

Series 333, Good Roads Records, 1901 – 1917 (2.0 cu. ft.)

Processed by: Michael Intranuovo, 2012

Historical Note:

The Good Roads Movement was a national effort for the improvement of public roads, initially started by leisure-bicyclists, although it eventually focused on the needs of automobile users. It began in the mid- to late-nineteenth century and started gaining significant momentum as the twentieth century approached and more people started owning automobiles. Before a significant percentage of the population used automobiles, most of the country's roads were dirt, particularly in rural and suburban areas. States used tax funding to construct modern, macadamized public roads, and their respective counties followed suit to construct "good roads" within their own geographical boundaries. The movement led not only to more modern public roads that served well for local purposes, but acted as a catalyst for the construction of a national system of interstate highways.¹

Similarly, the Good Roads Movement began in the late nineteenth century in New York State with communities implementing plans for road construction as early as 1898.² Westchester County followed soon thereafter. On April 1, 1901, a resolution was adopted by the Westchester County Board of Supervisors to authorize its Good Roads Committee to make purchases of land required for the improvement of public highways in Westchester County.³ While funding for construction (and the construction itself) was largely the responsibility of New York State, the administrative duties that took place before construction were the responsibilities of the Westchester County Good Roads Committee. The work of this committee continued through at least the first two decades of the twentieth century.

¹ Rubenstein, James M. "Roads." *Dictionary of American History*. Ed. Stanley I. Kutler. 3rd ed. Vol. 7. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003. 175-180. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 20 Sep. 2012.

² Hugill, Peter J. "Good Roads and the Automobile in the United States 1880-1929." *Geographical Review*. Vol. 72, No. 3 (Jul., 1982) (p. 332).

³ The Planning Staff of Westchester County Emergency Work Bureau and County Projects Committee Board of Supervisors in cooperation with Works Progress Administration. (1939). *Historical Development of Westchester County: A Chronology* (Vol. 2). White Plains, NY.

Collection Description:

The Good Roads Records document the efforts of the Westchester County Good Roads Committee to acquire real estate within Westchester County for the purposes of constructing public roads and highways. The records do not go into detail about specific roads being built (i.e. construction costs, constructions plans, etc.), but rather about the process of acquiring land parcels from their respective owners for the purposes of building roads in the future. These records are arranged in five distinct sub-series:

1. Commissioners' "Separate Reports" (1902 – 1913)
2. Court Papers (1901 – 1917)
3. Bills of Costs (1902 – 1914)
4. Court Hearings (1903 – 1911)
5. Correspondence (1901 – 1911)

In general, the Commissioners' "Separate Reports" and the Court Hearings give the best overview of the Good Roads Records as a whole.

Commissioners' "Separate Reports"

These reports were created by the Good Roads Commissioners, who comprised the Good Roads Committee. In these reports are their official findings, usually dealing with the ease and/or hardship they faced when acquiring land parcels from individuals. Each report also contain specific land parcel numbers that correspond with state engineer maps,⁴ specific roads, and the names of individuals from whom the land is being bought. Each separate report has supporting documents with it, such as second proceedings, that give further detail as to the findings of each report. Arranged chronologically.

Court Papers

This sub-series consists of the papers filed with the Westchester County Court in regards to the activities of the Good Roads Committee. They include the following: affidavits of individuals; applications, oaths, and resignations of Commissioners; notices of appeal, motions, or affidavits; orders; and petitions. These records tend to focus on the functionality of the Good Roads Committee, rather than the actual purchasing of property from specific individuals. They are arranged alphabetically by type of record (affidavit, application, notice, etc.) and chronologically within each type of record.

Bills of Costs

These bills outline the costs that land parcel owners incurred when filing a claim with the County Court against the County's Board of Supervisors (who gave the Good Roads Committee its authority) over the Good Roads Committee's acquisition or attempted acquisition of their property. The claimant's costs usually included fees for the following: trial fee, trials lasting more than two days, stenographer's fees,

⁴ State engineer maps are not included in this collection with the exception of a few small maps attached to petitions within the Court Papers sub-series. Some related maps may have been filed with the office of the Westchester County Clerk.

copies of minutes, witness fees, and several others. They are arranged by owner's name, or if there was no name, by land parcel number.

Court Hearings

This sub-series includes claims, stipulations, and testimonies of land owners that the Good Roads Committee attempted to purchase property from. Only a limited number of individuals / parcels documented elsewhere in this collection also have Court Hearing records available for them. However, these records, particularly the testimony, give great detail as to the topography of the property involved. In addition, the amount of money that each land owner was offered for the land and any trees, plants, fences, structures, natural resources, etc. are also indicated by hearing witnesses such as surveyors. Some of the Court Hearings relate to the eleventh and the fourteenth Commissioners' Separate Report (those that accompany the reports are marked on the top of the first page of the document) and many of the claimants also have a bill of costs. The Court Hearings are arranged by road number and name (if available), and then by owners' names alphabetically.

Correspondence

The majority of these letters are between the State Engineer and Surveyor and the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors of Westchester County and deal with the completed construction of a specific road by the State Engineer. These letters act as formal notice to the Board of Supervisors as to the road's completion. Other correspondence is to the Clerk of the Board from the State Comptroller and from the First Deputy of the State Department of Highways. Arranged chronologically.