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From a speech by John A. Wilson - County Board Member & Chairman of the Public Infrastructure & Development Committee at the Township Officials Fall Meeting

Jetting off to a tropical isle in the dead of an Illinois winter, if you've the time and money, is more than the stuff of dreams. Hundreds of people leave every day on trips of one, two, or many thousands of miles. It's no miracle that is, unless you think about it from a little different prospective.

Imagine that you are a sophisticated Easterner. The year is 1840 and you're headed to "The West." You're really planning on going all the way to Illinois. It will truly be an adventure worth writing home about-----because travel through any part of "the West," was an adventure in itself. Traveling beyond Chicago, at that time, was even more of a challenge.

Illinois was still a trackless prairie for the most part. According to the Gurler House Chronicles, interior access to Illinois was the first problem, confronting both the traveler and the settlers in that day. We read where early settlers to southern and central Illinois, came primarily by boat, down the Ohio and up the Wabash and Mississippi Rivers and their tributaries. Away from the river, settlers came by foot, horseback, wagon or prairie schooner. Progress was extremely slow and laborious. Just because travel was difficult, it didn't mean that people lost their desire to go from one community to another. After all, people traveled all the time in the East and lived to tell about it. They wanted to do the same in Illinois.

Travelers, as distinct from settlers, were the equivalent of present day tourists. They usually traveled by stagecoach. Early routes were laid out from Chicago along river valleys or across country to Galena, however they rarely passed through DeKalb County. Other trails were made into the area, and some of them became crude roads. A few survived and later became the modern highways that we now enjoy.

In 1837 the Territory known as Kane County was divided and the Westerly portion became DeKalb County. Two years later, Washington officials sent a surveyor here to make the first official map of the County. The current road, known as Chicago Road, was surveyed at this time, pretty much where it is today. This probably makes it the oldest road that was continuous across the County at that time, and still exists today. This survey map indicated several roads in the county that covered a few miles here and there, but few were inter-connected. Most of these early thoroughfares did not survive.

In 1834 a mail route was established from Chicago to the Rock River, crossing the southern end of DeKalb County. In 1837 a stagecoach route was established from St. Charles to Oregon, which traveled across the northern part of the county. In 1840, 24 Road Districts were formed in the County. The State Road from Ottawa to Beloit Wisconsin was laid out in 1841 running through DeKalb County.

Heavy rains and serious flooding in the County, swept away nearly all the bridges in 1844, making travel even more difficult. In 1851 a wooden plank road was built from St. Charles to Sycamore to try and improve the traveled surface. It was built as a toll road, but lasted only about a year. It's failure again due to washouts, and the extreme difficulty in holding the planks in place.

In 1914 the County Highway System was established and a segment of the first experimental cement highway was laid near Malta. DeKalb County got its first really beneficial paved road with the finishing of Lincoln highway across the county in 1920. The first highway signs were installed in 1929. In 1937 Annie Glidden Road was paved for 12 miles at a cost of \$125,792.98. I was amused to read that even that low sounding figure, was in excess of the estimated cost. As early as 1923 the idea of building the Chicago-Iowa Trail was discussed. In September of 1937 this Trunk Road, renamed State Route 64, was opened to traffic from Chicago to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, passing through Sycamore.

While I was researching old records at the Joiner History Room, in the Sycamore Library, I found the following article printed in the Sycamore True Republican, dated Oct 24, 1921. The headline said "ARMY TRUCKS TO WORK ON ROADS" "NINE OF THE 18 PATROL MEN HAVE BEEN HIRED" This lengthy article spoke of having the trucks to haul stone and "using a new machine" called a maintainer. This machine, a small scraper pulled by a single team of horses, brought a radical change in the maintaining of state-aid roads in the county. The article reported in great detail, the plan to improve not only the surface, but the grade itself, using this new equipment. A Mr. Russell, is referred to in the article as the Superintendent. The article stated that there was 175 miles of state-aid road in the county, which was about 1/5 of the total road mileage, but it carried about 1/2 of the total traffic volume. Two early employees hired to do this maintaining work was listed as Frank Klein in Pierce and Afton Townships, and Martian Mack of Kirkland, who was in charge of a section from Kingston to Kirkland and then south into South Grove Township.

Today, the DeKalb County Highway Department maintains 201 miles of bituminous-paved highways, and 45 bridge structures on the County Road system. These interconnect with over 800 miles of township roads and 146 township bridges in 19 townships. The County Engineer and his staff provide engineering expertise and assistance to township highway commissioners. As a result of the cooperation between the Townships Highways Road Commissioners, Illinois Department of Transportation, and other municipal officials, a well-maintained highway system can be found throughout DeKalb County.

Some of the more notable highway projects over the past few years include the completion of Peace Road, The North First Street Project and the relocation of Somonauk Road in Somonauk.

Now with help of the County Engineer, Mr. Lorence, I'd like to review the current 5-year Transportation Improvement Plan. Please keep in mind that this plan reflects what is seen as the systematic replacement, reconstruction, resurfacing and relocation of the roads and bridges of the county. They are based on traffic counts and patterns, cost analysis, and other factors. All of which are subject to funding and other influencing circumstances. Five- year planning has been a

long-standing operating practice for the Highway Department in DeKalb County. Some projects may be rearranged in the five-year schedule, depending on the realities of current happenings. As with any type of long range forecasting, the further out you plan, the more difficult it is to be precise. However, it is important, and does give us a track to run on.

At this point I'd like to mention two other road projects. The first one is the proposed relocation of Plank Road in the vicinity of Moose Range Road. Engineering is still evaluating this project. The second, is the relocation of the Genoa Road Railroad underpass at the west edge of Genoa. Money for this new Railroad underpass project has been requested through the Federal Government. If, and when these dollars become available, we would want to move forward with this important project.

In closing, I want to explain why the Transportation Committee's name was changed. In 1998, the County Board conducted a survey of the surrounding Counties' committee structure. After this study was reviewed, the Boards' standing committees were realigned and given new names to more fully reflect their new responsibilities. As a result of this work, the Committee previously known as the Transportation committee was renamed the Public Infrastructure and Development Committee. This was done to better encompass the trends being brought about by growth and new technologies. It was felt that we needed to move from the "Farm to Market" era to more of a "Regional Transportation" philosophy. New technologies in road coatings, lighting, drainage and computerized equipment, is bringing forth many new challenges. Increased traffic counts coupled with changing travel times, must be accommodated. New residential and commercial development throughout the County, puts additional pressure on our transportation system, both at the Township and County level. Management of storm water run-off has become more of an issue effecting all of the region.

We must all strive to stay ahead of this curve, without overtaxing our citizens. As chairman of this committee, I pledge to you that I will do my best, to carry that responsibility at a high standard. We would also like to take this opportunity to pledge our continued support to the Township Road Districts.

Thank you for inviting my wife Annabelle and I to be your guests tonight. I hope that you have enjoyed this little history and background of transportation in DeKalb County. Bill and I have tried to enlighten you on the future plans for County road improvements.

It is my hope that we can continue to build on the past and be pro-active toward the future.