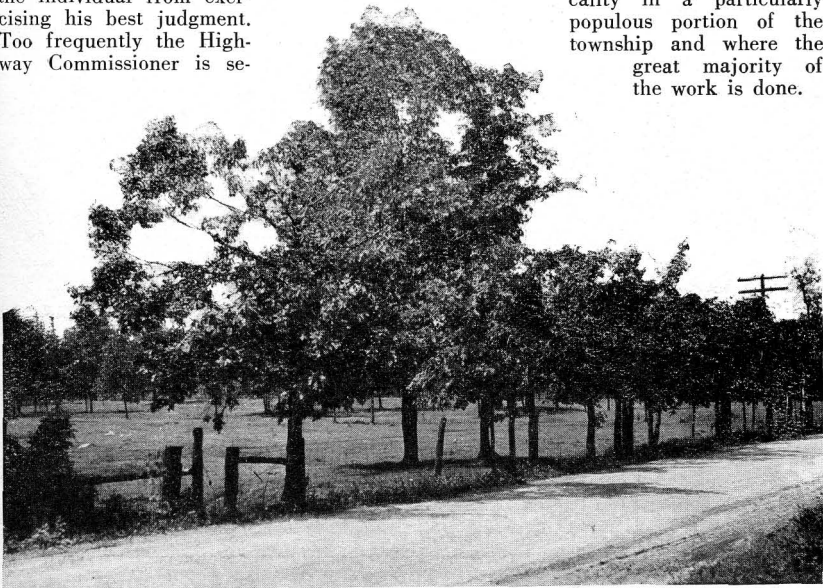
We believe it will be conceded by every person who has paid any particular attention to road affairs that the present system of road construction and repair as managed by the Township Highway Commissioners is not the economical or efficient one, but the question of determining what is the proper one is not so easy of solution.

The objections to the present highway law which provides for the construction and maintenance of roads under the direction and supervision of the Township Highway Commissioners, the moneys for which are raised by a direct tax for that particular purpose (except in four or five townships where the old path-master system still prevails) may be grouped under a few heads:

1. The law does not permit of any general plan of development beyond the township, and in practice, very little systematic development in the township.

2. The Township Highway Commissioners in the main are men who have given no particular attention to road construction in the sense of providing for proper grade, drainage and base.

3. The Township Highway Commissioners are dependent upon the public vote which frequently precludes the individual from exercising his best judgment. Too frequently the Highway Commissioner is selected because of his locality in a particularly populous portion of the township and where the great majority of the work is done.



4. The frequent changes in the office of the Highway Commissioner, due to the Highway Commissioner failing to satisfy some particular portion of the township.

5. The absence of any well-devised, systematic plan of improvement looking towards a completed system.

The question now is—what shall the remedy be? In the first place, there should be a systematic plan established for the entire County. The County is taken as a unit because the State is too large and the Township is too small, and while the County alone is not the ideal plan, under present conditions it is the most nearly workable. There should be a survey of the roads of the County in the sense of examination and determination of the relative importance of these highways. It is not fair to stop with our present roads and leave the ordinary earth roads untouched. The cost of construction of our present roads has been raised by taxation largely upon all the people. A very large portion of our people reside upon the roads that are not improved. It is true that there are improved roads more or less adjacent to their homes, but these people should have fair treatment, and fair treatment carries with it the extension of improved roads to the great majority of the people of this county, in order that they might have the proper reward or return for their money, which they have paid in the way of taxation for highway purposes.

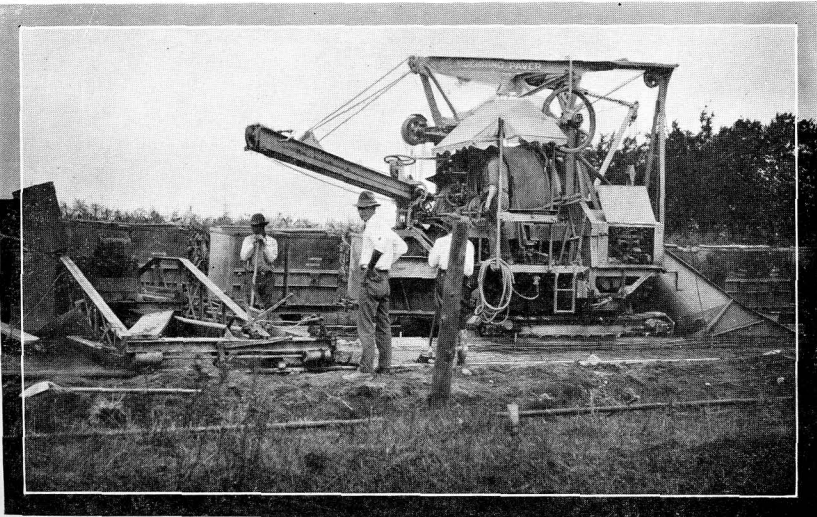
This system of county roads might be divided roughly into three (3) classes, we will say, A, B, and C.

The Class A roads, the most important of the unimproved roads, connecting with the present arteries of travel and leading to and through important points.

