



McHenry County Division of Transportation

Celebrating 100 Years, 1913-2013

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 sixth article, printed on June 28th, covered the history of County Engineers at the MCDOT. Watch for the seventh article on transportation planning at the MCDOT to be published at the end of July.

History of County Engineers

When one looks at any successful business or organization, the first person who the success is attributed to is the leader of the group. Over the last 100 years at the McHenry County Division of Transportation, successful leaders have helped build an effective organization.

Illinois law requires that each county employ a County Engineer and that person be a licensed Professional Engineer in the State of Illinois. The basic duties of the County Engineer include developing a long-range transportation plan and to repair, maintain and construct the County's highways. As McHenry County has grown over the past 100 years, so has the complexity of the office of the County Engineer. Let's take a look back on the six individuals that have held the office of County Engineer.

The first was Charles L. Tryon. He began in 1913 when Woodrow Wilson was the U.S. President and literally started everything from scratch. As this new idea of building roads took off, there was no state or national guidance. Tryon created notebooks full of articles from across the Nation and World of things that highway authorities were doing. Highway equipment was stored on farms through agreements with farmers up until 1927 when Tyron negotiated a part of the County Fair Grounds property at the corner of Illinois Route 47 and Country Club Road where the Panera Bread now stands. Through his tenure, his responsibility was to build all the county highways from the ground up. No small task for sure that kept him busy during his 45 years in office when he retired in 1958.

The second person to fill the office was Wayne H. Mentzer with Dwight D. Eisenhower as President. He had worked under Charles Tryon prior to becoming County Engineer. While continuing to construct roads within the County, he built an office building at the yard in Woodstock for the staff needed as the county grew. His final year in office was in 1969, where he was recognized by the County Board for 42 years of service at the then named Highway Department, with the last 12 as its leader.

The third person to take on the leadership role was James R. Rakow in 1969 as Richard M. Nixon was President. A monumental change occurred under Rakow's leadership. Up until this time, all road construction was done with county equipment and labor. As road standards became more prevalent and construction techniques were highly specialized, it was determined that the county would be better served to have this work done by private contractors. By using a bidding system, this helped get the best product for the lowest cost. The Highway Department evolved into more of a planning, inspecting the contractors work, and highway maintenance based organization. He remained in office until 1993 where his 24 years of service would later be recognized with a new road named in his honor.

The fourth County Engineer was Michael P. Magnuson in 1993 as William J. Clinton was President. It was under his leadership that a new "connector" road between Illinois Route 31 and Randall Road was completed. As you might have guessed, this new road was named James R. Rakow Road in honor of his predecessor. The shift away from sand towards salt for snow plowing occurred which improved traffic safety during the winter laying the groundwork for innovation in winter maintenance. Planning for the Western Algonquin Bypass began at this time also. The County's first long range transportation plan for the year 2010 was started. He left the office in 1998 having worked at the County for seven years with the last five as the County Engineer.

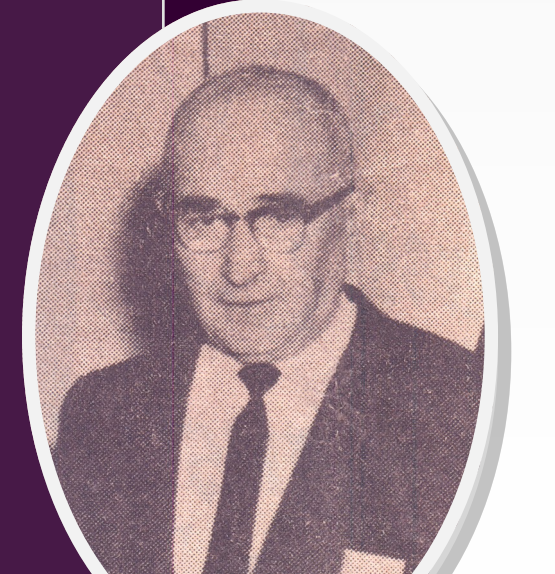
In 1998, James A. Stahlecker became the 5th County Engineer. The Highway Department began planning to move the equipment yard and offices to the corner of Nelson and Hartland Roads outside of Woodstock. The site was part of what was at one time the County Poor Farm. Also, major planning efforts took shape to rebuild and widen Algonquin Road as the growth in the southeast portion of the county was well underway. He left the office in 2001 having been with the County since 1996.

In 2001, Joseph R. Korpalski, Jr., the current County Engineer, took office as George W. Bush was President. The Highway Department completed the move to its current site and was renamed to the Division of Transportation (MCDOT) to reflect the evolving responsibilities beyond just highways by providing greater opportunities for transit and pedestrian travel within the county. As McHenry County became one of the fastest growing counties in Illinois, staff was expanded to help cope with the growth. Algonquin Road was widened during this time as well as the recently completed Rakow Road project. Innovation in winter maintenance took off as the MCDOT is now looked upon nationally and internationally as leaders in this field which includes pre-treatment of roads before a storm and using technology to minimize salt use to improve the environment. The latest long-range transportation is being developed now for the year 2040 where all stakeholders can give their input to help guide the future of transportation in McHenry County. To learn more about this and all the other projects the county is working on, visit www.McHenryCountyDOT.org.

Let us hear it for the Fearless Leaders of the MCDOT over the last Century. They helped pull Illinois out the mud, and lead us into the future. Happy and safe travels!



Charles L. Tryon



Wayne H. Mentzer



James R. Rakow



Michael P. Magnuson



James A. Stahlecker



Joseph R. Korpalski, Jr.

