

Inaugural address
of

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Inaugural Message

Members of the General Assembly:

As the General Assembly of the State of Vermont once again convenes in regular session for deliberation upon the Commonwealth's legislative problems, it seems fitting to pause for a moment in retrospective contemplation of the activities of the past administration, an administration which, owing to unforeseen circumstances imposed by the will of the Maker, has been fraught with many difficult problems. The disaster which came upon the State created unusual demands. It taxed the resources, the courage and the faith of our people, and necessitated activities far beyond the regular routine of the customary state administration program.

The emergency caused by the devastating flood of November, 1927, affected all branches of state activity, and placed additional burdens responsibilities and demands upon all departments of our state government. That great emergency was met by our people and our government with one common motive — a resolve to restore our Commonwealth so damaged on that eventful November day — and since that time the common watchword has been progress and rehabilitation. The true Vermont spirit was vividly exemplified by our indomitable courage in a time of adversity and the faith and valor of Vermonters has turned catastrophe into opportunity.

When the legislature adjourned two years ago it trusted to the administration a program of highway development unique in Vermont state policies. That responsibility was accepted by the administration and the highway department, and the work was undertaken with the aim and purpose of discharging the responsibility and fulfilling the pledge. Gratifying progress resulted in pursuing the 40 — mile program during that first year of endeavor. State departments were rendering valuable service to the people of Vermont by functioning with efficiency and loyalty. Conditions were, fine, excellent in all branches of governmental endeavor, presenting a most encouraging outlook for development and progress.

Then swiftly and ruthlessly came the flood to terrify our people, to inflict irreparable damages and to paralyze that progress which had seemed so secure and so prophetic of our future development. The dramatic narrative of how Vermonters dauntlessly bent to the burdensome tasks before them is widely known and has been rehearsed in verse and story in every part of the country.

Vermont faced a dire emergency. Our transportation facilities were hopelessly crippled. Hundreds of bridges and mile upon mile of highway were destroyed. The funds at hand were insufficient to cope with the serious situation. Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution, I, as governor, called the Legislature together in extra session to provide ways and means for reconstruction and to enact laws consistent with the needs of our towns and the State.

The special session convened on November 30, 1927, and in an historic meeting on that date legislative action provided for the rehabilitation of Vermont by the authorization of a bond issue of eight and one-half millions of dollars (\$8,500,000); eight millions (\$8,000,000) being for the restoration of our highway transportation system and five hundred thousand (500,000) for the rehabilitation of our state institutions and departments which had suffered heavy damages by the flood.

Through sheer force of determination, Vermont energetically accepted the challenge of the elements and in the face of real discouragement commenced the work of reconstruction. The results represent, to my mind, a notable achievement for our people and our government. Remarkable progress has been attained in the restoration of our highway and bridge system, without curtailment of our regular program of hard surface road construction. Many of the scars left by the flood have already been effaced and today we stand upon the threshold of a new era of state development. We must face that new era with courage and faith. In legislative action we must be guided by the desire to enact for the good of our State and her people, ever keeping in mind the necessity for sane judgment and fearless action.

Legislation imposes certain and real duties upon the members of the House and Senate in accordance with our constitutional provisions. In conformity with a custom long established I submit for your consideration

some matters of importance in connection with the work before you at the present session of the General Assembly.

We all realize that progress and prosperity cannot be crested by legislative action, but they may be established upon a firm and secure foundation if sound, proper and progressive laws are enacted. True prosperity must be the outcome of real service, the grasping of opportunities when they arise, and adapting conditions to a people's needs.

We shall prosper agriculturally, for instance, only so far as the farmer takes advantage of the opportunities that have been placed at his command. We shall prosper as a commonwealth only so far as we utilize and employ our capabilities and our initiative in the development of our natural resources.

