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Iowa Farm Opinion And The Good Roads Movement, 1903-1904

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On April 13, 1904, Governor Cummins of Iowa signed a bill authorizing the establishment, on a very small scale, of the Iowa State Highway Commission. Though this was done with no fanfare and little public notice, it was the first step in taking road administration matters in Iowa from the hands of local authorities, a turning point of sorts in the state's highway policy, and important in the evolution and development of central government agencies in the United States at the expense of local bodies.

In 1904, Iowa had 102,448 miles of road. It was third in the nation in total road mileage, behind Texas and Missouri. Of this mileage, 1,403 was gravel-surfaced, 241 macadam or other stone, and 20 surfaced with other materials. In other words, only 1.62% of Iowa's roads were improved.¹ This was less than in neighboring Wisconsin, Illinois, or Minnesota, and contributed to Iowa's reputation as one of America's worst "mud road" states.

Originally in Iowa, as in most other areas of America before extensive settlement, roads were laid out along divides between watercourses, to conform to natural drainage patterns.

¹ Maurice O. Eldridge, *Public-Road Mileage, Revenues, and Expenditures in the United States in 1904*, Office of Public Roads, Bulletin No. 32, 1907.

With increasing habitation, they were made to conform to property boundaries, which were almost always lines drawn in accordance with the federal land survey system. That system made no allowances for topography. Most Iowa rural roads at the beginning of the 20th Century, therefore, were laid out along section lines, and were thus liable to steep grades and severe washing and drainage problems.

Iowa rural road administration at this time was a purely local affair. County supervisors could determine road locations, change the course of existing roads and levy a county bridge tax.² The power of eminent domain implied in these functions was, however, seldom used in most places. Township trustees supervised the actual road work. They determined the amount of property tax to be levied to support the township roads during a given season. Until 1902, that township road tax could be paid either in road work by the farmer taxpayers themselves, or in cash, at the option of the trustees. Most farmers appear to have worked out their taxes. By statute, they were not to work farther than three miles from their homes. All able-bodied men between the ages of 21 and 45 were also obligated to perform two days of labor on the roads annually as a poll tax. In the fall of the year, each township was divided into as many road districts as deemed necessary. Each district had its own supervisor, who spent tax money or directed road work.³

Like so many similar American domestic institutions, for it was by no means confined to Iowa at this time, this system of road administration was derived primarily from the English common law, which early defined a local responsibility for road-making. Involved in the common law concept were required labor on the roads in payment of property tax, and obligation, similar to jury duty, for each man to serve as local road overseer.⁴ A parallel also exists in the *corvée* in France. This is a static concept, adequate to only a domestic, rural economy. By the middle of the 19th Century, however, England and other European countries were centralizing road

² *Code of Iowa, Annotated*, 1897, Title VIII, Ch. 1, 554-569.

³ *Ibid.*, Title VIII, Ch. 2, 569-582.

⁴ Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Governments The Story of the King's Highway*, London, 1913, 14-24, 27.

management. Concurrent with the trend toward English industrialization and urbanization was the tendency of county councils and "rural sanitary authorities" to assume greater responsibility in road administration. The trend was toward road work done by professional, technically trained personnel rather than amateurs. Ultimately, statutory recognition was made of the national obligation to contribute to the support of certain types of roads.⁵

There was no such concurrent trend in the United States. The most obvious explanation seems to lie in the thinly-populated vastness of the 19th Century America, which made for local isolation and extreme local sentiments of self-sufficiency. Decentralization was a dominant American political tradition until the Civil War forcefully imposed the paramountcy of the federal government over the rights of individual states. Within the states, the tradition of self-government at county, township and lower levels was deeply rooted and jealously guarded. There was, of course, a precedent for actual or attempted federal intervention in road building, in the military roads constructed in frontier areas and in the internal improvements program of the first few decades of the 19th Century. The latter program was for the most part abortive, however, being suppressed by sectional interests, the question of its constitutionality, and finally the advent of railroads. Though some states during this period had undertaken to support road programs, by 1850 neither the states nor the federal government had any interest in highway affairs. The control of roads had reverted to county and township agencies.

