

Inaugural address
of

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Inaugural Message

Mr. President and Members of the Joint Assembly:

The meeting of the town, city and county representatives is always an important event in the government of the people of Vermont. The session of the Legislature of 1927 will, I believe, be an historic one, because of its far-reaching effect on the progress and development of the State. Before us are many problems upon which we must pass judgment. May we pass this judgment fearlessly and in sober thought, foreseeing, as best we can, its effect upon the Commonwealth.

We have by the franchise been entrusted with the supervision of State affairs for the next biennial term. We should accept these duties as our serious work, actuated by the highest ideals for the welfare of the State and its people. However high our motives, however ambitious we may be to accomplish, we may fail of our purposes unless we can lay aside personalities and prejudices and submit to the will of the majority. Real co-operation must at all times prevail if we are to realize our hopes for the best and most prudent legislative action. If at times our ambitions and our individual opinions are overcome, we may find satisfaction in the knowledge that the judgment of the whole body of the Legislature is wiser than the judgment of any individual member.

We must approach the problems which are before us thinking in terms of real improvement, sane progress, sound economy and increased efficiency. We must work together to the end that the best interests of the people of Vermont are at all times furthered and safeguarded.

Practical aid to agriculture, advancement of the educational advantages for our boys and girls — particularly in the rural districts — the adoption of a definite policy for highway development, improvement of our State Institutions and responsible stewardship of our State wards, forestry of waste lands, increased publicity for the scenic beauties and superior advantages of Vermont, and development of our fish and game interests, are questions which we must seriously consider and with which we must reasonably deal.

Wise economy, that is, the greatest degree of economy consistent with progress and efficiency, should be our constant aim in the conduct of State business. Economy which impairs the efficiency of government, and which curtails essential service and the pursuit of needed activities, is unwise and should not be practiced.

AGRICULTURE.

Agriculture is the basic industry of Vermont and upon it depends, in large measure, the prosperity of the State. The farming situation in Vermont has shown some improvement during the past two years, but continues to present problems. That of co-operative marketing is one of vital importance to the State. The Department of Agriculture has already done much to aid our farmers in the marketing of their products. More could be accomplished if funds were available to extend the work. Farmers can unquestionably exercise effective bargaining power through co-operative organizations representing a majority of the producers of the crops. They can, by organization, prevent disastrous ups and downs in prices and cause a steady flow of their products to the markets.

The Commissioner of Agriculture should be given a sufficient appropriation, together with authority, to maintain a distinct department under his control to extend the service of co-operative marketing and to enlarge the scope of its activities, to the end that the individual farmer may benefit by higher and more satisfactory prices.

AREA TEST OF CATTLE.

The area test of cattle should be continued with an increased appropriation and a larger field of usefulness, as it is of the greatest value and importance to the State.

EDUCATION.

Vermont ranks high in intelligence and leadership among the states of the Union. To thoroughness in early school training we must attribute, in large measure, our enviable position. We have made progress

educationally, and I believe that under the school system that has prevailed, excellent work has been done in furthering efficiency and standardization.

To provide better rural schools, schools with better buildings, better equipment and better surroundings, and supplied with capable, trained teachers, is a task immediately confronting us. Influences which improve conditions of work in the rural schools, or which promote interest in those schools, have a beneficial effect upon the welfare of our communities.

The Constitution of Vermont from the days of the independent State republic to now has contained the first principle of a sound educational policy: "A competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town for the convenient instruction of youth."

From that declaration of principle, adopted by the people before Vermont became a State, we cannot safely depart. The fathers emphasized both an adequate number of schools and their location convenient to the children. They knew Vermont, its narrow winding valleys compelling a scattered population, and its rugged climate. God gave us our mountains, and with them He gave us school problems which must be solved in our way with our own good sense.

We have, I believe, drifted away from the Constitution in abandonment of school centers for the convenient instruction of youth. A community which has lost its school is likely to lose also its spirit and its pride. Abandoned school houses mean abandoned farms. It is yet to be proved that children who are forced to spend hours a day riding to a larger school receive a better education or turn to be stronger men and women than children who attend smaller schools near their own homes. It is not the size of the building or the number of grades that makes a good school, but the kind of teaching that is done in it. With a devoted teacher — and there are many such in Vermont — there is no better place for a start in education than the neighborhood school fostered by the local community. School taxes are paid more willingly when the money is spent nearby and not to build up the institutions of a larger center. The loyalty of a neighborhood to its school, and pride in the attainment of the children, are more stimulative to excellence than the most skilled supervision can be. The financial assistance of the State should be brought as near as possible to the children, and that means higher wages to the teachers, especially in the more scattered districts where the burden is naturally heaviest.

