18. Roads

AS LONG AGO AS 1875 writers were referring to San Mateo County's excellent roads.[1] But Robert S. Thornton didn't think the roads were so excellent. With road improvement as his concern, in 1858 he became an ex-officio road master and called for money to fill the "mudholes." Fifty-five years later he was still concerned, and although an old man, he was leading a drive for a special tax for road improvement.

In his endeavors he was joined by most of the people of old Colma. They talked about rough old Mission Street and about the holes in the roads that had to be filled with willow brush and rails from settlers' fences to pry stages out of the mud.

In 1908 James Casey got himself elected to the Board of Supervisors for the express purpose of fixing the roads. "Good Roads Casey" they called him in a salute to his long and earnest fight for highways and streets that would encourage settlement and progress. It was he who induced Santa Clara, San Mateo, and San Francisco counties to pass resolutions asking that Mission Street-El Camino Real be made a state highway. The eventual result of this and other drives was the construction of 125 miles of highway in San Mateo County.[2]

In 1910 when automobiles and airplanes were a novelty, Jim Casey induced the San Francisco Motor Club to sponsor a gala show at Tanforan with the proceeds earmarked for road improvement in the north county area. Several of the first air pilots in American history and the first automobile drivers joined with balloonists and glider pilots in a show that demonstrated their skills. Contemporary accounts state that the affair was a grand success.

As an organ for the roadbuilders the **Daly City Record** sounded the cry. "We are in hearty sympathy with the goal of good roads," the editor said as he announced his paper's support of a bond issue. When it passed he hailed it as "a vision of San Mateo County as Gloryland."[3]

In 1913 the voters of San Mateo County approved a bond issue for $1,250,000 which the State of California agreed to match. These funds made it possible to complete several road projects. Among them was the construction of a road that connected Colma and Daly City to the coastside villages. Another was the improvement of School Street and Spring Valley Boulevard, now a part of 87th Street. Still another was the laying of Junipero Serra Highway along a course that had been selected long before.

Completion of these projects was just the start. By 1915 so many shorter roads had been built that the editor of the **Record** wrote, "The improvements are so pronounced that anyone who has been away for seven years would hardly know the place to see it now."[4]

The fight for better roads has gone on and on with City Councils, the San Mateo County Supervisors, and the California Legislature continually facing the subject. From time to time whole communities have joined in. Even school children have written essays and letters and otherwise joined in the campaign. As a result, in 1972 five major highways—two of them freeways—ran north and south through northern San Mateo County while a part of the freeway and several other highways connect the bay shore with the coast side.

At the close of 1972 all of the public streets in the area were paved. Daly City alone reported 110.2 miles of paved streets within its city limits.[5]

MISSION STREET AND HILLSIDE—1930, LEADING TO OLD MARKET STREET RAILWAY QUARRY

JAMES "GOOD ROADS" CASEY

MISSION ROAD—1915, LOOKING NORTH FROM THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC OVERPASS IN COLMA.

SKYLINE BOULEVARD, NORTH FROM WESTRIDGE AVENUE—1923

RAILWAY TRACKS AT DALY CITY'S TOP-OF-THE-HILL, NEAR MISSION STREET AND SAN JOSE AVENUE

SOUTH ON JUNIPERO SERRA FREEWAY IN DALY CITY

LOOKING EAST OVER THE JUNIPERO SERRA FREEWAY—SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN IN THE BACKGROUND