

## COUNTY ROAD PROBLEMS

CARROLL M. REDFORD, County Judge, Barren County

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen of the Conference:

You were very kind to extend to me an invitation to appear on your program, the Third Annual Kentucky Highway Conference.

Having been born and reared in a rural community, I remember, believe it or not, when our roads were a great deal worse than they are today.

Since there appear to be no politicians present, I shall feel free to discuss my subject free of politics, and without any disrespect to any politician, living or dead.

I am a great believer in our way of life. I have found that there are some politics in every walk of life. You find it in your businesses, your churches, your schools and your government, and regardless of your party affiliation, if you take any interest in public affairs you lay yourself open for many untruths about you and your family from the beginning to the end.

Experience has taught that the persons who make most of these libelous and slanderous statements about the politicians are either the persons who failed or refused to vote the last time, or he is the person trying to take the office which you hold.

Whether you be a Republican or a Democrat, I say to you, stick by your belief, and your community and your county and your state will be a better place in which to live.

Yes, they tell a lot of stories about the politicians. A few years ago they had the Republican opening campaign speech down my way, and there was a small boy who had a bunch of cur dogs — puppies, out trying to sell them. He had a pitiful look. He went up to big, long, tall, strapping man and said, "Mister, won't you please buy one of my Republican puppies?" The little boy had an appealing eye, and this loyal Republican's heart melted, and he dug down deep in his pockets and brought up a dollar for one of these dogs.

Two or three weeks later, the Democratic opening was in the same community and this same loyal Republican attended the Democratic meeting to see what was going on, and he happened to spy this same boy selling dogs. He went over to see what he had to say. He was advertising his dogs then as Democratic puppies.

This man said, "Why, son, two weeks ago you were selling dogs as Republican puppies, and now you are trying to pass them off as Democratic puppies." The boy answered, "Yes, sir, but two weeks ago these dogs didn't have their eyes open."

A great politician was concluding his speech and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to state that I was born a Democrat, always have been a Democrat, and expect to die a Democrat."

A man out in the audience hollered out, "Not very ambitious, are you?"

Roads have been called a symbol by which the progress of a community can be measured. If people have no roads, they are savages, and if their roads are poor and little used, it is a sign that their civilization is stagnant, for if there is any motion in society, the road which is the symbol of motion will indicate the fact. Without roads, commerce is impossible, and large cities can not exist. Communities are isolated, and interchange of ideas can not take place. Roads are, indeed, not only the sign of civilization, they are one of the chief means for its advancement.

The importance of roads to the welfare of nations was not unknown to the ancients. The city of Babylon was paved as early as 2000 B.C. Herodotus speaks of a "magnificent Egyptian road" which was built to assist in the construction of the Great Pyramid. The Peruvians, Chinese and Carthaginians were also great road builders, but beyond question, the greatest road builder of the ancient world were the Romans, whose stone paved highways, often three feet or more in thickness, have never been excelled for solidity of construction. Regardless of obstacles, they kept a straight course from point to point, with the idea in mind that "All roads lead to Rome", and this statement was then literally true, for that city was the center of a network of wonderful highways, reaching from the remote East to the farthest West and even penetrating England. Many of them still remain as great monuments to the energy and skill of their builders, forming the foundation of modern roads, and in some instances constituting the road surface now used.

In our own America we have advanced from Indian trails which were for a long time the only means of travel except by water, and as the population pushed inland these trails were generally widened into roads for the use of wagons, but they long remained in an intolerable condition.

As trade increased better roads were demanded, and privately owned toll roads or turnpikes were built. These private roads were not popular, but they increased very rapidly, and before the beginning of the nineteenth century England had 30,000 miles of them, and after their introduction into America in 1790 the people invested in the stock of the turnpike companies a sum almost equal to the country's debt at the close of the Revolution. Little improvement was affected

in road building until the nineteenth century, when two skilled engineers, Thomas Telford and John L. Macadam, introduced scientific road building in England.

Road building remained a purely local and usually private affair in America until about 1806 when Congress began the famous National Pike or Cumberland Road to furnish better communications between the East and the West.

It remained for the automobile to give a great impetus to the cause of good roads. Before the introduction of automobiles and trucks, farming communities were indifferent or even hostile to road building, but with the coming of this type of transportation the city and the country alike awoke to the importance of good roads, and today as a result our country is interlaced with a system of fine highways leading from the North to the South, and from the East to the West.

It is interesting to note that one of the early famous roads was known as the "Wilderness Road" which was first called "Boone's Trace", which began as a trail, later a road from the Wautauga settlements in North Eastern Tennessee and North Carolina to Kentucky. The route crossed the Holston, Clinch and Powell Rivers, traversed the Cumberland Gap, and followed the Indian "Warrior's Path" to the present Manchester, Kentucky, then followed a buffalo trace to the Kentucky River near Boonesboro, and an extension ran to Lexington, with branches to Louisville and to Harrodsburg. This route was blazed by Daniel Boone in 1775. In 1795 and later, the Kentucky Legislature provided for a wagon road, ferries and other improvements.

