

324

3

07 - 0736

541

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINNESOTA ROAD SYSTEM

By

Arthur J. Larsen

Superintendent, Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright © by the Minnesota Historical Society, 1966

No portion of this volume may be reproduced or copied
without the permission of the Minnesota Historical
Society, St. Paul.

388.1
9L329

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINNESOTA ROAD SYSTEM

By

Arthur J. Larsen

Head of the Newspaper Department,
Minnesota Historical Society

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. ARTHUR J. LARSEN is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and holds a Ph.D. degree in history from that institution. This volume constituted his doctoral thesis.

Mr. Larsen was born in Iowa in 1903. In 1928 he joined the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, and the following year became curator of the Society's newspaper department, a position he held until 1939. In 1940 he became superintendent of the Society.

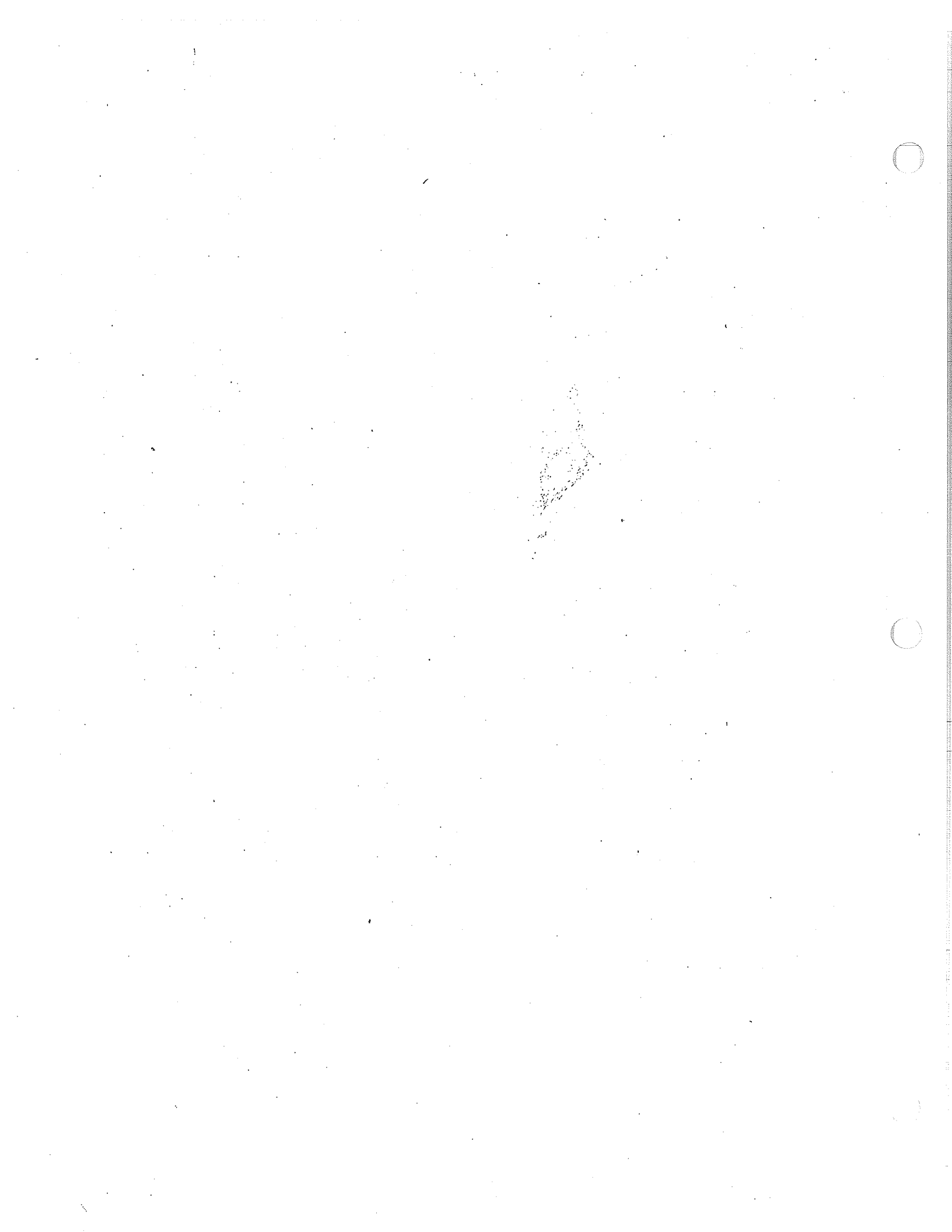
Two years later Mr. Larsen entered the Army Air Force as a first lieutenant. During World War II he served in Canada and as a historical officer for the Continental Air Force, rising to the rank of major. He was discharged in 1945 and returned to his position in Minnesota.