Charles L. Dearing points out a parallel, in this traditional cleavage to parochial political institutions, between the local rural road function in America and rural school policies. In neither case, he says, was American society conscious of its collective needs or capacities. Neither field had standards of performance professionally formulated and accepted by public opinion. Emphasis in the United States at this time was on extensive, rather than intensive accomplishment.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 167-170.

⁶ Charles L. Dearing, *American Highway Policy*, Washington, 1941, 46.

After the Civil War, reactions against the physical condition of the rural roads of the United States became increasingly noticeable. Urbanization and the consequent expansion of domestic markets for agricultural products, the growth of the world market, made possible by technological advances in agriculture and communications, and perhaps a consciousness of the poor showing of American roads compared to those elsewhere contributed to this. In any area of agricultural production, farm goods were transported by wagon to local market or to railhead, and often the cost of this transportation was directly proportional to the condition of the roads. In agricultural areas, good roads agitation was therefore usually oriented to a farm-to-market interpretation of the highway function. In the northeast, where industrialization was heaviest and population around urban centers dense enough to make suburban development possible, good roads sponsors were able to point to the need for inter-community roads, and a direct causal relationship between highway development and land values. In any event, the good roads movement appears to be of urban and predominantly economic origin, although Dearing points out altruistic motives too. He calls the good roads movement "a national undercurrent of pressure for adjustments that would enable the rural population to share in the new ways of life emerging from industrialization." The rural economy was restricted by 18th Century standards of mobility, he says, while the urban population was blessed with modern technology and organization.⁷

Leaders of the early good roads campaign undeniably represented urban interests. Academic leaders, interested in improving government performance of basic functions contributed to a theoretical basis for improved highway administration and finance. They were seconded by more pragmatic bicycle and road equipment groups, and later, automobile interests. Railroads were strong supporters of the movement. They regarded rural roads as feeders to their systems, and were particularly active in the movement for improved farm-to-market roads after it became apparent that motor vehicle

⁷ Dearing, *American Highway Policy*, 46.

transportation might become competitive in inter-city movement of goods.

In 1893, the federal government began to participate in the good roads movement in a small way, through the activities of the newly-organized Office of Road Enquiry in the Department of Agriculture. This agency at first promoted state aid to road building through the collection and dissemination of data regarding the progress of highway programs in those states, mostly in the northeast, which had by that time inaugurated state highway programs. It also conducted surveys on such matters as the comparative transportation costs on wagon roads and railroads.

Somewhat in line with the national movement, there was expression of the need for increased efficiency in road work in Iowa as early as 1883. This was probably aggravated by the fact that Iowa roads were particularly impassable during the winter of 1882-83. S. D. Pryce of Iowa City, in a letter to the Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, pointed out:

1. The great economic loss to farmers through bad roads.
2. The contradiction of Iowa's high rank as an agricultural state and her possession of the "highest per cent of poor roads of any country . . ."
3. The folly of working roads in the fall of the year. This was an inefficiency inherent in the statute labor system, as farmers were needed in the fields during the spring and early summer, the best road-working seasons.
4. The necessity of graded, tile-drained gravel or macadam roads, depending on topography and the availability of materials.
5. The wastefulness of paying taxes in labor.

To counter this situation, Pryce recommended the repeal of the statute labor provision in the road laws, which permitted the payment of taxes in road work; a uniform tax of five mills on the dollar, to be paid into the county treasury, not the township treasury; the appointment by the governor of a highway commissioner in each county to oversee road work; and the contracting of road building to responsible parties, with

drainage and grading to be placed under the supervision of a competent civil engineer.⁸

Most of this program was adopted in resolutions by the first of a number of Iowa good roads conventions, at Iowa City the following March. In addition, the Convention advocated the abolition of road districts within townships, and the supervision of all roads in a township by a single commissioner.⁹ In response to this, a memorial was sent to the General Assembly from Warren County the following year, claiming that local road administration and finance were "more in accord with the provisions of justice and liberty and the requirements of free government than the suggestions of the late commission."¹⁰

The 1884 Iowa legislature, in partial accordance with the suggestions of the convention, provided for a county road fund of one mill, payable by all citizens, as distinguished from the previous sole road revenue source provided by the township fund. This new county road fund could be spent as the supervisors saw fit. On local option, the trustees might organize a township into a single road district. When this was done they could order township highway taxes to be paid only in money, and could themselves direct its expenditure and let out contracts for road work to individuals thus held more responsible to high work standards.¹¹ Apparently this privilege was not often exploited, and most Iowa townships retained the old system of multiple road districts and statute labor.