In educational matters especially we can well afford to respect the principle of local self-government. The people of Vermont can be trusted to provide for the education of their children. Let us foster the local school and help every school district where there is a sufficient number of pupils to keep its school and to make it a good school. Money, spent in repairing the school houses and making them neat and the grounds attractive, will pay better dividends in education than money spent on transportation busses, and at the same time it will tend to keep up the population in the rural districts, which is of the utmost importance for the general welfare of Vermont.

HIGHWAYS.

It must be plain to all of us who have followed the public discussion of the State issues for the past year that the question of better highways is one of the greatest importance. Highways are the only means of communication between many rural towns and are increasingly important to all residents of the State, as well as to the tourists and visitors who come to us in greatly increased numbers during the summer season. For the necessary and convenient purposes of daily use, as a public investment and as a means of attracting visitors who may become permanent residents, good roads are no longer a luxury but a necessity.

In considering the matter of highways, we must not let the "much" there is to do obscure the "much" that has been done. We have made material progress in our highway development during the past few years, and credit should be given the highway department for the steady improvement that has been made. We have accomplished much, for we have laid the foundation for an adequate and improved system of highways in our State.

Few of us realize, however, that a revolution has taken place in our system of transportation as applied to highways during the past twenty years. The number of motor vehicles in this country has increased during the past ten years from 2,500,000 to 20,000,000 and in Vermont from 15,671 to 73,946. In contemplating the

future, I am impressed with the necessity of making adequate provision for the increasing service that will be expected of the highways in the State. The highway service we provide must be capable of expansion to meet the needs of growing traffic.

First of all, good roads are a necessity to our farmers, and no plan of road-building should overlook the urgent needs of the farmers and others who live off the main lines of travel. These residents and taxpayers are as much entitled to a passable road to their markets as those on the trunk lines where the traffic is greater, and we should consider the necessity of providing them with better roads. Under any plan of improvement, provision should be made for the development of our system of so-called back roads, by leaving intact funds now available from present revenues for such development.

Experience has shown, however, that while gravel as road-building material is usually adequate for roads where the traffic runs below 1,000 cars a day, the cost of maintaining roads where traffic may run as high as 2,000 cars or more a day is so great that some more durable surface is plainly indicated.

We should, therefore, also consider it good business and a profitable public investment to build as many miles of hard-surfaced road as possible each year, situated where the traffic survey shows the heaviest travel or where the cost of maintaining gravel roads is so high as to make hard-surfaced roads good economy and a good business investment.

The number of miles of such road which we should undertake to construct in a year is entirely for you, members of the House and Senate, to decide. You alone, under the Constitution have the authority to levy taxes, and without the necessary revenue, no extended program of road-building is possible. If, therefore, you should see fit to authorize a system of better roads between the rural towns and their markets, and additional mileage of hard-surfaced roads on the main arteries of travel, you will, of course, provide the necessary revenue for such purposes.

It is not for me to say how this revenue shall be provided or how many miles of hard-surfaced road shall be built each year, but it is proper to lay before you the results of my own investigations and refer you to the report of the highway department.

From the most recent records it appears that the average cost of building a mile of paved road in concrete is \$45,659.43, and in bituminous macadam \$33,630.23. The gross revenues of the highway department are about \$2,726,477.12 per year under the present scale of taxation and revenue, and these revenues are distributed in highway appropriations as follows:

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT APPROPRIATIONS AND RECEIPTS AVAILABLE FOR WORK OF 1925.

(1) Five Per Cent Fund Apportionments.....	\$	144,476.37
(2) State Aid Construction for aid to Towns in improvement of Selected High ways.		200,000.00
(3) State Aid Bridge Fund for aid to Towns in building or rebuilding bridges on Selected Highways		75,000.00
(4) Maintenance, Dust-laying, etc.		1,075,000.00
(5) Unselected Highway Fund.....		250,000.00
(6) Federal Aid Appropriation by State of Vermont		400,000.00
(7) Federal Aid Apportionment by U.S. Government		365,025.27
(8) Supervision and Engineering		100,000.00
(9) State Machinery Receipts		116,375.48

TOTAL		2,726,477.12

Items 1, 2, and 3, are available for paved road construction only to a limited extent. The Statutes make these funds available to each town in the State, and it is only by special agreement with towns interested that they can be turned in to cover a part of the cost of an extended hard-surfaced project.

Items 4, 5, 8, and 9 are not available for paved road construction from the nature of the appropriations.

Items 6 and 7 are available for whatever type of construction work on the Federal Highway System may be agreed upon between the State and the Federal Government.