In July, 1947, Dr. Larsen resigned from the Society to accept a commission in the regular Army as a major in the Air Force. For the next ten years he served in the office of the air historian in Washington, D.C.

In 1957 Dr. Larsen returned to Minnesota and joined the history faculty of the University of Minnesota, Duluth. He became an associate professor in 1958 and a full professor in 1964. He lives at 2545 Anderson Road, Duluth.

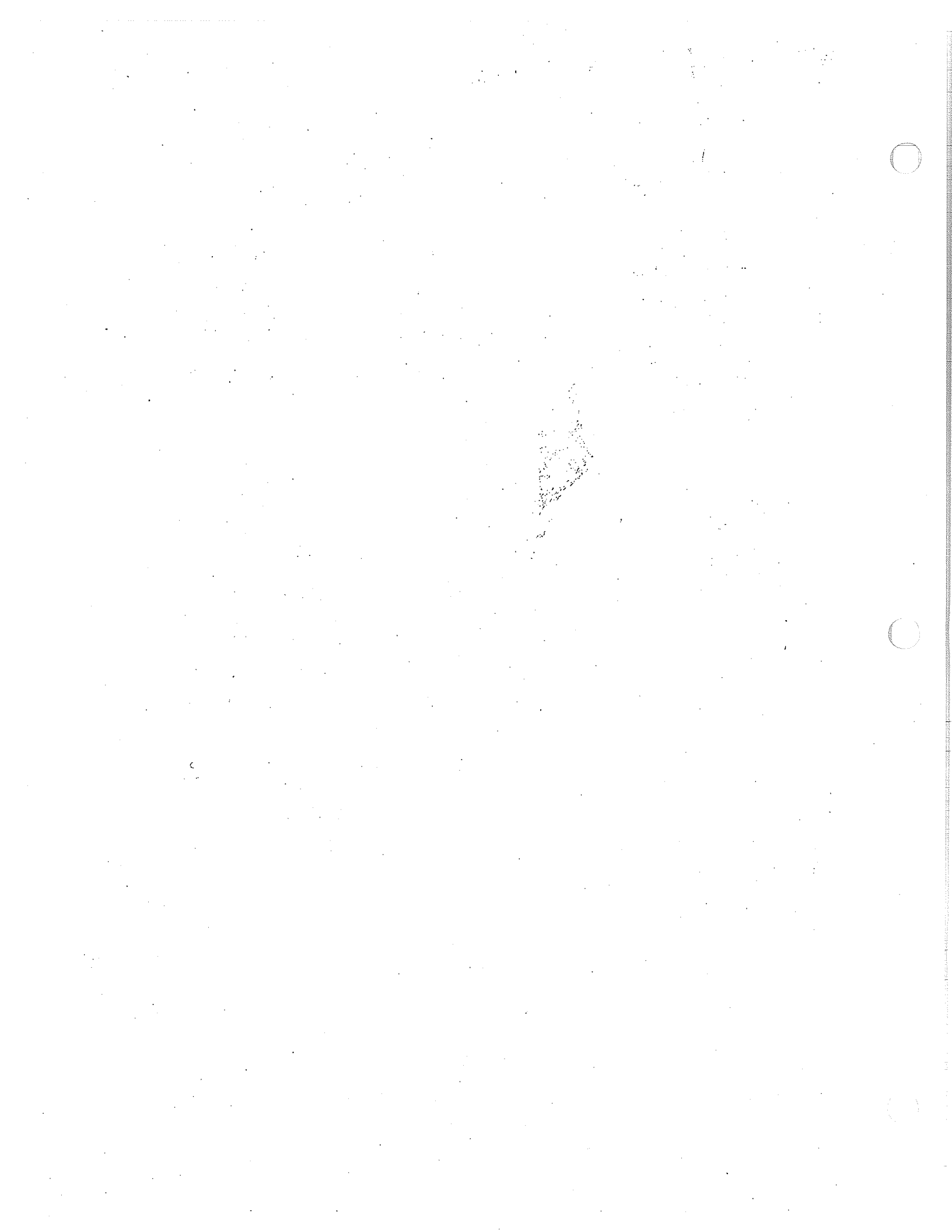
CONTENTS

I.	The Roads of Pre-Territorial Minnesota	1
II.	The Foundation of the Frontier Military Road System	39
III.	The Expansion of the Government Road System	89
IV.	The Roads of the Territorial Pioneers	125
V.	Completing the Frontier Road System	175
VI.	Road Legislation during the Territorial Period	218
VII.	Road Laws of Minnesota, 1858-95	258
VIII.	The Country Roads of Minnesota	287
IX.	The Crusade for Better Roads	330
X.	The Automobile and Good Roads	379
XI.	The Development of the Trunk Highway System	428
XII.	The Good Roads Revolution	476
	Bibliography	494



MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

The Grand Portage	3 -
Main Routes of Travel in Pre-Territorial Minnesota	21
Red River Oxcarts on the Streets of St. Paul in 1859	23 -
Route Followed by Captain McGee	27
Northern Terminus of the Point Douglas-St. Louis River Military Road	67
Southern Terminus of the Point Douglas-St. Louis River Military Road	76
Roads Built by the Federal Government	88
Routes of Travel in Minnesota in 1855	142
Frontier Stagecoaches	171- 189-
Main Routes of Travel in Minnesota in 1860	181
Roads of West Central Minnesota in 1878	194
Roads of Northwestern Minnesota about 1895	203
Roads of Southwestern Minnesota in 1875	207
Minnesota Bridge Building by Poll Tax Labor	306
Too Common "Road Working"	322
The Cycle Club of St. Paul in 1889	335 -
Entries in an Early Automobile Race at the State Fair Grounds in St. Paul	388
The Route of the Minnesota Scenic Highway	434
Diagram of the Trunk Highway System	447



PREFACE

Within the space of the century covered by this study, from the days of the French coureurs de bois, who in the early years of the nineteenth century scarred the western prairies with the trails made by their unwieldy ox carts, to the adoption of the good roads amendment of 1920, the Minnesota version of the American drama of state making was enacted. First to penetrate to the wilderness home of the Indians were the traders, missionaries, and soldiers. They were the advance guard for the invasion of civilization -- pioneer farmers, lumbermen, frontier businessmen, and land speculators who, at the mid-point in the nineteenth century, opened the land to settlement. The pioneer stage was followed by a period of agricultural development, when Minnesota was the breadbasket of the nation. Finally, as the period covered by this volume closes, Minnesota, like other American regions, was growing into an industrial state.

