

# Planning, Building, and Dedicating a New County Highway Garage

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Until about three years ago the Carroll County Department of Highways continued to operate in the same manner and under the general set-up that existed at the time the counties assumed control of the roads from the townships in 1932. In Carroll County, we have 14 townships and about 880 miles of county-maintained highways. Until our reorganization, we attempted to maintain on the township-unit plan by having sub-supervisors in each of the fourteen townships. While these sub-supervisors were theoretically under the direct control of the county highway superintendent, the plan proved to be unsatisfactory in accomplishing the work needed. The division of funds available for labor and material created an unhealthy rivalry between the townships. It was necessary to put practically all our employees, except the superintendent, on a part-time basis, and made the jobs we had to offer undesirable. Justice could not be done to the highways or to the men employed.

One of the most important handicaps to our former organization was the lack of equipment sufficient to supply each township with necessary implements and to shift such equipment to places where it was needed most. We had no central headquarters from which equipment could be allocated, or a place where we could properly care for and maintain what equipment we did have. The rate of depreciation on our tractors, drags, and maintainers was too high by reason of improper maintenance. Equipment was scattered all over the county, in barn lots, fields, and every place except where it should be. I have no doubt that Carroll County has lost a fair amount of equipment by the very nature of our set-up and under conditions which could not be remedied without some considerable expense.

These conditions made it imperative for us to reorganize our highway department and to convince the public, the state officials, and our county

council that a major expenditure was necessary. Mr. Ross, Mr. Gard, and I spent many days visiting surrounding counties and inspecting their organizations and general set-up. We were convinced that it was time to end township organizations and to erect a central garage. In spite of the high cost of construction, it would be a good investment for the county, and better roads would result. You can imagine some of the opposition that was encountered in selecting a location for a public building and reducing the number of supervisors. Our former highway office was in the Court House at Delphi, which is not centrally located, being near the western boundary of the county.

## FINANCING

The principal obstacle to remedying our situation, other than pressure groups, was finance, which always confronts county commissioners. We did not want to issue bonds or make it necessary to raise our tax rate. In our visits to other counties, the cost of erecting a building to suit our needs was one of our primary interests. We employed an architect and received valuable suggestions from other commissioners and from local contractors. We finally decided that we could erect a building to suit our present needs and allow for further expansion for less than \$40,000. We searched the laws for means to make this money available. We learned that the county auditor had enough money in the school fund which had not been loaned, and that it was possible for the county to use that money. You know the county pays the state 4% interest on all school funds in the custody of the auditor, and the only way the county can break even on such funds is to loan them on real-estate mortgages. We were levying taxes to pay the state interest on funds which were not being used. The law permits the county to borrow this money for emergency purposes; so if we could borrow this money, upon which we were already paying interest, we would not have to pay additional interest on the money used to erect our structure. I won't go into all of the technical, legal phases of making such money available (our county attorney says that for a reasonable fee he will give you the procedure).

Our first hurdle was the county council. We met with them informally on several occasions, and it was not too hard to convince them of the necessity for such a building. There was some dissension on the location question, as was only natural, since they represented all sections of our county. But such opposition was not too serious. The council passed an ordinance permitting and pledging the county to repay the loan and appropriation of \$38,000 for the new building. We borrowed \$38,000

from the school fund for a five-year period at 4% interest, which, as I have said, we were paying already. We appropriated the fund for *a county building*, not *a highway garage*, which was a technical point but necessary under the procedure we were following. Upon completion, the county leases the building to the highway department.

The building, in the center of the county at Flora, was completed for approximately the \$38,000, including the land, building, water supply, architect fees, and landscaping. It was constructed by local contractors at local wage rates; and in comparison with costs for constructing similar buildings we feel that the county received an above-average job.

The building is constructed of 12-inch hollow and glazed shale tile, with steel beams, wood rafters, and wood sheeting under a built-up roof. We have a concrete floor throughout the building, which has a floor area of 6,780 square feet. The outside dimensions of the garage are 60 feet by 113 feet. Our shop area is 40 feet by 40 feet; the storage room for equipment is 58 feet by 71 feet; the parts room is 14 feet by 17 feet; and the superintendent's office is 14 feet by 17 feet. The building has two rest rooms, an oil-fired steam furnace, and approval from the state fire marshal and board of health. Two 14-foot by 12-foot Crawford overhead doors provide passage through the entire building. We have our own well for water and plenty of ground for expansion and storage outside the building. The building is about one mile from a railroad siding, where equipment can be unloaded.

We have employed a full-time mechanic and have a fairly complete inventory of tools, which were purchased out of the budget of the highway department.

During the past two and one-half years we have purchased a truck for each of the districts that were created when we reorganized. We now have seven districts instead of fourteen. All our equipment is now serviced and repaired at the garage. We know where it is and in what condition.

We have had to spend a considerable amount of money in obtaining this building and reorganizing our department, but our brief experience shows that the money was well spent and that the people of our county are already receiving more for their gas-tax dollar.