

Road Makers Who Have Turned Iowa Soil Into Smooth Boulevards



PART OF A JACKSON TOWNSHIP ROAD BEFORE DRAGGING.



VIEW OF THE UNDRAGGED ROAD AFTER DRAGGING.



WELL CROWNED ROAD THAT SHEDS WATER AND IS SMOOTH AS A FLOOR.



1. H. Stielow; 2. Frank Fuller; 3. George Lyon, Jr.; 4. L. H. Grantow; 5. August Jass; 6. August Stielow; 7. Frank Hiseof; 8. H. Fouts; 9. Dell Cross; 10. O. Huffman; 11. Guy Baker; 12. H. L. Doud; 13. Fred Trickey; 14. H. Eickenbom; 15. W. Shamer; 16. J. L. Simpson; 17. George Cross; 18. E. W. Wolfe; 19. A. J. Bear; 20. Earl Eick; 21. T. E. Crippen; 22. R. S. Shanner; 23. P. Ransom.

MEN WHO DRAG THE ROAD.



TYPICAL STRETCH OF ROAD IN JACKSON TOWNSHIP, HARDIN COUNTY, IOWA.

EL DORA, Ia., Jan. 14.—A little north of the geographical center of Iowa lies Hardin county. Eldora is its county seat. Aside from being a rich farming community and the site of the State Industrial School for Boys, Hardin county makes no further claim to pre-eminence compared with the other ninety-eight counties of the Hawkeye state.

Near the center of the county is Jackson township. Its largest town is Owasco. Jackson township is similar in all ways excepting one, to the rest of the county. Its long level stretches and its low, rolling hills—typical prairie land—make the topography of its thirty-six square miles like the other townships which surround it. The single exception, which is at the same time a difference and a distinction, when compared with its sister townships, and for that matter others of the state, are its good roads. They are of such general excellence and such a source of pride to the inhabitants of the township that they are called highway boulevards, and they well deserve the name.

The traveler may cross the state from Keokuk to Sioux City, from Dubuque to Council Bluffs, and he may traverse all of its highways and byways, but not in another section will he find roads to compare with them.

Because of its good roads and the systematic work which has transferred them from impassable quagmires into highways, which are not only possible, but which in most places during most of the year are as smooth as the average paved street, Jackson township's fame has spread all over Iowa. The township stands alone as the first one in the world to adopt a plan of systematic road dragging with a King drag. With no other materials but the clay and loam, which are the top soils of that section, and with no other implements but the grader and the King drag, the men of this township, under the leadership of Prentiss Ransom, road superintendent of Owasco, have built up and maintained highways like the one which, when material used is considered, cannot be surpassed in the entire west. They have demonstrated beyond the possibility of successful argument that the making of good roads in mud-ridden Iowa without the use of crushed stone, macadam, gravel, cinders or sand, which are so expensive, and none of which are to be had in Jackson township, can easily be accomplished.

Sixty-Five Miles of Boulevards.

Sixty-five miles of highway boulevards. To these sixty-five miles of excellent roads the people of Jackson township point with pride when the wayfarer is within its gates. Stretching back and forth across the township, dividing it into high squares like a gigantic checker board, run the highway boulevards of which the township justly boasts. Some of them run for six miles as straight as the bow string, dipping through shallow valleys and rising over undulating hills and knolls. And every foot of it is like every other foot, wide, smooth and hard. Graded to the center to shed water, dragged to a smoothness almost unbelievable for dirt roads, they are a delight to the auto owners. The farmers, the residents of the township in general, and especially to their maintainers and the signifier of the idea, Prentiss Ransom.

Mr. Ransom, originator of the "systematic road dragging" by townships is a hard headed farmer, whose predominant traits are good common sense and stick-to-itiveness. For years he entertained ideas touching on the question of making good roads, and the possibility of turning clay and loam highways into smooth hard roads. He argued his ideas persistently whenever he could get a hearing. He was an enthusiast on the subject. Eventually his clamor for systematic road making gained attentive ears and he was ap-

pointed road superintendent of Jackson township. That was six years ago. For years he had talked and argued harangued at farmers meetings, institutes and like gatherings that by grading the roads in the spring of the year, and then dragging them with a King drag after each heavy rain, that the result would be not only passable, but excellent roads. Now that he was road superintendent the chance to put his ideas into operation was opened to him, and he was not slow to take advantage of it.

Origin of Systematic Road Dragging.