Pernicious and harmful laws are sometimes passed because of lack of proper understanding or because of too hasty consideration. Guard well against such bills, as they prove detrimental and may even work irreparable injury to our State and our people, There is legislation to consider affecting such vital activities as agriculture, forestry, state institutions, education taxation, highways, etc. it is my purpose to touch upon some of these topics, offering whatever suggestions I may have as possible aids in your deliberations.

In these deliberations you must at no time fail to assume the obligations that are undeniably yours. Foster and promulgate such measures that those gratifying results may obtain which look to the betterment of our State and our people. We should at all times and under all circumstances promote rather than retard progress and prosperity, to the end that all the people may enjoy the common blessings that are inseparable from a prudent, economical and honest administration of their affairs.

One of the most commendable virtues in life today is true economy. We face competition in our daily lives as never before. We earn money faster and we spend faster than has any generation which has preceded us. Wise economy is essential in the conduct of state business and in legislative action, if the State is to function for the benefit of her people. We should, however, regard with greatest attention the real needs of the Commonwealth, making sure that we guard against an unwise application of economy which might be detrimental to those needs.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture, because it is the foundation upon which Vermont prosperity fundamentally rests, is of the utmost concern. During the past two years considerable progress has been made in the development of our agricultural resources. Notable among these developments is the work of the bureau of markets which began in January, 1928. Marketing constitutes one of agriculture's paramount problems today. A marketing program to be of lasting value must be developed on a firm foundation, and the emphasis must first be placed on what we are going to sell.

To this end the bureau of markets has been working and official Vermont grades have been established for the first time on many products. Vermont is cooperating closely with the other New England States on a uniform marketing program and the use of a New England marketing label. My recommendations to the Legislature of 1927 included the need of granting the Commissioner of Agriculture authority to maintain a distinct department under his control to extend the service of cooperative marketing and to enlarge the scope of its activities to the end that the individual farmer may benefit by higher and more satisfactory prices. I commend the work that has been accomplished during the past year by the newly created bureau of markets and recommend that this valuable activity be continued and its scope be extended as far as possible.

BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS ERADICATION

The area test of cattle should be continued. In considering an appropriation for this purpose it should be borne in mind that bovine tuberculosis is a highly contagious disease spreading constantly and rapidly in infected herds and the more energetically this work is pushed forward the less will be the ultimate cost of complete eradication.

Fifty per cent of our cattle are now under state and federal supervision. The demand is constantly increasing for daily products produced from tuberculin tested cows, Other states are spending large sums for eradication

and are becoming more and more particular as to the health of the cattle they purchase for replacements. Dairying and the raising of surplus dairy cattle is the backbone of our agriculture and in order to hold our markets for both dairy products and cattle it is absolutely essential that eradication work be carried forward without hesitation.

EUROPEAN CORN BORER

The recent widespread invasion of the State by the corn borer pest threatens to become a serious menace to the corn growing industry. Nearly every county is affected by this scourge, and great diligence should be exercised to check its advance by the adoption of such control measures as have proved effective in other localities, as the corn crop is one of great value to our State.

FORESTRY

The flood of last year has made all the more mindful of the importance of keeping our mountainous and non agricultural regions productive of forest growth. Forests may not prevent floods during periods of excessive precipitation but I believe we all agree that they do lessen this danger and prevent the washing away of the valuable top soil which is so necessary in keeping our State productive. Probably two-thirds of the land area of Vermont might be classed as forest land, and if this vast area is to be handed down to future generations in a productive manner we must now guard against unnecessary forest destruction.

I believe the State should continue and increase as fast as possible its forest activities, especially along the lines of forest fire prevention, state forest purchase, reforestation, and protection against forest tree diseases and insect attacks.

The planting of seedlings in available tracts shows material increases and this activity promises much for the future development of our timber lands. I recommend that the forestry department be given every support in its endeavor to plant and propagate seedlings, and be given encouragement in its worthy efforts to keep pace with the demand made upon it from all sections of the State for suitable seedlings for planting.