Under such plan of distribution approximately \$2,282,326.78 has actually been expended for so-called permanent roads in the past two years, and about 43.3 miles of such highway constructed, or is nearing completion. This, however, includes 16.4 miles of standard gravel, and about \$500,000.00 of this amount has been expended on bridges.

To raise the total mileage of paved roads to 40 miles per year would represent, therefore, a very substantial increase, but inasmuch as this seems to meet with the approval of a majority of our fellow citizens, I, therefore, recommend the same to your attention.

An estimate of funds from revenues now available for permanent road construction indicates that there is annually at the disposal of the highway department approximately the following:

Federal aid allotment.....	\$365,625.27
Federal aid appropriation by State of Vermont.....	400,000.00
Total estimated revenues available for transfer from registration fees and gas tax	520,979.54

That is, from present revenues there is available approximately \$1,286,604.81 for permanent construction, including bridges, on our trunk lines.

As to the proper method of raising the necessary revenue for the construction of 40 miles of hard-surfaced road each year, the so-called gasoline tax has so far proved most equitable and is collectible with the least trouble and expense. Under the present tax of two cents per gallon, the gross revenue for 1926 will be about \$515,000. An increase of one cent per gallon would produce by estimate \$260,000 in, 1927 and a further increase in 1928.

This, however, would fall short of the necessary revenue and unless a careful examination of the budget can suggest to you substantial savings, or unless some additional source of revenue can be developed, the alternative seems to be a direct State tax of not over ten cents on the dollar of the grand lists of the State. A direct tax on the grand lists would yield annually about \$287,596.81, making a total of funds available for paved road construction and bridges each year about \$1,834,201.62. The method should allow the construction of at least 40 miles of hard-surfaced road or concrete and bituminous macadam each year, and still provide revenues for necessary bridge construction.

Inasmuch as the use of gasoline as a power fuel on the farm and elsewhere is steadily increasing, it might be well if some practical plan were devised whereby the users of gasoline for purposes other than propelling vehicles on the highway would be relieved from paying a tax thereon, either by suitably safeguarded rebates, payable on certificate of the Secretary of State, or by some other method of refund. It is obvious that a highway tax on gasoline is not properly collectible on fuel consumed for agricultural, manufacturing or domestic purposes.

Provision, also, should be made to secure revenue by means of license fees or otherwise from trucks and busses bearing the license plates of other states. Such vehicles place heavy burdens upon our roads, especially in the spring and fall seasons because of their excessive weight.

The small State tax works no hardship. It would fall equitably on all classes of taxpayers, all of whom are benefited by good roads, but all of whom do not contribute to the proceeds of the gasoline tax. I, therefore, recommend this plan of revenue for your consideration.

While highways are being constructed for the better accommodation of motor vehicle traffic, both foreign and domestic, we should not curtail our watchfulness over the safety of those who use these highways or lose sight of the fact that improved highways enhance the danger of travel through inviting greater speed. It is a constitutional duty resting upon the State to protect its people in life, limb and property, against violators of the

law. This also applies to the automobile laws and regulations. The State should continue to enforce such laws, and the increased number of automobiles calls for increased vigilance and activity on the part of State officers. Such authority and means as may be necessary to a safe and reasonable use of our highways should be provided by the Legislature.

STATE INSTITUTIONS.

I believe the most thoughtful attention should be given the delinquent, the feeble-minded and the dependent insane. We cannot curtail the appropriations for the improvement or maintenance costs of the Institutions which house the unfortunates of the State, for any scheme of economy which adds to the misery of the wards of the Commonwealth is one which the people of Vermont, in honor to themselves, must not countenance.

The Legislature of 1925 by Act No. 19, Section 41, gave the Commissioner of Public Welfare authority to establish Colony homes for the feeble-minded to be managed and placed under the control of Dr. T. J. Allen. One such school was established in the city of Rutland in May, 1925, with accommodations for sixteen girls. This venture, with the co-operation of the people of the city of Rutland, has proved a success, and today it is practically self-supporting, other than the expense of the rent of the home. Only a small percentage of the inmates can be thus selected so that the school at Brandon is not relieved in proportion to the applications for admission that are now on file.

If the Institution at Brandon is to qualify under the law as passed in 1912, added accommodations should be considered, as I believe that segregation is the only safe remedy in considering the problem of the mentally deficient.

I, therefore, recommend for your consideration the advisability of such increased accommodations as will allow a continuance of this important work. I also advise the installation of a refrigeration plant at the State Industrial School, believing that it will prove an economical proposition for the State and for the Institution.

PAROLE OF PRISONERS.