No sooner had Ransom been placed in charge of the roads of the township than he began to put his ideas into operation. At first it was slow work, and it was an equally tedious and hard task to get the farmers to join hands in this radical movement for good roads. It required education and a practical demonstration to convince many. Farmers accustomed to roads which were impassable during certain months of the year were skeptical. They doubted the feasibility of Ransom's plan, who was considered by many to be a sort of a tinker on the subject of road making. They were equally reluctant to leave the work in the field to get out and drag and grade the roads. They had, however, this redeeming feature, they were open to conviction. When Ransom demonstrated that his theories were practical by grading and dragging certain sections of the highways, and they saw the wonderful change accomplished, the idea began to soak in and lay hold, and it was not long until first one and then another man owner and neighbor began to take an active, then an enthusiastic and working interest in the road building. Having gained a sound footing for his idea, Ransom, with his usual persistency, began to thoroughly develop it. It required three years' time before the development with the grader and King drag came regularly and systematically after every bad storm. But it required the co-operation of the farmers and the systematic dragging of the roads. It had to be kept up to be successful, and there had to be men ready to go on the work whenever called. To accomplish this Ransom divided his township into "stations." At first there were numbered twenty-five, but later this number was increased and each "station" was shortened in length. He then gave each farmer a "station" of six rods along his farm and instructed it was necessary to make the "station" lines as far as possible be the telephone lines which had telephones. Early in the spring the force was sent out to grade the roads with graders. Later when the highways were dragged Ransom calls those who have "stations" to drag on the grader and King drag. The result is that within three hours after every bad rain every foot of the sixty-five miles of roads is gone over and made as smooth as the floor.

This was the origin and the method of systematic road dragging, found that at times and in certain places the clay and loam highways became flat, failed to drain water

and were cut up with wagon tracks and developed mud holes and mires. Such places require special treatment. In his own words, this is how he cares for them: "When the roads become flat and sodded and do not drain properly there should be a couple of furrows plowed along each side of the road as soon as the frost goes out in the spring. When the sod becomes sodded so it will pulverize, commence in the furrows to drag, dragging the dirt to the center, and in a few times of dragging there will be a well-crowned road. In the average Iowa road the furrows should be plowed about a rod from the fence. By following these directions and applying the road drag in systematic dragging any township can have highway boulevards."

For three years now his plan of systematic road dragging has been carried out on every rod of highway in the township. In the spring each road is graded, and where the road has become sodded the fur-

rows are plowed. Then after each heavy rain the drag is run over the roads. Because most of the heavy rains fall during the months of April, May and June the roads are dragged oftener during that quarter of the year. During the drier seasons, weeks and sometimes months elapse without it being necessary to go over the roads with the drag. The work is kept up as late in the winter as the weather will permit.

What Has Been the Cost?

One of the first questions that will arise in the farmer's mind is, What has it cost? The cost has been small and so insignificant in comparison with the results accomplished as to be hardly comparable to what has been attained. The cost has been on an average of about \$1 per mile per year. It has not always cost that much, although the exact amount depends, of course, upon the season. Years when there has been abnormal rainfall the cost has exceeded

drier years. The average is about \$300 for each twelve months, but in 1908 the cost was \$100 less than that amount.

How is this expense for roads met? The toll taxes of those who do the work takes care of part of it. Instead of paying their tax in money the farmers go upon the roads and work it out with the grader or drag. The rest of the cost is paid for at the rate of 50 cents for each mile dragged each time. This money is raised by general tax on the land of the township. It amounts to but a small fractional part of one mill of the annual assessment for taxes, the amount paid by each individual being very small indeed.

During the month of April of last year there came a number of hard rains, more than usually fall in that wet month. The result was that it was necessary to drag the roads many times. Ransom says of that month's work: "We dragged the roads of our township six times in seventeen days, the result being that three days after the last storm we had the roads of the township free from ruts, mud holes and smooth as a board walk. The cost of dragging was about \$25 for each time or about \$150 in all. While that may seem a large amount to expend for dragging in seventeen days, yet we know from experience that our roads can be graded and maintained enough cheaper during the rest of the year to offset the cost of dragging during the seventeen days. We can grade and repair with the grader quicker and easier three times the amount of road than we can grade and systematically in one mile that has not been dragged at all. I do not mean to infer that our township can afford to expend \$150 a month the year around



PRENTISS RANSOM, Owasco, Ia.

for road dragging, but we can afford to drag our township roads regularly and systematically after each rain on an average of from \$250 to \$300 a year, and we believe every cent is returned to us in the saving of grading."