During the past year the State has received through the generosity of Ex-Governor Redfield Proctor a valuable gift of 900 acres of forest land in Granville Gulf. This tract extending for a distance of six miles along the Granville Gulf highways, will protect for posterity this beautiful region. With the increase of travel on our highways, there will follow many creations of man to destroy the beauty of our State and, therefore, I recommend that the State take every opportunity to acquire additional tracts, either through gift or by purchase, so that more of our scenic stretches may be permanently preserved.

NATIONAL FOREST

The Legislature of 1926 passed an enabling act permitting the Federal government to establish a national forest within the State of Vermont. The National Forest Reservation Commission has recently authorized the acquisition by the United States government of a national purchase unit in southern Vermont comprising one hundred thousand (100,000) acres, thus taking advantage of the legislation which the General Assembly of 1925 enacted with wisdom and foresight.

A national forest located here will make Vermont a part of a countrywide movement to preserve, through scientific forestry methods, our magnificent wooded hills and will guarantee reforestry of the lands within the unit in accordance with economic and advanced forestry practices.

EDUCATION

Notable progress has been made in the last two years in the matter of modernizing the rural schools of the State. There are approximately 1050 one-room school-buildings in Vermont, the great majority of which have been in need of thorough remodeling. At the present time there are approximately 400 of these schools which have been standardized or made superior, and if these schools which have now been completed are also included it is safe to assert that the entire task of making the rural schools of the State modern and satisfactory in all essentials has been more than half completed.

The importance of this work can hardly be overestimated and its value has been fully demonstrated by the accomplishments already achieved. Every reasonable effort should be made to push the work to completion as rapidly as possible. Most of the towns in the State have been vitally interested and have contributed generously, both from public funds and private contributions toward the promotion of this work. The State has also aided substantially through two funds the so-called Standardization fund from which aid is granted on a one-third basis up to a maximum of \$300 for a single school; and the so-called Community fund from which aid is paid on a fifty-fifty basis up to a maximum of \$100. Both of these funds have proved so stimulating in this valuable work that they should be continued. The Community fund of \$5,000 annually was voted by the last Legislature as an experiment and has been used to match money privately raised for the improvement of rural schools. The experiment has been distinctly successful and the call for aid from this fund has far exceeded the possibility of meeting the requests. It would be highly desirable to continue this fund for the next biennium, making the annual appropriation \$10,000 instead of \$5,000.

I have always been a strong advocate of adequate rural schools and I believe the people of Vermont are zealous in their desires to provide for the education of their children. Let us foster the development of our local schools to the end that the children in the rural districts may be given similar advantages to children who are privileged to attend the schools in the larger centers. I consider this of the utmost importance as good schools contribute materially to progress and contentment in our rural districts.

The program of training teachers for elementary and rural schools has been developing most satisfactorily. For several years the supply of trained teachers has been adequate, although this statement must be modified by recognizing that candidates who have completed but one year of normal training beyond high school have been, and still are, granted certificates to teach. Rapid progress has been made within the last biennial period toward a higher standard of training following high school graduation.

The unfavorable conditions existing at Castleton after the fire of 1924, due to the necessity of housing students in rented dwellings, has been remedied by the completion of the new dormitory authorized by the last General Assembly. The dormitory was put in use at the beginning of the current school year and is proving exceedingly satisfactory. At the present time the entire student body is accommodated under most favorable conditions which will doubtless prove more economical and contribute to a greater degree of efficiency in teacher training.

I deem it highly important to pursue the present efficient program and to improve the equipment and facilities for the training of teachers to the end that we may always have available adequately prepared instructors for our rural and elementary schools.

FISH AND GAME

Vermont resources in fish, game and wild life represent values that are tremendous, even if considered purely from an economic standpoint. Our annual income, based on actual figures is now more than \$350,000 from fur-bearing animals alone. The food value of fish and game taken annually is priced conservatively at \$250,000.

