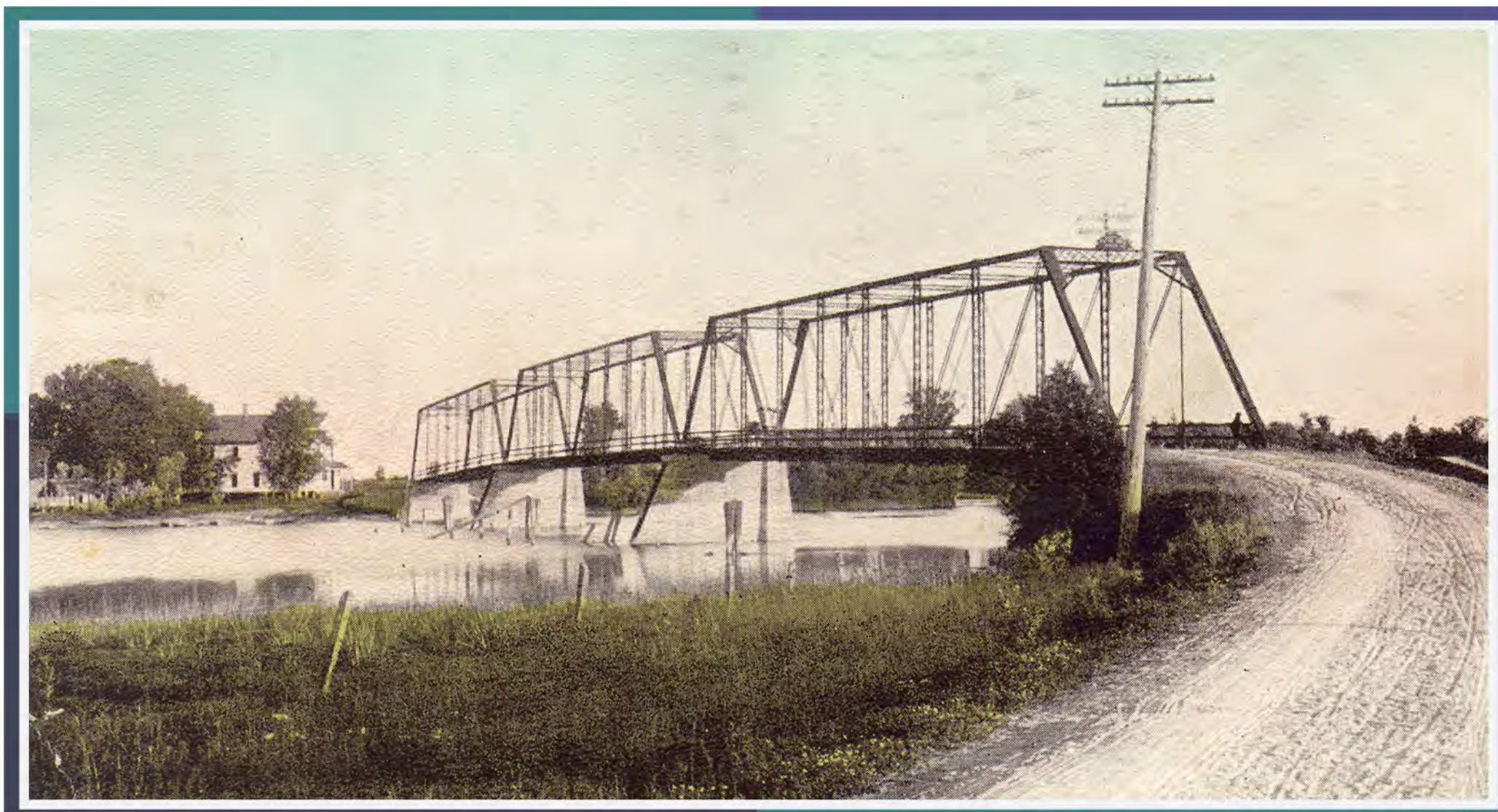




McHenry County Division of Transportation

Celebrating 100 Years, 1913-2013



Chapel Hill Road Bridge Over the Fox River, Johnsburg, IL

Each month this year, a new article celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the McHenry County Division of Transportation will be featured in the Northwest Herald. The first article, printed on January 23, 2013 gave a historical overview of the MCDOT. Watch for the second article on winter operations to be published at the end of February.