What Has Been the Result.

The result of this systematic grading and dragging of the roads is that the township has roads unsurpassed by any of its kind in the entire Mississippi valley and equalled by few if any. The township sends an open challenge to the world that by its system it can put its roads in the best of condition in less time than by any other method. It is regularly done in three hours. It has been done on a wagon in an hour, and that means that every foot of the sixty-five miles has been gone over, some of it twice in that time.

Other results are that it has increased farm values. The amount is estimated at from \$1 to \$10 an acre. It has lessened the cost of transportation, by reducing the wear and tear on horses, vehicles and harness. It has brought them closer to the farmer, or moved the farm closer to town, because of the lessened time it takes to reach town over the good roads compared with the old muddy roads. It makes the rural mails more regular and earlier, and it makes the township a better place to live in, and the pride which its people take in the roads are reflected constantly in the additional improvements of the homes and the beautifying of the grounds.

Here is the terse way one farmer enumerates the compensation he gets for each time he drags the roads. "Driving over my own dragging. Driving over the dragging of others. It increases the value of my farm. It beautifies my home. I get my mail from one to three hours earlier. The distance to town is shorter. The pleasure of being one to help carry along this grand work. Fifty cents a mile for dragging."

Farmers Are Enthusiastic.

Farmers of the township, who at first were openly sceptical or lukewarm in their interest in this systematic dragging of the roads, are now, with scarcely an exception, warmly enthusiastic in the work. They have seen their bottomless roads transformed into smooth, hard highways and they are not willing to return to the days of impassable, rut-furrowed roads. With one voice those who are engaged in this work of keeping up the roads say: "We deem it just as important to drag the roads when they need it as to till the soil on our farms when it needs it."

So enthusiastic are they, that it matters not what they are doing, when the word comes over the wire from Ransom to get out on the roads, the plow is stopped in the furrow, the harrow is left in the field, and, quitting all else for the time, they hitch to the drag and go skating and sliding back on forth over the highways.

The contention is not made that Jackson township roads are never muddy. Ransom, the oracle on the subject, says regarding this point: "In rainy weather dirt roads are muddy, they always were, they always will be, but get after them with the road drag at the first opportunity and they will never be bad very long at a time."

A point in controversy between advocates of the road dragging system is when is the proper time to drag? Ransom agrees with D. Ward King, the originator of the King road drag, that the time to drag is when the road is plastic but not sticky. In summing up his plan Ransom encompasses it in the following paragraph: "The road drag is a road builder, a road smoother, a money saver and all it needs is for people to put it into complete operation. I have given my plan a thorough test for three years and I have studied its consistency from almost every point and I have become fully convinced it is the best and the cheapest way to maintain earth roads. If all the townships would adopt the systematic method the roads of the state could be dragged like clock work."

Quaint Features of Everyday Life

Even the Teeth Failed.

After giving nine applicants for his hand in marriage, a nine months' trial each to prove their worth as housekeepers, and having rejected them all for the tenth, Frank Bowman, 47, of Nevada City has been able to keep the one he chose as his bride only six months.

Having tried the nine women just long enough to find out their virtues, Bowman was "spelled as a husband," according to his wife, and because he was too conscious of the faults of the woman he finally chose. She couldn't stand the strain of his constant domestic science criticism. Today Lucy E. Bowman, his bride of last August, sued him for divorce.

"I told him," she says, "that I was merely looking for a place to work, but that I did not desire to marry him, and by the end of a month I had become so attached to the three youngest children that I consented."

"He said that I did everything better than any of the other nine housekeepers. In fact, he liked me so well that he threatened to kill himself if I did not marry him. He said that months of experimenting had caused him much disappointment, but that I had compensated for it all."

But no sooner had the marriage been celebrated than Mrs. Bowman's troubles began. She didn't make as good coffee as Miss White did; she couldn't "fix up" the two little girls as well as Mrs. Fletcher did; and Miss Murphy had managed the grocery buying better, etc.

The Doctor's Mistake.

A certain good natured doctor, whose door bell rang late on Christmas evening, supposing that the summons was from some one who needed his services, rose from the bed, put on his dressing gown, and went to the door. A man stood there, holding a huge paper package, from which buds and leaves were protruding.

"Is Miss Caroline Ward in?" he asked.

"She has retired," returned the doctor.

Miss Caroline Ward was his cook.