Vermont stands without a rival among the states with our diversified scenic beauty of mountain, field and forest, with our sparkling lakes and clear-running streams. Much of this attractive beauty would be lost if the wild life of field and forest and the fish in our lakes and streams became exterminated or seriously depleted. With our improved highways and modern methods of transportation, every lake and stream, and every area of marsh and forest land providing game cover, is accessible to the 73,000 or more hunters and fishermen who are licensed annually, and to the thousands of farm owners, tenants and minor children who hunt and fish without a license. To preserve this great heritage for ourselves and future generations is a sacred duty and demands the united efforts of all citizens.

This department should be encouraged in its work and aid should be extended wherever possible as our fish and game resources represent one of our most important as well as unique assets. Constructive conservation, and use without waste should be our policy.

STATE INSTITUTIONS

Our state institutions in general are very satisfactory at the present time. The physical plants especially, by reason of repairs and extensive improvements at the State Prison in Windsor, and the rehabilitation work at the State Hospital in Waterbury, necessitated by the flood, are in most excellent condition. Both the School for Feeble Minded at Brandon and the Sanatorium at Pittsford are badly congested. All those who are a menace to society because of mental deficiencies should be committed to the Feeble Minded School and persons needing care and treatment, especially in incipient cases of tuberculosis, should receive our attention.

The colony home idea has proved to be wise and effective. A second colony home has been established for boys since the original venture for girls in Rutland. This relieves in a measure congestion at the School for Feeble Minded in Brandon, but increased facilities are needed, nevertheless, at the Brandon institution as well as the Pittsford Sanatorium, and I would recommend for your consideration the advisability of meeting the most vital needs of the School at Brandon and the Sanatorium at Pittsford so that this valuable work among the unfortunates of our State may go forward without the handicap of inadequate facilities.

AVIATION

The rapid progress recently made throughout the world in aviation would appear to require that suitable legislation be adopted for the control and operation of air craft. What aviation meant to Vermont at the time of the flood is so well known to you all that I not need to comment upon it here.

I recommend that this Legislature pass suitable laws defining air craft, fixing suitable rules, regulations and requirements for the licensing of operators, and making proper provision for the acquiring of airports by cities, villages, towns or counties within our State, either through purchase or by exercise of the power of eminent domain.

This subject was given thoughtful and careful study by the Aviation Committee of the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce and the recommendations of this committee are set forth in their report rendered at a meeting held in Rutland on October 16, last. I commend this report to your favorable consideration and recommend legislation along the lines embodied in said report.

PUBLICITY

Fruitful returns have resulted from the efforts of the State Publicity Bureau to give increased publicity to the marked and superior advantages of Vermont as a vacation state and a pleasure land. The growing importance of the tourist business and the increasing activity of other New England States in this direction make it imperative that Vermont take every advantage of her splendid opportunities for development. I believe that an increased appropriation for publicity will be an investment that will yield commensurate and gratifying returns.

FLOOD CONTROL

In an effort to see if it is not possible to prevent a recurrence of such disasters as resulted from the flood of 1927, as well as those from which the State has suffered in earlier years, there was appointed late last winter an advisory committee of engineers on flood control, under the direction of the Public Service Commission. This committee was requested to investigate the possibility of such regulation or control of the flow of water in the streams as might be necessary to prevent damage by floods. The investigation also included a study of the possibilities of power development in connection with the flood control and the regulation of the streams. On this account certain power companies in the State agreed to pay one-half of the expense of the investigation, the balance being paid from the emergency flood fund.

The findings of the committee, together with their recommendations, are set forth in a report which is now before the Legislature, which I trust will be given careful study and consideration by the Assembly. The program proposed is a complete plan for the future control of the streams of the State and the development of the entire water power resources in Vermont. It is a long-time program to be gradually undertaken as conditions in the future will justify. If this plan can be put into operation, we may expect to see our flood work greatly lessened and the power available in the State materially increased.

Five important rivers, in whose valleys the greatest devastation occurred, have been investigated. It seems advisable to cover the remaining rivers of the State in the same way during the coming year to the end that all rivers of importance in Vermont would be comprehensively investigated. I would, therefore, suggest a further state appropriation of \$5,000 to complete the preliminary investigation provided a like amount will be supplied by the public utility companies.