These stages in the development of the Minnesota commonwealth were reflected in the story of its roads. The fur traders left a heritage of picturesque Red River carts and the trails which they wore in the Minnesota sod. The soldiers, lumbermen, and pioneer settlers

opened a labyrinth of paths of communication -- military roads, rough logging trails, and wagon roads. The agricultural era left its mark on Minnesota by straightening those crude trails, for practice decreed that, unless insuperable obstacles prevented, roads should follow section lines. But the agricultural era of Minnesota history left a legacy of poor roads. It was the age of mud and the statute labor tax. The dawning industrial age produced a profound change in Minnesota road conditions, however, for with the coming of the bicycle and the automobile, vastly different and better roads were needed. These products of the new day drove the state -- along with the nation -- into the era of concrete roads, hot dog stands, and billboards.

Such in brief is the story that the following pages tell. The sources from which this study of the development of the road system in Minnesota is drawn are varied in character. Government archives -- federal, state, and local -- manuscript diaries, letters, and other records, reminiscent sketches and biographies, accounts of travel and description, state and local histories, printed and manuscript maps, periodicals and newspapers -- all played important parts in supplying information. Most of the material is contained in the invaluable collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

It is no more than fitting in these first pages that the author should acknowledge his debt to his mentor

and superior, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, professor of history at the University of Minnesota and secretary and superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, without whose wise counsel and friendly criticism it is difficult to conceive how this study could have been made. To Mr. Walter F. Rosenwald, veteran of many years of service in the Minnesota Highway Department, and now director of safety for that department, another heavy debt is owed for his helpful suggestions as to the scope and content of the later chapters. My wife alone understands how much her assistance and encouragement have meant in bringing the work to completion. To them, and to those others who have contributed advice, encouragement, or criticism, must go much of the credit for such excellence as the work possesses.

Arthur J. Larsen

Minnesota Historical Society
St. Paul

