

75 Years Old: The Purdue Road School

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This year is a historic year for the Annual Purdue Road School. As your program boldly states, this one is the seventy-fifth Purdue Road School, the oldest in the nation. That also means the Purdue Road School, today emulated by a similar state highway conference in almost every state, was the first of these in the nation.

Obviously, there must have been some reasons for having the first one in 1915. In January of 1913, Dr. W. K. Hatt, Head of the School of Civil Engineering, issued a call for a Civil Engineering Conference to cover the problems of county surveyors and city engineers. Roads and streets were a big portion of those problems discussed. At a similar conference, held again in 1914, a resolution was passed that called for a provision in the laws of Indiana that there be a yearly school of good roads. In 1915, the name of the Civil Engineering Conference was changed to the Purdue Road School. And each year since, the Purdue Road School has been held in an early month of the year typically at Purdue University.

The first two conferences were arranged to emphasize the needs of county surveyors and city engineers. The participants, however, agreed that the big need for instruction and information was for county road superintendents. Their 1914 resolution called for instruction and discussions on the construction and maintenance of highways and on the manufacture and testing of road-making materials.

It was not until March 21 that House Bill 184, which embodied the 1914 resolution, was passed. It required a county highway superintendent to attend all sessions of the Annual Road School during each and every year of his incumbency and authorized his expenses for attending to be paid from the free gravel road repair fund of his county. Nevertheless, the first Road School was held in 1915 with the annual meeting of the Indiana County Highway Superintendents Association, holding its meeting in connection with it.

The purpose of the Road School in those early years was to bring together city, county, and state officials, contractors, materials and equipment persons, and others who were "interested in street and highway problems to hear various phases of highway problems presented by speakers of local and national reputation, and to exchange ideas with each other. The design of highways, construction methods, maintenance operations, equipment, and traffic requirements are continually changing" (the purpose acknowledged), "and no interested official, engineer, or contractor can expect to keep in touch with these newer developments without taking advantage of such agencies as the Road School." The School was to be scheduled over five days in one week. In 1926 for the first time, some separate sessions of the different groups involved were scheduled.

The 1926 Road School program noted that registration fees of \$2 would be charged for the five days and \$1 would be charged for a shorter period. Room and board were said to be available in the Fowler and Lahr hotels in Lafayette at a cost of \$1.50 to \$3.50 per person per day. Good rooms were also noted as available in private homes in West Lafayette for \$1 per night.

Attendance at the 1915 Road School was 75. This rose to 172 at the fifth School, 306 at the tenth, and 1,097 at the twenty-fifth in 1939. In 1937, the Indiana Legislature approved another Legislative Act establishing the Joint Highway Research Project at Purdue in the School of Civil Engineering and included the Annual Purdue Road School as one of the specific activities of extension that the funds provided for this research and extension organization should cover. As a consequence, no registration fees have been charged attendees since.

The chairman of the two early Civil Engineering Conferences was Dr. W. K. Hatt, who was head of the Purdue School of Civil Engineering. Chairmen of the 75 Purdue Road Schools have been the following.

George E. Martin	1915-1917, 1920
R. C. Yeoman	1918-1919
C. C. Albright	1921-1924
Ben H. Petty	1925-1943, 1946-1956
K. B. Woods	1944-1945
Ben H. Petty, K. B. Woods, J. F. McLaughlin (co-chairmen)	1957-1958
J. F. McLaughlin	1959-1969
William H. Goetz, Harold L. Michael (co-chairmen)	1970-1985
Charles F. Scholer, Kumares C. Sinha (co-chairmen)	1986-1989

The Highway Materials and Equipment Association began official cooperation in 1928 and inaugurated a Road Show as a supplement to the School. This was held each year thereafter, except in 1929, through 1942. During the World War II years, 1943 through 1945, no Road Show was held. It was revived in 1946, but because of University Registration use of the Purdue Armory Building during Road School, it was not held in 1947 and 1948. It again was held in 1949 and 1950 and in even years thereafter until discontinued after 1956.

The Indiana County Commissioners began official cooperation in 1934 and the Indiana Highway Constructors started official cooperation in 1936. By 1924, the State Highway Commission had established a state system of 4,100 miles of which 800 were paved. The state gasoline tax was 2 cents per gallon.

At the 1926 Road School, the banquet speaker was Purdue President Edward C. Elliott. His address was titled, "What's at the End of the Road?" He noted

Nowhere in the history of the world is there a more dramatic story than that found on the pages recording the conquering of that one-time wilderness we now know and cherish as the United States. The stages of exploration, of settlement, of unification and nationalization of this conquering epoch may be written around the thrilling work of the path builders. . . . The builders of the roads, the canals, and the railways gave practical reality of the union, one and indivisible.

On such an occasion as this, one cannot but feel himself in the presence of new pioneers who are building new roadways for the new

civilization already upon us. The modern highway has suddenly assumed a tremendous economic, civic, and aesthetic significance for the American people . . . That we need the good roads we have, there can be no doubt. That we are going to have more and better roads than we have, there can likewise be no doubt . . . Yet how much better off will be the individual citizen of the state when we have 40,000 miles of state highways instead of the present 4,000? Will these same roads make for an aggressive constructive citizenship determined to promote the best interests of the best rural life? . . . Will this same program produce better government? . . .

These are some of the serious questions which those whose duty it is to think for the future as well as live for the present are asking. Unless this great modern public undertaking of road construction shall produce something more than those profits that make for material prosperity; unless these roads furnish something for our people besides the means of speed and pleasure; unless they become a new agency by which men come to know and to understand one another better; unless they become the threads by which we are bound more securely to our common heritage of duties and responsibilities, then I say to you that we shall have spent our substance in vain, and that the roads we build today are leading to the land of nowhere, instead of the land of our dreams and our hopes.

Will hard roads make for a soft civilization is a fair and open public question.

What is your answer to Elliott's queries of over 60 years ago? I believe Elliott would be pleased with the quality of life and the quality of our nation as they are today.

But just as everything at this Road School will not be serious business, the head of the School of Civil Engineering at that same meeting advised the attendees also to enjoy the Road School and offered this anonymous quotation:

The wisest men that e'er you ken
 have never deemed it treason
To rest a bit, to jest a bit,
 and balance up their reason,
To laugh a bit, and chaff a bit,
 and joke a bit in season.

I also want to welcome you to Purdue and invite you to visit the new Civil Engineering facilities. This year we occupied for the first time an addition to our building which permits all of Civil Engineering to be together. We obtained many new laboratories, for both teaching and researching.