Little further attention was given by the General Assembly to road matters for some time, though in other parts of the country the good roads movement was mushrooming. In fact in 1900, G. H. Van Houten, secretary of the Iowa Board of Agriculture, was able to write:

The Good Roads Movement has not yet struck Iowa as it has in some states. There is plenty of room for improvement. The wild schemes advocated by some and the extravagant statements made

⁸ John E. Brindley, *History of Road Legislation in Iowa*, Iowa City, 1912, 184-185, citing *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), Jan. 3, 1883.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹ *Laws of Iowa*, 1884, Ch. 200, 217-220.

do not advance interest in the movement that is expected . . . The facts are bad enough and road improvement should receive attention, and the best methods for each locality adopted for early and effective improvement.¹²

Action was forthcoming, however, in the 1902 General Assembly. Recognizing roads were bad and the old system inefficient, the legislature made mandatory what had previously been optional. A new road law, authored by the House Committee on Roads and Highways, abolished the office of district road supervisor, and consolidated all road districts into single township bodies, the supervisors of which were to be appointed by the trustees. Road taxes were to be paid in money only, although the annual poll tax labor provision was retained.¹³

The new road law, called the Anderson law after its most vocal House supporter, an Indianola newspaper publisher, was approved by the State Board of Agriculture, the Iowa Good Roads Association, and such influential farm journals as *Wallaces' Farmer* and *The Homestead*.¹⁴ Farmer reaction was mixed. The new law violated a long-standing tradition of extreme localism and personal participation in self-government, and met some strong opposition. The new law also was used as a starting point for Iowa partisans of further centralization in the form of state and federal participation in road affairs. As is often the case, agitation ran far ahead of legislation. Pending in Congress at the time were the Brownlow and Latimer bills for federal aid to highways. *The Homestead* came out in favor of these, and also pointed up the success of eastern state-aid programs, the fruits of which were becoming noticeable in the construction of improved roads.¹⁵

The Iowa Good Roads Association met in Des Moines late in April, 1903. It advocated national aid for the building of

¹² *Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1900, 97-98.

¹³ *Laws of Iowa*, 1902, Ch. 53, 30-32, Ch. 64, 40.

¹⁴ *Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1902, 9; *The Homestead*, Sept. 10, 1903, 4(324), Jan. 7, 1904, 11(11); *Wallaces' Farmer*, April 17, 1903, 582. Page numbers for *The Homestead* indicate the page in a given issue, and cumulative page number for the volume.

¹⁵ *The Homestead*, Feb. 12, 1903, 30 (306), Feb. 26, 1903, 5 (393), May 21, 1903, 4 (596), Dec. 24, 1903, 3 (917), Jan. 28, 1904, 5 (133), Feb. 4, 1904, 8 (180).

permanent highways, with a "just and reasonable" distribution of the aid money among the states. Local authorities were to select the roads to be improved, however. The Association requested the next General Assembly, which was to meet in 1904, to enact suitable legislation in the spirit of those resolutions.¹⁶ The editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* lauded the sincerity of the delegates to the convention, and their deep interest in good roads. He pointed out, however, that they were mainly from the towns and cities of Iowa, and thus the proceedings of the convention did not closely touch the actual situation. Alluding to the fact that in Iowa, good roads still most directly affected farmers, he declared that:

Four fifths of the farmers will have no interest whatever in macadamized or covered roads this year. They may come in time, but not now. The aid from the federal government, state and county may be available some time in the future, but the present difficulty which confronts the farmers in how to make the roads passable this year, next year, and the year afterwards.