HIGHWAYS

No one can doubt the necessity for a comprehensive system of adequate highways in any plan looking to the development of Vermont. Good roads help trade and commerce. They help the farmer and the pleasure seeker. They promote and stimulate business.

Every citizen of Vermont today recognizes that there is a very evident obligation resting upon the State to continue her program of hard surface roads construction as represented by some definite policy, such as the plan adopted at the last session of the Legislature.

Gratifying results have been obtained during the past two years while operating under the present pay as you go plan. In 1927, 47.8 miles of hard surface roads were constructed in accordance with the most modern and approved methods. During 1928, 57.45 miles of such roads have been built. It is a matter of great satisfaction to the people of Vermont that the program adopted at the last legislative session has been exceeded, in so far as anticipated mileage is concerned. Even the flood did not force any curtailment of the program of construction as originally scheduled.

Pleased over the splendid results already obtained the people of our State apparently desire to step forward in the march of progress and there is an unmistakable sentiment for a progressive continuance of the hard roads program. I share that sentiment, and I firmly believe that the interests of all Vermonters can best be served by pushing hard roads development to completion as is consistent with sound business economics. Our public policy should be to speed up the program for the construction of hard roads in accordance with the federal traffic survey, which was unanimously approved by the State Highway Board as a ten- year program.

It will be remembered that I offered a definite policy for hard road construction in my message to the last Legislature. The plan involved certain features of finance and method which were, so far as essentials go, approved by the Legislature. I considered the plan feasible, adequate and progressive. I still consider it so. My own conviction, in considering this paramount question of road development, is to continue the plan that has proved itself so beneficial and productive of gratifying results, and to increase the mileage under that plan as far as our resources and abilities will permit.

Therefore, adhering to the principle of the method and plan I first adopted, I suggest as a possible solution of our road problem an expansion of the present plan which, to my mind, will meet the needs of the State for the next two years without resorting to bond issues or drastic and complicated schemes of finance.

It is not my purpose to submit any hard and fast proposition from which there could be no deviation, or to offer calculations which are so precise and inflexible as to allow but one irrefutable answer so far as aggregate mileage is concerned. My aim, rather, is to suggest the possibilities which may lie behind an extension of the present program through utilization of the revenues already available to the road fund, together with the additional revenue accruing from a one cent increase in gas tax.

An examination of revenues, actual and estimated, which will be available for our highways from the various sources, such as gas tax and automobile registration fees, together with estimated returns from a one cent increase in gas tax, and a conservative estimate of the normal increase in gas sales and registrations indicate that there would be an income sufficient to construct at least 100 miles of hard surface road during the next biennium. This also provides for payment of interest and principal on the flood bonds and does not disturb the appropriations for maintenance and state aid for unselected highways.

If, however, the Legislature will make provision for meeting the flood bond obligation for the next two years, by securing revenues from other sources, we will be able to increase the hard surface mileage to at least 125 miles for the two-year period.

I am convinced that the mileage suggested would be the minimum which may reasonably be expected under conditions which will in all likelihood prevail through the next two years. It represents, to my mind, satisfactory progress in our hard surface roads development. It will be noted that a one cent increase in gas tax is contemplated but no direct tax is required and the present appropriations for maintenance of our entire road systems in and improvement of our secondary roads are not disturbed. In any plan for hard surface road development we must also recognize the imperative need of improving our town roads, so vital to an adequate highway system in Vermont.

I am not unmindful of an indisputable demand on the part of many of our people for a more ambitious plan of hard roads development, which has for its aim a completion of our trunk line system with more pronounced vigor and greater rapidity. If the Legislature feels that this demand for a program of more rapid progress is one that should be heeded with wisdom, then there are ways for obtaining the desired results.