The responsibility for the parole or discharge of prisoner should not rest wholly upon the Governor. Our present system prevails by authority of the Constitution, but I believe that this Legislature should consider the question of paroles, and, if possible, authorize an advisory council composed of three citizens, with the Attorney General as chairman, the Commissioner of Public Welfare and one member appointed by the Governor, as the personnel of the council. It would be their duty to periodically examine the prisoners, determine those who were eligible for parole and report their recommendations to the Governor for his guidance.

REFORESTRY OF WASTE LANDS.

Reforestation has an importance far above the attention it usually secures. Particularly important both from the standpoints of thrift and economy, and of enhancing the natural beauties of our State, is the reforestation of our waste lands. If we are to continue the industries which are dependent upon the supply of wood as raw material we must further our work in forestry development. I am in favor of increasing the forest holdings of the State and of offering every encouragement to all who, realizing the benefits of conservation and development for future generations, seriously undertake the re-making of our forests.

PUBLICITY.

One of the noteworthy developments of recent years is the remarkable increase in the vacation business and no state has greater natural advantages than Vermont for supplying the growing demand for recreation. This business has assumed large proportions in several of the neighboring States and in Vermont there has been a steady growth in this important industry. The State Publicity Bureau operating with a small appropriation for the past fifteen years, has done good work, and I have been gratified to note of late the cooperation of various State organizations with the State Publicity Department. Some persons who have come into the State for the summer have become permanent residents. Visitors have made investments in Vermont industries and in several Vermont towns the presence of summer colonies has increased largely the value of real estate and has added materially to the revenue secured from taxation.

In view of the growing importance of the vacation business, the increasing activity of neighboring States along this line, and the need that Vermont take advantage of its opportunities for development, I believe that a larger appropriation for publicity will be a good investment for the State.

If Vermont is to keep abreast of our national growth it must be able to adapt itself to changing conditions and take advantage of new opportunities as they present themselves. If we can supplement the fertility of our valleys by reaping harvests from the beauty of our hills and mountains, we shall increase our productive area, and thus enlarge the opportunity afforded our citizens and increase the usefulness of our State.

FISH AND GAME.

Closely linked with the development of Vermont as a vacation land are the fish and game interests of the State. This feature has grown into an important department, which deserves recognition, and commendation for its accomplishments.

Because of the importance of the Fish and Game Department to our own people, as well as to the increasing numbers of visitors within our borders, the policies of this branch of our government should be continued progressively, and every encouragement offered for furthering the work.

BENNINGTON SESQUI-CENTENNIAL.

Vermont is rich in history. Notable anniversaries of historical events occur this year, the year of the sesqui-centennial. Particularly noteworthy is the Bennington celebration. I would urge all the citizens of Vermont to a full support of the anniversary, as proper and fitting celebrations of such events afford us opportunities to reconsecrate ourselves to the great fundamental ideals upon which our Commonwealth was founded.

PROPOSED BRIDGE ACROSS LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

The proposed bridge across Lake Champlain, connecting the states of New York and Vermont would be a big asset to our State and of material value and importance to our people. The subject has been given intelligent study by a joint commission. This commission will, in due time, make their report, based on a scientific investigation of engineering and traffic conditions. I would urge that the subject be given careful consideration upon the presentation of the report.

Our object should be the enactment of a few laws which can be effectively enforced, rather than many laws which are incapable of enforcement. We should at all times stand unequivocally for law and order, demonstrating by our attitudes that we have respect for the dignity of our laws.

Any reforms in our court system, whereby technicalities might be eliminated and justice made more simple and speedy, would, of course, be an accomplishment worth while. Likewise any tax reforms are advisable, if they are consistent with existing conditions and are founded on the basis of equitable distribution of the burdens. I do not believe that the present so-called tax law on intangibles should be hastily condemned or summarily discarded before being given a fair and thorough trial. The law has been in effect only one year. It should be continued until its operation has been more completely demonstrated.

This message, my fellow citizens, aims to be representative rather than exhaustive. I have confined the substance as carefully as possible to matters that immediately confront us on the convening of the Legislature, and have made no attempt to cover the whole field of State Policy. From time to time, according to our organic law, I shall bring before you such other matters as may require consideration. The accomplishments of the past show hope of our ability to meet the problems of the present. Our State, our towns, our cities, are reflected in us. The positions we take on present day problems will be the controlling factors in our government.

We are solicitous for the welfare of the farmer, the day laborer, the capitalist, the business and professional man and woman, in the development of old as well as new enterprises. Our water powers, our natural resources, our scenic beauties, and, above all, our boys and girls, offer us opportunities for earnest endeavor and constructive development, which must be undertaken with the idea of the constant advancement of our Commonwealth.

The allegiance of our citizenship is not wholly human. It is of divine origin, and we cherish an ambition for a contented people whose lives shall merit the favor of Almighty God.

JOHN E. WEEKS