He turned to a technical argument as a solution to the problem. Uncontrolled water, he asserted, was the prime cause of bad roads, and the main issue confronting farmers with regard to roads, was how to get rid of it.¹⁷

In *The Homestead* shortly after appeared a long article backing state aid, and enumerating the advantages of intelligent professional supervision in laying out roads, and selecting materials and methods of construction, as opposed to local patchwork techniques of which must be undertaken on already existing roads subject to poor drainage and steep grades.¹⁸ Another argument used by *The Homestead* in favor of centralization was the fact that rural schools could be improved through consolidation, but that consolidation could never come about if roads continued to be built through the use of local financial and labor resources.¹⁹ Answering claims that federal road-building would be paternalistic, it was replied that "this is no more the case than it is in the Post Office Department." In the same article the editor wrote,

¹⁶ *The Homestead*, April 23, 1903, 4 (816); *Wallaces' Farmer*, May 1, 1903, 653.

¹⁷ *Wallaces' Farmer*, May 1, 1903, 651.

¹⁸ *The Homestead*, May 21, 1903, 4 (996).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1903, 3 (917).

"When it is considered that 95 per cent of the entire freight tonnage of this country is first transferred over the common road it must appear at once that, after all the road question is not merely a matter of local concern." The question, nevertheless, came closer to the farmer than anyone else, he continued. The farmer had to move freight. When roads were impassable prices tended to soar, and later might be depressed by over-supply.²⁰

In rebuttal, *Wallaces' Farmer* returned to its technical argument.²¹

The United States government with all its power . . . can not make good roads unless they first drain the land. If the water had a chance to get away from under the roads, from beside the roads, and run off the top, we would have good roads anywhere in the country. They could be improved by graveling, by macadam, by putting on burnt gumbo, or the gaub from the coal mines . . . after they are first drained, but not before.

The neighborhood that leans on the government for what it can do for itself, said the editor, "leans on a broken reed." Some day tax money might be diverted to road purposes from funds "wasted every year on rivers and harbors, where there is no water either in the river or the harbor," but it would be useless to create new taxes at that time.²² An ultimate panacea was foreseen in the extension of inter-urban railroad lines into the country, but for the present the existing local road structure was sufficient. The new road law, said the editor, had provided for work to be done by efficient, responsible road builders. Farmers must learn when to do road work and what kind of equipment was necessary.²³

How Iowa farmers themselves felt about the good roads problem in general is probably best reflected in their correspondence to farm journals, and in the activities of the General Assembly in 1904. The area of origin of most of the letters to periodicals, the southern and western parts of Iowa, is the region roughly commensurate in the state with the Kan-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Jan. 28, 1904, 5(133).

²¹ A degree of personal animosity existed between James M. Pierce, publisher of *The Homestead* and Henry Wallace. Wallace had been editor of *The Homestead* until February, 1895. See Russell Lord, *The Wallaces of Iowa*, Boston, 1947, 130-132.

²² *Wallaces' Farmer*, May 29, 1903, 783.

²³ *Ibid.*, April 17, 1903, 582, Feb. 12, 1904, 197.

san glacial drift area. The soils of this area are mostly loess, composed of small, windblown particles. Such soil absorbs and holds moisture, and washes badly. In this area there is no gravel or stone road building material available in quantity, except in a few stream beds. The topography of this region is of extreme age, as the Kansan was the earliest of the ice sheets. It is characterized by well-developed stream courses and alternating ridges and valleys, yet the roads of the area historically conformed to section lines, and were thus subject to all the problems attendant to straight roads in undulating country. Northern and Central Iowa belong to the Iowan and Wisconsin drift areas. This area is relatively flat, thus drainage is a problem. Gravel and road-building materials are abundant, however, in terminal moraines and other deposits.²⁴ In spite of these facts it does not follow that the majority of letters from South and West Iowa favored state or federal intervention in road-building, or any other broadening of the tax base. The heavy correspondence only indicates that the road problem was most strongly felt there. Unless specifically solicited,²⁵ most of the letters from farmers came during the months of January, February and March, when rural roads were at their worst.