Several plans which contemplate bond issues as methods of financing our hard roads program for the purposes to early completion of the trunk line system have been placed before the people and frankly discussed by the press and the public. Let me say that, while I hold to the belief that the present plan for hard roads construction contains features which are more desirable from the standpoint of safe financing and economic soundness. I am, first of all, most deeply concerned over the welfare and the best interests of Vermont and her people.

If, therefore, the Legislature deems it advisable to adopt a change of policy in regard to hard roads development, by favoring some plan other than the method which I have advocated, I will give it my whole-hearted support, providing the plan contains provisions consistent with sound business principles, sane judgment and wise economy.

I will not oppose any plan which commends itself for adoption for reasons which are for the best interest of all the people of Vermont.

I am convinced that Vermont must face the highway problem just as the State has faced other problems of great magnitude requiring large amounts of money. Vermont must face the highway problem with courage, determination and in the spirit of true progress.

FLOOD BONDS

The flood of 1927 made it necessary for Vermont to depart from a traditional public policy in regard to bonding the State, and the Legislature, in special session, authorized a bond issue of \$8,500,000 to meet the emergency. It was hoped in the first instance that it would not be necessary to utilize the full amount of the issue under the authorization but the damage to our highways and bridges has been found to be so extensive and the problems of reconstruction so manifold and ramified, that the use of the entire issue will be required in addition to the appropriation of \$2,654,000 made by the National government.

It is incumbent upon the Legislature to provide means for the next two years for meeting the obligation thus imposed upon the State, and to enact measures looking to the retirement of our bonded indebtedness. It is my belief that an emergency obligation, such as the recent bond issue, should be met by emergency provisions, and the retirement achieved by special revenues obtained for that specific purpose, without encroachment upon the established revenues of the State.

Upon this theory of public policy I would suggest as possible methods of meeting this emergency the enactment of such special measures as a small direct state tax, an amusement tax and readjustment of the fees for registration of motor vehicles. In considering the possibility of a direct tax for this purpose it must be borne in mind that it is not in excess of the state tax of 1927, as that tax was authorized for two years only.

I offer this suggestion for flood bond retirement for the next biennium with the full understanding that it is only one of many possible methods of handling this problem. It seems to me to possess the merit of being an emergency tax proposition created to provide for emergency expenditures. I believe such a solution is safe from the standpoint of broad public policy. However, in your deliberations you may be able to discover a more feasible plan. If so, it will have my endorsement.

TAXATION

Taxation has always been a troublesome and highly debatable subject. It is a proposition of such tremendous magnitude that it is a physical impossibility to effect a satisfactory solution in one legislative session, unless the results of a thorough and intelligent, study is available as a basis of procedure. I would, therefore, ask that the present Legislature consider this, matter and authorize a commission of at least five persons to study the question' of taxation from all angles and to report their findings to the General Assembly of 1931. I recommend a reasonable appropriation for that, purpose.

In this connection I would say that in June, 1928, the Vermont branch of the New England Council passed a resolution with the recommendation that the Governor appoint a committee to consider and study the whole question of taxation because of the fact that the flood had materially increased Vermont's problem of raising revenues.

It was further suggested that the committee make a report to the Legislature in order that the members might be properly advised, before new legislation was passed.

Acting upon this resolution, I asked the New England Council to appoint a committee from its own membership to conduct this study, and they have made certain observations and recommendations that are embodied in a report which will be placed before you for consideration.

CONCLUSION

You now enter upon your duties as representatives of the freeman vote of Vermont. May your record prove as worthy and fruitful as the records of those who have preceded you in the historic Assembly. May you also legislate that Vermont will continue rightfully in that position which means progress and prosperity, not only for ourselves alone, but also as contributors to the progress and prosperity of the country of which we form a part.

Vermont is endowed with resources which can contribute to an enlargement of her material, intellectual and spiritual life. Success in no small degree is dependent upon the service rendered by the legislative Assemblies. I ask that you take up your tasks with faith in your fellowmen, faith in your State, and faith in God.

JOHN E. WEEKS.”