Our state has made remarkable progress within the last 25 years, not only in trade and commerce and education, but in the way of road construction as well, and road construction has brought about the great improvements in our state in other lines. It brings tourists to Kentucky, it makes modes of travel and transportation easier and more economical, and with the construction of new roads comes new business.

Present officials of Kentucky have seen fit to place in the strategic positions those people best fitted to guide and aid in the construction of roads — people who have devoted their lives to this work — people of experience and ability, and because of this fact Kentucky has progressed rapidly in more and better roads, and our own Highway Department is now in the hands of men educated in road building, practical in experience, sympathetic to rural life, and I predict a great future for farm to market roads.

Most of us are from the country and are more interested in our own county roads, farm to market roads, than we are the main highways.

Under the political set up in our counties, with the County Judge being Judge of the County Court, Judge of the Quarterly Court, Judge of the Juvenile Court, Judge or presiding officer of the Fiscal Court, Judge of the Probate Court, and being the general head of the economics of the county affairs, it is almost impossible for him to have the time, even though he might have the ability, to go out and supervise the construction of highways. You hear it said, and frequently so, and truthfully so, that "I went to see the county judge but he was out," and of course some people want to believe that he is out for no good reason, when as a matter of fact he may be out then, even though he has a county road engineer, listening to the complaint or looking over some road of which he has knowledge which needs some work, in order that he might be better able to advise his Fiscal Court at the next meeting.

We are not kidding ourselves, neither are we fooling the voters, as county judges, when we undertake to supervise the construction of the highways in our county.

The State has lifted a tremendous burden from the county judges and Fiscal Court by installation of the rural highway department, thereby taking many miles of road under its supervision and maintenance, but at the same time, when a citizen has a complaint to make about the State Highways or the Rural Highways or the county road, he starts with the county judge.

There is one main problem in county road building. It is the same problem that we have in every walk of life. We had it in the beginning, and we will have it in the end, and that is money. And as Senator Withers so well stated on numerous occasions while he was Highway Commissioner: "I have never found any substitute for money." Therefore, when the money runs out that is the end of the Highway Department's help.

As you so well know, all of our funds are raised by taxes, whether it be county, city or state, and the power to tax is the power to ruin. We, as a land of plenty, have grown to know more luxuries than have ever been known in the history of mankind. We dislike to forego some of those luxuries, but we cannot kill the goose that lays the golden egg. That is the tax payer. Therefore, remember, there is a limit to all good things, and we must not let ourselves overtax our good people.

The county road problems are many and perhaps, due to the lack of time, due to the lack of finances, or in the pressure of an election

year, we lose sight of the fact that a road is a permanent thing, will help many or few people, and therefore in the interest of expediency agree to build a road without too much consideration.

If you decide to build a home or other structure for yourself, you have some idea what you want, what you can pay for, and you look at other buildings, ask for advice and perhaps employ an architect.

Therefore, I would say that our second problem is proper supervision in the construction and maintenance of county roads. I can give you an answer to that problem and that is to employ a competent road engineer. Some few counties now have road engineers, but unfortunately so many counties are not financially able to employ one. Some provision should be made for every county to employ a road engineer.

The third problem is to determine whether to spend all your money on one road in one neighborhood, or divide it up and give each section of the county some benefits of the tax money.

The business answer is obvious, and that is to build one good road in a particular section this year, and move on to another section the next year, however, the practical and best solution is to divide your funds and spread out over the county, thereby giving a return of tax money to all parts of the county.

We oftentimes also have a problem in obtaining rights-of-way, but those troubles can be eliminated by moving on to a new community. So often the land owner thinks the state or county is paying the bill and he should charge. However, we have found that with the right approach these handicaps can be overcome. The remedy is, do not buy any rights-of-way.

With the money problem reconciled to our size, with the employment of a competent road engineer, and having decided where the roads should be constructed, then our next step should be either to discuss the matter with the State Highway Department, if you do not have an engineer or on the other hand, leave it to your own engineer giving him a free hand, good equipment, and he will construct a road that you will be proud of and the people will appreciate.

Sometimes we give too little thought to drainage.

The great buildings of our land are no stronger than their foundation is firm. Our people are no more solid than our faith. Our roads are no better than their drainage.

With the help of the Rural Highway Department and the fine cooperation of the two cent mileage program, and our own county revenue, all our county roads can and will be unexcelled by any state.

We should profit from the experience of the ancient road builders and better plan our work in the future.