Of the few pleas, direct or indirect, for state aid, most relied on rather general arguments. A farmer from near Swea City, for instance, felt that if localities must depend on their own resources for good roads, two or three generations might yet pass before much headway could be made. "It seems to tax our ability to ever hold our own—to maintain and keep culverts and grades in repair, let alone putting in new grades and culverts in places where urgently needed. State or national aid will be needed."²⁶ Some, however, specifically thought of state aid as financial support, without any resultant loss of local authority. A township road superintendent from Lineville, on the Missouri border, interpreted state aid as a

²⁴ Geological problems posed to Iowa road-builders were discussed in considerable detail in the *First Annual Report of the Iowa State Highway Commission*, 1905.

²⁵ *The Homestead* devoted several pages in its June 25, 1903 edition to letters it had previously requested on the best ways to build roads.

²⁶ *The Homestead*, June 25, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 2 (102).

device to provide hard-to-get gravel, with which local labor would improve the roads. "As about 65 per cent of our taxes are raised on farm products," it would be more than right to share the greater road tax obligation. He, as had the editor of *Wallaces' Farmer*, favored a diversion from rivers and harbors money for this purpose.²⁷ The most extreme instance of favor to government aid came from a correspondent who advocated the employment of convict labor from the state prisons on the highways.

This would remove one of the greatest items of expense of permanent roads in the central west. This, could we have government ownership of railways (and who knows but what we may by the time we are ready for permanent highways) with free transportation from factory to point where used, would bring the era of permanent roadway into sight.²⁸

Several farmers felt the need of trained road workers more important than state funds for hard surfacing. The new road law, which made contract labor mandatory, should be strengthened, they implied, by a state agency to train road workers in sound techniques. *The Homestead* specifically called for the establishment of a department of good roads at Iowa State College to provide this.²⁹ A precedent for such work at the college already existed. Some experimental road building and demonstration had been done at Ames in 1902, and instructive articles on road matters appeared from time to time in the College's periodical the *Iowa Agriculturalist*.³⁰ A farmer near Fort Madison felt such instruction necessary to dictate a uniform standard of quality on the state's roadways. "The state allows that there must be highways, but it has no practical ideal by which to judge workmanship."³¹ Another thought of such an agency as an information agency, much like the Office of Road Enquiry, to advise the best techniques and surfacing methods for Iowa.³²

The Anderson Law of 1902 attracted some favorable comment, but was most often thought of as the ultimate step in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, June 25, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 2 (102).

²⁸ *The Homestead*, Sept. 24, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 11 (139).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1903, 1 (1).

³⁰ Samuel C. E. Powers, "The Iowa State Highway Commission," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 29 (1931) 217; also E. A. Stout, "The Good Roads Problem," *Iowa Agriculturalist* 5 (May, 1904) 13-20.

³¹ *The Homestead*, June 25, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 5 (105).

³² *Ibid.*, 5-6 (105-106).

good roads administration. A Muscatine County farmer said, "With the road taxes we are now paying, we could have the best roads in the world, if the work was only done right, and no time wasted."³³ Another, however, would enlarge the tax district to include whole counties, in order that town dwellers might bear some of the burden of improved roads.³⁴ This was understandable, and many complaints arose from the inequality of road taxation. To farmers, good roads would represent an increase to an already inequitable tax load, in that they might be assessed up to five mills for road purposes, but town dwellers only one mill, represented by the county road fund. Township levies did not apply to town dwellers.³⁵

This is probably one reason why the most common arguments against good roads were economic and anti-urban. Many of these ignored the possibility of state or federal aid or any kind of broader tax base. Prospective road improvements were thought of as coming about under the existing legal structure. Thus farmers in Southern and Western Iowa, the same area where some called for state and federal support to pay for surfacing materials, might also denounce good roads agitation because of the expected expense to farmers, and call the entire campaign a device of bicycle and automobile manufacturers and other urban interests. A farmer from Bloomfield wrote:

I am a friend to any good road movement that may be agitated by the farmer, but . . . the greatest howl is coming from a class who would hardly know a plow from a self-binder; they are the automobile and bicycle factories and the improved road tool builders. I have been a delegate to the good road conventions and I have found the speakers did not belong to the "overall brigade," but, on the other hand, they were from the cities and advocated crush stone roads to be paid by the adjoining land owners.³⁶

Another admitted that "the roads most of the time are not fit for pleasure driving, but they do fairly well for our needs."³⁷ Others, influenced by the high cost of material in their own communities, claimed the expense of surfacing

³³ *Ibid.*, July 30, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 12 (128).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1903, 26 (1142).

