

V.—ROADS AND HIGHWAYS.

Historical.—The early roads were auxiliary to water routes as avenues of transportation. Their use became common during the summer season, when portages were necessary to avoid obstacles to river and lake travel, and during the winters, when ice prevented navigation and snow covered the inequalities of the ground. Even the extensive system of waterways of Eastern Canada was an inadequate means of communication between points of settlement in a rapidly growing colony, and the need for overland routes manifested itself in the introduction of the system of common roads which prevailed under the old régime. Not only did the crude early roads serve the needs of the settlers, but also those of the British, French and American armies during the numerous campaigns. Regiments were frequently employed, during times of peace, in road construction in different parts of Upper and Lower Canada.

The first important highway in Canada extended along the north shore of the St. Lawrence from Quebec to Montreal, being gradually completed with the growth of the French settlements. In Upper Canada, one of the earliest roads was that from Toronto to lake Simcoe (Yonge St.), completed in 1794 under the direction of Gov. Simcoe, the work being done by the Queen's Rangers. This road not only gave access to the area north of Toronto, but also provided a more convenient route than that of the Ottawa river from the trading posts on the Upper Lakes to the centres of population along the St. Lawrence. Montreal was joined to Kingston by road in 1816, and in the following year to Toronto. Thereafter other highways from points served by water routes to inland settlements began to increase in number, as it became apparent that they were essential to the commercial life of the country as a means of transporting supplies to the settlers and of bringing their products to the central markets of the colony. The system of posts which had been established about the beginning of the nineteenth century necessitated passable routes between the various offices, and by 1827 a through road was available between Halifax and Amherstburg, comprising for the most part the old Kempt road, the York road, Dundas street and the Baldoon road. From this trunk line of communication, branch roads extended north and south to the more important centres of population in the two Canadas.

The cost of construction of these roads was high, and travel by stage coach was tedious and costly. As late as 1850, some points in central Ontario were still inaccessible to any vehicle. Later years, however, have brought with them improved methods of construction and a resulting reduction in expenses, together with an improvement in the wearing qualities of the more important highways. The growth of motor traffic has played a conspicuous part in the movement towards increased and improved road construction. In the older provinces of the East it has been a question of improving the existing roads and of building highways for the use of through traffic between the larger cities, while in the western provinces it has been more a matter of replacing the prairie and mountain trails with roads fit for modern tourist and other traffic.

A table of road mileage in Canada is appended. When it is considered that throughout the Dominion there are but 22 persons to every mile of road and that on an average there is one mile of road for every 9 square miles of land, the magnitude of the problem faced in the construction of these traffic routes is illustrated. A small population scattered over a large area has made this, like other transportation problems, particularly difficult of solution.