"Oh sorry, sir, to call so late, something went wrong with the car. I was in. I'll leave this for her, sir, if you will kindly give it to her in the morning."

"Certainly," said the doctor. He took the flowers into the kitchen and placed a dishpan in the sink, drew a few inches of water in it, carefully pressed the base of the package into the water and went back to bed, thinking how pleased the cook would be.

The next morning he found the cook holding a dripping bundle. She was angry.

"Oh I had the pusses, what did this," she said, "I'd empty the kettle on 'em! I'd let 'em see if they could put the hat what my young man brought me in a dishpan I would!"

The doctor left the kitchen somewhat hurriedly.

under circumstances the most favorable the ordinary man turns pale at the altar. Elaborate precautions are taken to divert his mind from the fact, but with all that he still trembles. If it were not for the fact that his faculties are benumbed by the loud music, the rattling of banquets and artificial palms, and the ecstatic buzzing of the unmarried ladies in the audience and the further fact that his distrust is allayed by the appearance of the bride, who is carefully schooled in shrinking gentleness, he would jump out of the window.

But the man who marries Carrie will benefit by no such benign deceptions and annoyances. If there is any music at all it will be the alarming cacophony of fife and snare drums. And Carrie herself will wear no mask of title and talcum. Upon her face will be that same stern frown which bartenders see in the silent watches of the night; upon her head will be that same black bonnet which has long bristled with eloquent threats, and in her hand will be the ancient symbol and instrument of her grim sailing—her glittering hatchet with its sinister liquorish stains. Fancy the agitation of the bridegroom when her glance fixes him! Fancy it—and then fall on your face before that Virginian named Slater. He belongs to the old race of giants. Of such were the men who brave the demons beyond Jehel-Tarik and rid the earth of goblins, tyrants and necromancy.

Fortune in Old Chest.

Mrs. Emma Bailey died at New London, Conn., five months ago, leaving a comfortable home to her daughter, Miss Alice Bailey, but she left little else, so far as anybody knows. Miss Bailey is 67 years old and she looked forward to spending the rest of her life in the cozy little home, keeping the wolf from the door by sewing for her more prosperous neighbors and friends.

One day Miss Bailey took a notion to go through an old cedar chest that her father, Captain William Bailey, had carried to sea with him when he was master of whaling ships many years ago. She took out all the clothing, which had been kept there away from the moths, and at the bottom of the chest she found three bank books, which showed that \$2,500 had been deposited.

A hurried calculation was made by Samuel M. Hinkley, president of the Whaling Bank, where the money was deposited, and it was found that compound interest for

A Courageous Virginian.

Let the name of a Virginian named Slater be scratched over the main entrance to the Hall of Fame, between those of Roscoe and Snake Eater and "my friend, Carl Akery of Chicago," who choked a lion to death with his bare hands and crushed a leopard's lungs with his bare knees. The Washington correspondents have neglected to send out the given name of Mr. Slater, but regarding his valor they are copiously eloquent. He is no common hero of the garden variety—no cheap pursuer of runaway horses or rescuer of boat rockers at Sunday school picnics or slayer of senile hippopotami—but a veritable Olympian, heaven-kissing, unrivaled, unique. To come to the point at once. Mr. Slater has offered to marry Carrie Nation.

The true quality of this remarkable offer, observes the Baltimore Sun, will not be apparent at once. On its face, indeed, it appears to be nothing more than an act of reckless bravado—a symptom of a brag-gadois spirit, more picturesque than brave. But a careful examination of the nature of human marriage and particularly of marriage to an elderly widow armed to the teeth, invests it with colossal daring. Even

December and May.

It is getting to be the fashion nowadays, this mating of December and May. Recently a wealthy woman of Hartford made plans for marrying a schoolboy at New Haven. She was about 70 and he about 16, and her children and grandchildren, when they heard about it, went to the courts and said she was crazy. But the judges knew otherwise, and set her free and let her continue mistress of her own fortune.

Then there was the lady of a noted American family who lived in the mansion on the Hudson. For sixty-eight years she had lived alone, and then she married her hostler, aged 24. What of that? Shall a woman who has lived nearly three score years and ten and still is an old maid, continue so until her death?

Mme. Françoise Mantalstein, 71 years old, and Arthur Springer, 23 years old, have taken out a license to marry in New York City. Speaking for the lady and himself, Master Springer makes this statement: "It is no one's business except our's if we marry." The boy is right; he can marry his stepgrandmother if he wishes, and not even the law can say him nay.