³⁵ *Code of Iowa, Annotated*, 1897, Title VIII, Ch. 2, 570-571.

³⁶ *The Homestead*, June 25, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 7 (91).

³⁷ *Wallaces' Farmer*, June 26, 1903, 908.

would be too great even if state or federal aid were forthcoming. A farmer near Ottumwa thought improved roads might sometime come, "but the country will have to be richer than it is now."³⁸

Similar arguments were used by the most conservative of all letter writers: those who not only opposed centralization of the road function in state or federal authority, but who opposed the Anderson Law of 1902 and the small degree of governmental consolidation it represented. They repeated the belief that the good roads movement originated among those not expecting to pay any of the additional taxes required. A Warren County correspondent of *Wallaces' Farmer* pleaded, "for goodness sake let us have our legislators stop the making of new laws to bleed the farmers. We will see that the roads are passable."³⁹ Another, referring to money payment of road taxes at his former residence in Ohio, claimed, "The road tax bankrupted almost every farmer who had a debt of consequence, and will do the same in Iowa."⁴⁰ The new road law was said not to secure for the townships their full opportunity to exploit the existing circumstances affecting roads and the labor market. "No one is so well qualified to judge of these conditions as the resident taxpayers of the several townships," asserted a Woodbury County writer.⁴¹

One of the most articulate pleas for decentralized administration came from a *Homestead* correspondent identifying himself only as "Hawkeye Subscriber." Farmers, he said, use roads more than anyone else and have greater interest than anyone else in making roads passable. Therefore, they should have the privilege of working out their taxes on roads between their own farms and market towns, rather than see their money expended for improvements "five or six miles away," on projects not directly benefiting them. "The tendency and drift of public sentiment and all legislation is toward centralization and consolidation, when it ought to be in the other direction, to distribute power and divide honors, and make

³⁸ *The Homestead*, June 25, 1903, Farmers' Institute Edition, 7 (91).

³⁹ *Wallaces' Farmer*, Jan. 29, 1904, 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Feb. 12, 1904.

⁴¹ *Wallaces' Farmer*, Feb. 19, 1904.

the individual more responsible, instead of the township, the county, or the mass of the people.”⁴²

It was obvious that the road question would be an important topic in the 1904 General Assembly. Movements afoot in some rural areas to repeal the Anderson Law were being countered by the state and national good roads conventions' demands for a state highway department. *Wallaces' Farmer* reiterated its stand in favor of the Anderson Law, but would commit itself no farther. Shortly before the meeting of the new legislature, the editor advised farmers that all that was needed at the time for good roads was the appointment of competent road supervisors under the existing law, and a solution to the drainage problem.⁴³

The Iowa Farmers' Institute, meeting at Des Moines, Dec. 8, 1903, was addressed by W. H. Moore of St. Louis, president of the National Good Roads Association. Moore made a definite legislative proposal that would leave the initiative for road improvement in the hands of adjacent property owners, but half the cost would be divided among the specific counties, townships and property owners affected.⁴⁴ Moore was seconded at this meeting by D. B. Lyons, president of the Commercial Exchange of Des Moines and secretary of the Iowa Good Roads Association, who opined nevertheless that Iowans were not quite ready for that type of legislation. "But I anticipate that we may be ready sooner than some of you think," he continued, "because we are learning more about it every day." Lyons pointed out that one horse could haul 6270 pounds on a macadam road. Two horses would be needed to pull this load on the best gravel road, five on the best dirt road. "I insist therefore, that the man who is using five horses to draw what only one might haul, is contributing to the value of use of four horses constantly, for the privilege of bad roads. This is his bad roads tax." He further stated that

⁴² *The Homestead*, Dec. 17, 1903, 13 (885).

