

Early Washtenaw County Road Officials

Since the beginning of the Washtenaw County Road Commission, the former County Board of Supervisors, now the County Board of Commissioners, has appointed three county road commissioners. These three commissioners have, in turn, employed a road commission Supervisor-Manager, initially on a yearly contractual basis.

The 'first' Washtenaw County Road Commission was in existence from April 1913 to April 1914. The County Board of Supervisors appointed three County Road Commissioners at their June, 1913 meeting; Walter Bilbie, Frank Dettling, and Samuel Schultz.

In November 1914 the Good Roads District of Eastern Washtenaw County was established and one commissioner from each of the 9 participating municipalities was either appointed or elected. In the case of Superior Township Ennis Twist was appointed by the Township Board on April 7, 1915. He held this position for a two year term and then was defeated by Richard J. Bird at the Superior Township annual meeting Spring election in April 1917. Bird was reelected in 1919, the year in which the Washtenaw County Road Commission was reestablished.

The 'second' Washtenaw County Road Commission was voted into existence April 7, 1919. On May 5, 1919 the County Board of Supervisors elected a three member road commission from several candidates running for the positions. Elected were George W. McCalla, Richard J. Bird, and B.C. Whitaker. McCalla and Bird had served on the Good Road District Board of Commissioners which the county was more or less making into the county wide road commission.

On August 24, 1919 commissioner Burleigh C. Whitaker died at age 40. On October 31, 1919 he was replaced by Otto D. Luick.

On April 21, 1922 Richard J. Bird resigned his position on the County Board of Road Commissioners and was replaced by Forrest W. Roberts.

George W. McCalla, Otto D. Luick, and Forrest W. Roberts remained county road commissioners until the first of January 1931. The election of November 1930 resulted in a major change in the political structure of the county government and at the first of the year the three incumbent road commissioners were replaced by George Gill, C.E. Ferguson, and W.L. Walz.

Walz was replaced by A.G. Andres in 1933.

The Washtenaw County Road Commission remained unchanged until 1941 when Andres was replaced by H.L. Frisinger.

The Supervisor - Manager

The County Board of Supervisors hired John J. Cox on May 5, 1919. His title was to be Engineer-Manager.

Cox was a member, later a professor, of the University of Michigan Department of Civil Engineering and had been the Engineer hired by the Good Roads District for the entire period of its existence. Cox's contract was not renewed sometime in the early 1920's.

As of 1927 A.R. Bailey was the Engineer - Manager. It appears that the contract for Bailey was not renewed by the road commission for 1931, or possibly that Bailey was actually fired by McCalla, then chairman of the road commission. Bailey was rehired later that Spring by the new road commission board.

Bailey died in on automobile accident in July 1931 and was replaced by Leigh D. Townsend as Engineer - Manager. Townsend resigned effective January 1, 1935 to accept a position selling road building materials.

Townsend was replaced by K.L. Hallenbeck who was given the title Superintendent and Manager. Hallenbeck had been a long time employee of the road commission in a supervisory capacity and evidently did not have an engineering degree.

In 1941 he had been replaced by E.J. Allmendinger as Engineer - Manager. Allmendinger had also been a long time employee of the road commission in a supervisory capacity.

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The minutes of the Washtenaw County Road Commission were prepared by a deputy clerk who was either the supervisor - manager or recruited from the staff of the road commission. All were made deputy county clerks by the County Clerk. Hiring from within was normal. As of 1931 Hallenbeck was chief clerk in the road commission office and Allmendinger was supervisor of pavement maintenance.

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This is intended as a brief outline of WCRC management to 1940. This information was taken from the minutes of the WCRC and the WCRC Annual Reports. More detailed and accurate information could undoubtedly be obtained from the minutes of the Washtenaw County Board of Supervisors and the newspapers of that period.