The fact that the County Highway Department is celebrating its 100 year anniversary would probably have been difficult to conceive at the time when it was created. In 1913, the need for roads beyond anything necessary for a horse and a wagon could probably be akin to how we talk about flying cars today. Self propelled transporting vehicles (anything but a horse) were for the wealthy and merely a novelty. Considered the first car maker, Benz (Mercedes-Benz) sold only 572 cars in 1879.

It wasn't until 1920 that Henry Ford really got things going with the assembly line making the car affordable "for the common man" by building over 940,000 cars in a single year. So what was happening in Illinois in 1913 that led to the creation of the County Highway system and the County Highway Superintendent several years before the big car boom?

Illinois was one of the leading States when it came to agriculture, industry, commerce, and manufacturing. The railroads and riverboats were king when it came to long distance travel for goods. They were reliable and were rarely affected by the weather. For everyone else, it was a different story. Each spring (planting) and fall (harvest), when it rained, the dirt roads were quagmires for any car and even more difficult for a team of horses. If you weren't near a railroad or river, it was difficult to make long distance trips getting your product to market straining a team of horses. Illinois was "stuck in the mud", literally. Even the urban centers had their problems. City funds were exhausted trying to fix the dirt roads and pedestrians discouraged from shopping left merchants frustrated. Illinois needed a reliable road system, and needed it immediately.

Many moves were tried to accomplish such a coordinated action, but it was not until Homer J. Tice, state representative from Menard County, sponsored Illinois' first good roads legislation that became Law, on June 27, 1913, that things started to happen.



*Homer J. Tice, Greenvew
Illinois State Representative*

Using the already established system of Counties throughout the State, the Law put forth that each County would have a County Highway Superintendent, or County Engineer. This individual would start a directed and coordinated effort to affect the improvement of roads and the road system to allow for their use by the new automobiles and trucks. Upon completing this task, the roads and road systems would be turned back over to the State, and this County level of road department be disbanded. The disbanding part would never happen because the transportation system that had been created necessitated that the County Highway system remain in place along with a professional engineer who could manage it meeting the challenge of the future demands.

That first County Engineer for McHenry County was an ambitious and spirited young man by the name of Charles L. Tryon. The family surname may ring familiar to many residents of the County, as there are relatives and landmarks that still bear that name present to this day.

Since 1913, there have been only six County Engineers, each adding more to the ever evolving position and agency. These changes have not only occurred within the field of transportation and technology, but also within the development of its facilities, equipment, and operations.

The County Engineer position is held today by Joseph R. Korpalski, Jr. Continuing from his predecessors overlying goal, the County Engineer works to provide a transportation system that is safe and reliable for all users. From laying out the first roads, to paving the first roads, to building new bridges or making them safer for today's users, the County Engineer makes it a point to take the best of what his predecessor's had formulated, and continue to work with, make better, and adapt these to the 21st century, and beyond.

Over the course of the this year, the MCDOT will be working with the Northwest Herald to present to you a series of articles covering many topics such as: the history of key road projects in McHenry County, how traffic signals work; and, how McHenry County became world renowned in winter maintenance. The hope from these articles is that you will be fascinated and have a better understanding of the world of transportation which exists around you. We look forward to presenting the information for your enjoyment, and hope that as the year passes and the next century of progress for the MCDOT starts, you will be on the cusp of what lies ahead.



*Charles Tyron
First County Highway Superintendent
1913 — 1958*

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