⁴³ *Wallaces' Farmer*, Jan. 1, 1904, 3.

⁴⁴ *Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1903, 44-48. A bill embodying these proposals was introduced into the Senate early in the session by Sen. Ericson, a Boone banker. It was reported out of committee unfavorably. *Journal of the Senate of the Thirtieth General Assembly of the State of Iowa*, 1904, 321, 547, 598; Senate Bills, 1904, S. F. 244. *Journal* hereafter cited as *Senate Journal*.

farmers are often compelled to accept a ten per cent loss for products when roads were passable, compared to what they could have got during the muddy season, if only they could have delivered their produce to market. Thus, this ten per cent loss was also an outright tax on bad roads. Merchants suffered from this, he concluded, from reduced farmer buying power.⁴⁵ After lengthy discussion on the good roads matter, the Institute issued a final resolution in favor of the Anderson Law until it could have a full and fair trial.⁴⁶

When it convened the following month, the General Assembly was exhorted by Governor Cummins to "go forward slowly" on the road issue, to avoid the burden of increased taxation, "but let us at least go forward."⁴⁷ The main road issue for the legislature turned out to be the Anderson Law. A total of 106 petitions relative to the law were received during the session. Of these, 52 favored repeal, indicating by this means at any rate, an almost equal division of opinion.⁴⁸ House of Representatives deliberations of the road question are probably most significant as indicators of opinion, as farmers were more numerous in that body than in the Senate. They were, in fact, the most numerous occupational group represented in the House, though they did not constitute a majority. It must, of course, be kept in mind that most members of either house represented predominantly rural constituencies and probably responded to prevailing sentiment in those constituencies, regardless of their own occupational background. Most highway legislation was introduced in the House, however, and all such measures had to be reviewed by the House Committee on Roads and Highways before passage. Of the 28 members of that committee in 1904, 17 were farmers. Farmer predominance on the Roads and Highways Committee seems to have been customary at the time.⁴⁹

The Cedar Rapids *Evening Gazette* reported the consensus

⁴⁵ *Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1903, 54-56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1903, 61-62.

⁴⁷ *Journal of the House of the Thirtieth General Assembly of the State of Iowa*, 1904, 36-37. Hereafter cited as *House Journal*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; *Senate Journal*.

⁴⁹ A check of the *House Journal* for ten year periods before and after 1904 indicated this, where occupational information was given.

on road legislation during the first weeks of the session was not to repeal the Anderson Law's provision making road tax payable in cash, but to make its expenditure optional, either by the township trustees or under the old plan involving district supervisors, petitions for repeal notwithstanding.⁵⁰ The majority sentiment of the House Roads and Highway Committee is apparent, however. Three measures that would compromise the Anderson Law by the means described, or permit some work on roads by farmers in lieu of cash payment of property tax, were introduced in the House.⁵¹ Only one of these reached the floor of the House for debate.

That one exception, sponsored by Rep. Chassell, of predominantly rural Plymouth County, was introduced on February 9. In its final form, it would mandatorily divide townships into two or more road districts, in which all or part of the property tax could be paid in road labor. In one sense this bill was a compromise substitute for the Anderson Law, in that it would permit a return to the single township district plan after a two-year trial. In all other respects, it represented a repeal of the new road law.⁵² The Chassell bill was reported unfavorably by the Roads and Highways Committee on March 8, but a committee minority of 13, including eight farmers, offered a slightly revised version as a substitute. The motion of Chassell to accept the minority report was passed, 44-41, and the bill passed the House on final vote, 58-37, on March 18, though with less than half the farmers in the chamber approving it.⁵³ Later, however, the Chassell bill was killed by the Senate Committee on Roads and Highways.⁵⁴

In the light of this sentiment it seems obvious that propositions for state aid programs for roads would be likewise generally unsuccessful. The Iowa Good Roads Association met in Des Moines on February 24 and 25.⁵⁵ It prepared a state aid bill which was introduced in the House on the 25th. The bill

⁵⁰ *Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids), Feb. 10, 1904.