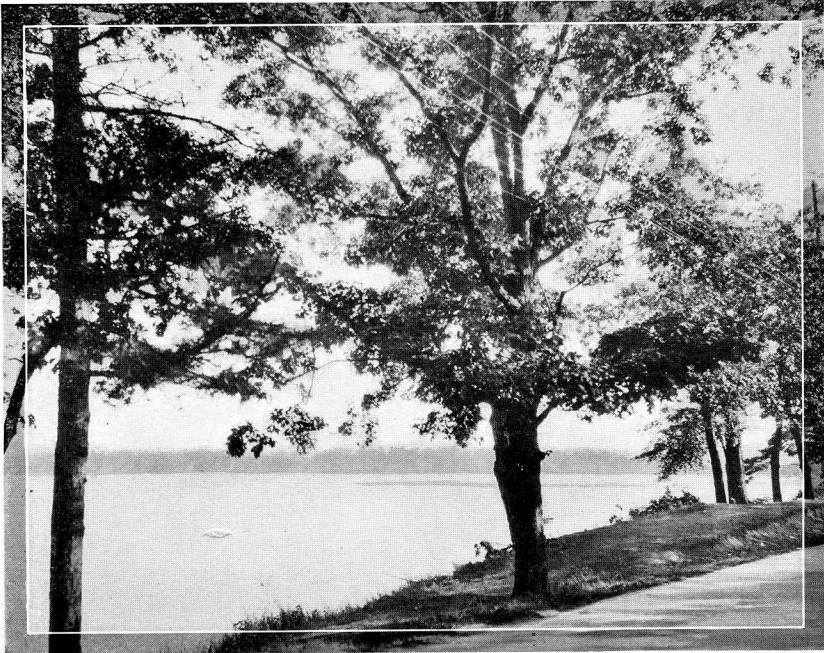
Class B, the next in importance.

Class C, the balance.

This is but an arbitrary division and may not be entirely just but it will afford a basis for constructive legislation. The Class A roads should have that essential of all good roads, proper drainage. Much of the money that has been expended in reducing grades might be very well saved by constructing the roads practically upon the present grades. There would be, of course, some exceptions, but in the main, grades are no great detriment to the ordinary automobile traffic. These roads need not be built of as high a grade of construction as our existing gravel roads, but the



Concrete paving equipment, John R Road



Along the shore of Pine Lake

foundation should be thoroughly laid and then the surface treatment can be modified and extended from time to time. The Class B roads would be less expensive and the Class C roads less than the Class B roads.

One of the difficulties which we experience in regard to the construction of roads lies in the fact that the people want too much in too short a time. Michigan, which wasted nearly half a century in the care of her roads, now expects in a few short years to make up for that half century of neglect. It can, of course, be done, but it has meant and will mean a very large rate of taxation, too much, in fact, for the people to bear.

Another difficulty with road construction is that we think of our highways in terms of today, when as a matter of fact, we should think of them in terms of twenty-five (25) years, fifty (50) years and one hundred (100) years hence. This community has many years to live; highway development is but in its infancy and we should construct our roads having in mind that fifty (50) years from now the problems which are being met with in our main arteries will very likely be problems on now relatively unimportant roads, hence it behooves us to lay the foundation of our roads as to drainage and as to width on a liberal basis. Land is not so dear, outside of the main arteries of our highways, that there should be any difficulty in securing wide right-of-way. Nothing contributes more to the appearance of a community than a broad highway. It is true that the broad highway carries with it some obligations of beautifying but these can be met and solved gradually.

One of the practical questions involved in the scheme outlined is the question of expense. In 1921 there was expended by the Townships of this County, through the various Township Highway Commissioners the total of \$259,538.00. This does not include the townships which are operating under the path-master system. This sum represents a little over three (3) mills on the dollar of the assessed valuation of our County for 1921. While some of this amount expended by the Township Com-

missioners was for construction, the great part of it was expended for maintenance and it is in the matter of maintenance that the greatest loss is sustained. Under the present system the maintenance in the main is not intelligently or systematically carried out and the result is a great loss.

The total amount expended by the Board of County Road Commissioners in 1922 in the maintenance of 435 miles of improved roads was but \$279,543.00, about \$20,000.00 more than was expended by these townships.

This scheme will undoubtedly meet with opposition from the localities which are unwilling to part with the control of their highways but there can be little question that the proper method of handling road construction and repair lies in centralized control systematically exercised. It may be that some plan may be worked out by which the two systems may be to a certain extent reconciled but for real efficiency and return for money invested, the township system is not a success. There should be some unified general movement looking towards legislation permitting the carrying out of some such scheme as is here outlined.

It may be that many Counties in our State are not so situated or do not desire such a plan; if that be true, then the legislation ought to be optional, so that counties desiring to adopt some such plan may do so and the moneys raised expended accordingly. There ought to be little objection to such legislation; it is a step in the direction of home rule. The problems of Oakland and other counties closely situated to the big industrial centers are not the problems of the major part of the state; the legislation which they should have is likely different from that desired by others, but there are no logical grounds for objections to legislation which will leave it optional to the voters of any county to adopt some such system.

The action of the Board of Supervisors in its October session in directing the Road Committee of the Board, in conjunction with the Road Commissioners and the Engineer of the latter body, to consider and prepare for the approval of the Board of Supervisors a systematic plan of road development, constitutes the first and a very important step in the direction of sane highway improvement and consequent legislation. It is a matter of congratulation that the Board of Supervisors of our County has thus taken the first step in this very important work and it cannot fail but have a decided influence in directing attention to this much needed improvement in legislation.

Of course, these ideas are naturally very general in their character and very likely would be modified before being put into practice but they furnish the fundamental thoughts which ought to govern future road legislation.

