

## **What Goes Around Comes Around**

Certainly it is no secret that many in Western York County over the past few years have had, and aired their complaints over the spending of "Pennies For Progress," and the delay in improving Highway 5's western leg. Some have even wondered at the amazing progress lil' ol' adjoining Cherokee County made, while little activity was seen just across the county line. Too, an eye was cocked and a brow raised over how much and so quickly work was done on the eastern leg. Well, as we say, "What goes around comes around," and this is no new story.

During the summer of 1919 road improvement was a hot issue in Western York County. Then, like now, the residents were complaining about the small amount of tax money that was being spent on area roads. In August of that year, during laying-by time when farmers had more time to devote to civil activities, men of the Bullocks Creek and Broad River townships came before the County Commissioners citing the necessity of road improvement in those townships. They were none too happy about the condition of their roads and the seemingly lack of attention it was being given by county leaders.

As an agricultural town only thirty years old, it was argued that the town of Sharon was becoming the area's main merchandising center and the deplorable condition of the road from York to Sharon and Hickory Grove was described as being "more fearsome than the roads in the mountains of western North Carolina". Sharon's own Dr. Joseph Saye, a South Carolina House Representative and leading advocate for better roads was outspoken for Western York County. As his constituents believed (and expected their representative to do) he voiced their consensus. "I don't think it would be anything but right. Here, Western York County has been paying taxes for years for which every other section of York County has received benefit, while we have received practically nothing...there is no more reason why the eastern, northern and southern sections of the county should not help us to build a good road though Western York [County] than that we should help them build good roads through their respective territories as we have done."

The area people had long learned to have faith in Saye. Though his medical practices might be considered crude by today's standard, the people depended on his medical care and knew him as a man of action. He had successfully secured a depot for the town in 1889 by twisting the strong arm of the Three C's Railroad. He managed a pharmacy and other businesses including a farm, organized and built the First National Bank of Sharon, participated in county politics and for years was chairman of the York County Medical Association. When the physician and legislator promised he would get the South Carolina Legislature to appropriate fifty to sixty thousand dollars for the purpose of building a road through Western York county, no one doubted him for minute.

By February 1921 the Survey Corps of the State Highway Commission completed their survey of the proposed "West Road". The route would run from York to the Cherokee County line through Sharon and Hickory Grove, the same route presently slated for improvement as "the Nimtz Loop". The road was to be thirty-four feet wide from ditch to ditch with twenty-four feet surfaced with concrete. Apart from the \$10,00 in federal funds appropriated for the West Road, the York County budget carried a one-mill levy to raise another \$20,000, and as Saye promised

the state appropriated need funds. (Part of this original pavement may still be seen on Highway 97 from Hickory Grove to Smyrna.) Huffstetler & Ginn of Gastonia was awarded the contract and construction was to begin on the York-Cherokee line and proceed to York. But, as always, there were some who wanted their own interests served first.

When the Yorkville Business Men's League got word of the contract an emergency meeting was called. The newly formed organization's main reason for existing was to protect and promote the town's interest--and beginning at the county line, they believed, did not serve their best interest. The meeting erupted into a shouting match when Attorney Marion demanded the league go on record as opposing the commission's decision to begin on the west side of the county. Whatever arguments he presented, the real reason to begin near Smyrna was due to York's inability to decide on where they wanted the new road to enter the town. Some believed entrance from Kings Mountain Street would be best while others chose Liberty Street and still others wanted the connection at the south end of town.

After Marion's triad, Senator Hart took the floor and defended the decision to begin at the county line and reminded the businessmen Western York County had paid \$92,000 in road taxes over the past twenty-two years and had gotten little return on their taxes. He believed that to begin there was pure and simple justice.

James D. Grist of the *Yorkville Enquirer* agreed with Hart. He reminded the men, "much of your salvation from a businessman's standpoint lies in Western York County--you need these people. You need their friendship and trade. You'll never get it by antagonizing them. That's one big trouble now...in past years there has been too great an apathy towards people further out. The result is they are giving you the high sign....you'll be making a grave error by any attempt...opposing present plans for that West Road."

One businessman in the middle of the debate jumped to his feet and said what others were thinking, but too political to say: "We are as much entitled to that money as anybody else," he stormed. "If we've got a chance to have that work start at this end I think we ought to do it. We are more interested in roads in the immediate vicinity than we are further out and I think it's right that we go after this matter."

Businessman S. L. Courtney replied, "I think we ought to let those Western York County people and their road alone. I think more of them from a business standpoint than I do of most anybody else." With that said he moved that the league go on record as being unopposed to the starting point. Frank words and ideas flew back and forth, but eventually Courtney's motion was carried by an overwhelming majority.

By November 1923 the road from Smyrna to Yorkville was nearly complete and most of the traffic from the courthouse town to Hickory Grove was passing through Sharon. The West Road became a feeder from Sharon to all parts of Western York County, even as it is today, eighty years later. In May of that year one of the town's residents (who apparently had nothing else to do) counted 2,900 vehicles passing through Sharon in three days.

An increase in traffic naturally bred accidents. In Sharon during January 1922, Boyd Street

suffered a broken leg when he ran out into the street in front of R. W. Hope. Six months later Joe Sims, a well-known Sharon pharmacist, had his leg broken when a car driven by Paul White struck him. This accident resulted in a lawsuit--the first in Western York County. Two weeks after the Sims-White incident, as the Joe Maloney family was headed to church, they collided with Sam Smith in front of the First National Bank. Mrs. Maloney and the children were thrown from the car, but suffered little injury.

Perhaps while reading this story of road building in York County you had the feeling of de-javu. Yep, we've all heard the same old grips and arguments, seen the politics, the shuffling of money and self-serving interest--its all too familiar. Like they say, history repeats itself and life is nothing more than a stage--the actors may change, but the script remains the same.