⁵¹ *House Journal*, 196, 199, 304, 383; *House Bills*, 1904, H.F. 202, 257.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 504-505, 561-563, 693-694; also *Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids), Mar. 22-23, 1904.

⁵⁴ *Senate Journal*, 677-683, 747.

⁵⁵ *Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids), Feb. 26, 1904.

provided for a state good roads and drainage commission, which would have general supervision over the roads of Iowa. The commission would employ a fulltime, salaried staff, whose duties would be to investigate the best means for locating, constructing and maintaining highways, and to conduct public meetings and demonstrations in each county each year. It would be the duty of county supervisors, township trustees, or others involved in road work, to make use of the findings and recommendations set forth by the commission.⁵⁶ This was not palatable to the House Roads and Highways Committee, nor were two other even more conciliatory measures, neither of which would involve the expenditure of state funds on actual road projects, or the exercise of state authority. Neither of these would permit the commission to even make recommendations without the invitation of local authorities.⁵⁷

In the waning days of the session, a final road bill was offered in the House by Rep. F. F. Jones of Villisca. This bill would, in accordance with some previous suggestion, make an already-established state agency, Iowa State College, the State Highway Commission. The faculty of the college would function much as the Office of Road Enquiry, as a purveyor of technical advice related to conditions in specific areas, at the request of local authorities in those areas. It would also conduct public demonstrations of road-building techniques. A biennial appropriation of \$7000 was made for this purpose, not to the State Highway Commission *per se*, but to the College directly, "to be used for good road experimentation."⁵⁸ Jones later indicated in an address to a farm group that he chose this expedient because of the already-established interest and ability of the College in the state's agricultural matters. No fault could be found with this by the legislature. The bill passed the House by a vote of 75-4 on March 22, the Senate by 40-0 on April 8, and was signed by the governor on April 13.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *House Journal*, 360, 383; *House Bills*, 1904, H.F. 279.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 105, 383, 521; *House Bills*, 1904, H.F. 40, H.F. 356.

⁵⁸ *Laws of Iowa*, 1904, Ch. 104, 108, Ch. 156, 145; *House Bills*, 1904, H.F. 371.

⁵⁹ *House Journal*, 578, 632, *Senate Journal*, 1143-1144.

The creation of a state highway commission went unnoticed by newspapers and farm journals. *The Homestead* called the 1904 General Assembly "rather uneventful,"⁶⁰ while *Wallaces' Farmer* commented only on the retention of the Anderson Law, and pleaded that farmers "all get down to business in good faith and with the best grace possible," and give the law an honest trial.⁶¹

From the evidence it would appear that Iowa farm opinion on the road question was divided, though certainly not equally, into three categories. One of these groups felt county, state or federal aid necessary to provide necessary road improvements. Roads must be surfaced to be made permanently passable. Local administrative units could not afford this. The other two groups would keep road administration in local hands. One, however, generally felt that no road issue in fact existed. Roads were acceptable in their present condition, and the old, highly personal system of management prevalent before the Anderson Law was sufficient. The second of these groups acknowledged the existence of a road problem, but felt that it could be solved under the Anderson Law structure, providing for township administration and contract labor. The House vote on the Chassell bill would indicate a majority in favor of the more decentralized pre-Anderson Law system, though the activities of the farmer-dominated House Committee on Roads and Highways points up satisfaction in that body with the *status quo*. Underlying all this, in both the considerations of the Anderson Law amendments and the failure of any but the most innocuous state aid measure to be accepted, seems to be a fundamental reluctance of Iowa rural residents to part with their local prerogative in road administration. The need for greater efficiency in road work was generally recognized, and though technical advice might be made available through solicitations, efficiency itself must be self-attained, not imposed from some other source. The widespread use of the automobile and the demands it was to make on the rural road system was, of course, to drastically alter this situation.

⁶⁰ *The Homestead*, April 21, 1904, 7 (655).

⁶¹ *Wallaces' Farmer*, April 22, 1904, 570.

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