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Highway In '28 Insured Kankakee's Importance

Road Built By Gov. Len Small

With the construction of the 46 foot superhighway, route 49 from Chicago to Kankakee, in 1928 by the late Governor Len Small of Kankakee, this city's integration as a city of major importance in the mid-west was assured.

For the first time, a four lane highway was opened for a distance of approximately 60 miles from Chicago. The original section was opened between Kankakee and Richton Park in early 1928 and the remainder completed later that year between Richton Park and its connection in Chicago with South Park avenue at 126th street.

(Route 49, commonly referred to as the Governor's Highway, is now known as U. S. highway 54 between Kankakee and Chicago).

Kankakee became the hub of several important highways in Illinois through the road building program of Governor Small.

Road Praised In Report

"It is probably true that the business interests of Kankakee cannot fully appreciate and comprehend at this time the tremendous asset this highway will be to Kankakee," the Kankakee Chamber of Commerce annual report pointed out in 1929.

"Our hard road transportation system, in conjunction with our excellent railroad transportation, is one of the biggest selling points Kankakee has to offer to new con-

cerns seeking a location," the report declared.

The four lane road between Chicago and Kankakee typified the type of road construction in Illinois during the years 1921 to 1929) that the Kankakeean Len Small held office as the state's chief executive. During his two terms in office, nearly 8,000 miles of new hard roads were constructed in Illinois. Construction was financed by a 100 million dollar bond issue passed by the state legislature in 1924 and by an earlier issue of 60 million dollars.

Warning Given

Before leaving office in January, 1929, Governor Small gave the legislature a warning of what might happen to the state's network of roads if adequate steps were not taken to protect what had been built. His words proved prophetic, for today one of the state's most pressing problems is the deterioration of what was once the nation's proudest highway system.

Governor Small's words were as follows:

... "But important as more and wider roads are to the welfare, pleasure and comfort of our people, it is far more important to preserve the roads that are already built. Our roads have been designed and constructed for carrying for an indefinite length of time with perfect safety the maximum legal load now in force in Illinois. The greatest single menace to the life and usefulness of our highway system is the large motor truck carrying loads in excess of those for which our highway system has been designed, and the one thought, above all others, that I wish to leave with you, members of the General Assembly, and all other future General Assemblies, is to stand firmly and steadfastly for the law as it stands today, and prevent the breaking down and destruction of our roads by overloaded trucks.

"There is great danger that, not realizing the tremendous loss which may occur from doing so, sometime in the future, some legislature may pass a law permitting increased truck loads and before the people have realized the danger, this wonderful system of highways, which has cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars, will be destroyed.

I recommend that the motor vehicle laws be amended so as to provide that the commercial truck be made to pay its fair and just portion of the original cost and maintenance of the public highways which they use."

Note: Since these words were spoken the maximum load for vehicles in Illinois has increased from 20,000 lbs to 72,000 lbs.



Illinois Roads Stood Out In 1920s

Led by a Kankakee man, Governor Len Small, the state of Illinois showed the nation how to pull itself out of the mud in the years following World War I.

This highway map, published in 1926 by the United States Department of the Interior, portrays graphically the progress made by the state of Illinois in highway

construction in the 1920's, when compared with other states.