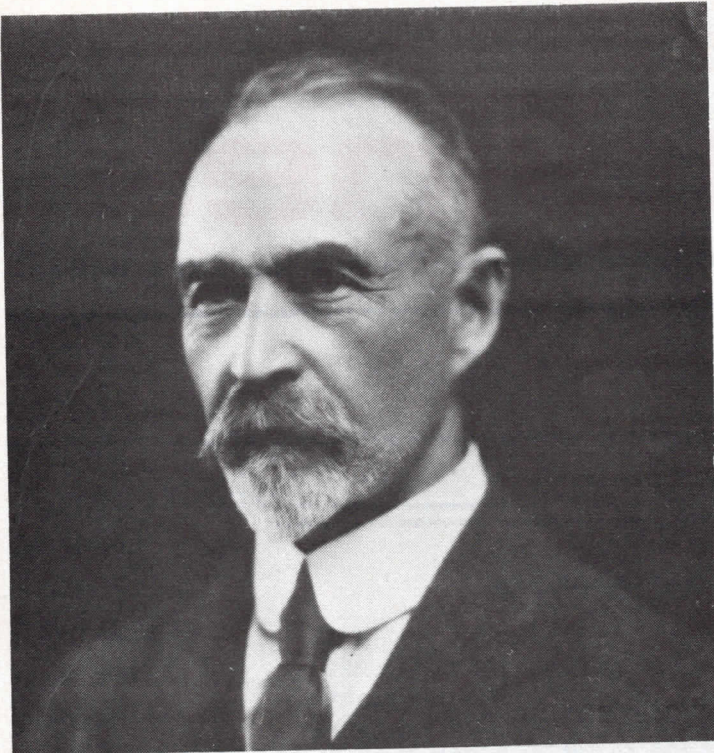


1913-1973



William Calder, first C.R.B. Chairman



Board Members inspecting the Mirboo-Leongatha Road in 1913



"Prudence" bogged in Warrigal Road in 1914.

SIXTY YEARS OF SERVICE

Last month the Country Roads Board celebrated its 60th Year. In personal terms this would be regarded as a "Diamond Anniversary", which is another decade nearer the more magical Centenary.

In the six decades now past much has been accomplished. Muddy roads which were often no more than settlers' tracks have been replaced by highways of standards undreamed of by those sweating bullockies whose whips still cracked through the air in 1913.

There is no doubt that the Board's record is very good and that Victoria's system of principal roads is generally acknowledged to be the best in Australia. This creditable performance over six decades has been achieved through the efforts of many men. In particular, we owe much to those men who in 1913 took up the challenge to turn miles of often impassable tracks into all-weather roads. Such was the task ahead of them that one of the greatest problems was knowing where to start!

So the first Board Members, Messrs. Calder, McCormack and Fricke, spent their first two years in the job travelling from one end of Victoria to the other to get an appreciation of the road needs of the State. Generally, road construction had never kept ahead of settlement and the task had quite outgrown the resources of shire councils. We seldom think of the hardships under which the inspections were often carried out. Where "Prudence" their faithful 30 h.p. Itala couldn't get through, horses had to be used.

The Board's first Chairman, Mr. W. Calder, kept a diary of notes on the initial inspections. Reading these notes is quite interesting, for he had a keen eye and recorded his observations in a dry, somewhat scientific style. Some indication of the conditions in 1913 can be gauged from the following extracts:

Lillydale: 6th May 1913 —

"Left for inspection of the Evelyn to S. Wandin road with Mr. McComb, reached Evelyn from Lillydale by a very badly graded and unmetalled road, where 'Prudence' became bogged in the mud for nearly an hour."



In 1913 the Princes Highway East in Dandenong looked a bit muddy.

Lillydale 8th May 1913 —
 "... endeavoured to negotiate the Mt. Dandenong Road via Montrose and Kilsyth. After getting two thirds of the distance up the car stuck and had to be backed down the hill ..."

Alberton: 16th July 1913 —

"At 2.5 p.m. reached Binn's holding on top of hill, on Whitelaw's Track. This holding has been occupied about 5 years and during that time Mrs. Binns has not been out of the place owing to the condition of the roads. When she goes for a jaunt it is on a sledge. The land is so steep that Mr. Binns had to erect a picket fence to prevent Mrs. Binns from falling into the creek. When he gets tired of Mrs. Binns he removes the fence."

"At this stage Cr. Fahey's horse became indisposed. Mrs. Binns prepared a mixture of washing soda, gum arabic and some green coloring medium (name unknown). After saddle and bridle were removed the owner, with the assistance of Shire President and Engineer administered the draught from an empty beer bottle. The horse however rejected the dose, which was received by Cr. Fahey down his sleeve. He affirmed that the horse received much benefit, and was enabled to renew the journey along Whitelaw's Track to Yarram."

Tallangatta: 20th February 1914 —

"At 10.20 a.m. passed Mail Coach, which left Tallangatta at 6 a.m. The road here is in very bad condition, and the surface rough. ..."

We can acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of those men in the Board's service during the early years of the C.R.B. Using horse and human muscle power with equipment and plant laughable by today's standards, these men built roads the hard way. Earthworks which then took a team of men and horses a week of back-breaking work can now be achieved in a few hours using the brute power of the diesel engined earth-moving equipment in use today.

Whilst times have changed over sixty years, a comment made by Mr. Calder in 1913 still stands good today: the comment was that roads were only as good as the men who look after them!

So let's spare a thought for a moment for those road men of the past. After all, their efforts paved the way for our splendid roads of today.



Heavy going on the South Gippsland Highway at Korumburra in 1914

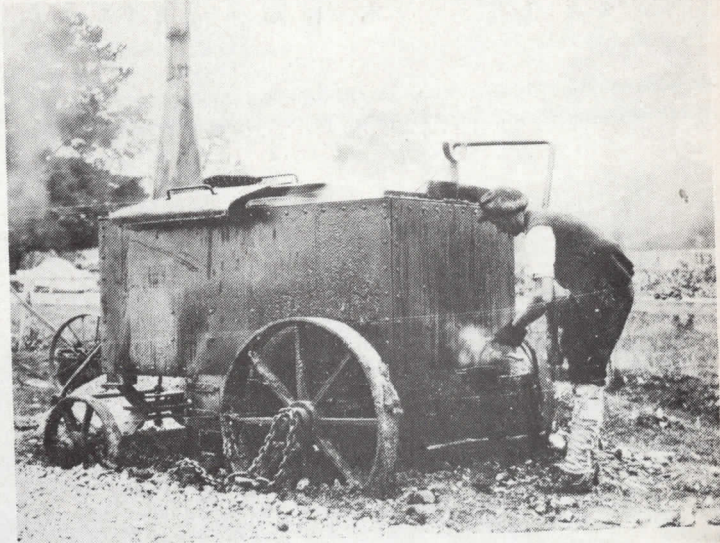


C.R.B. staff in 1920. Taken outside their offices at the Titles Office building.

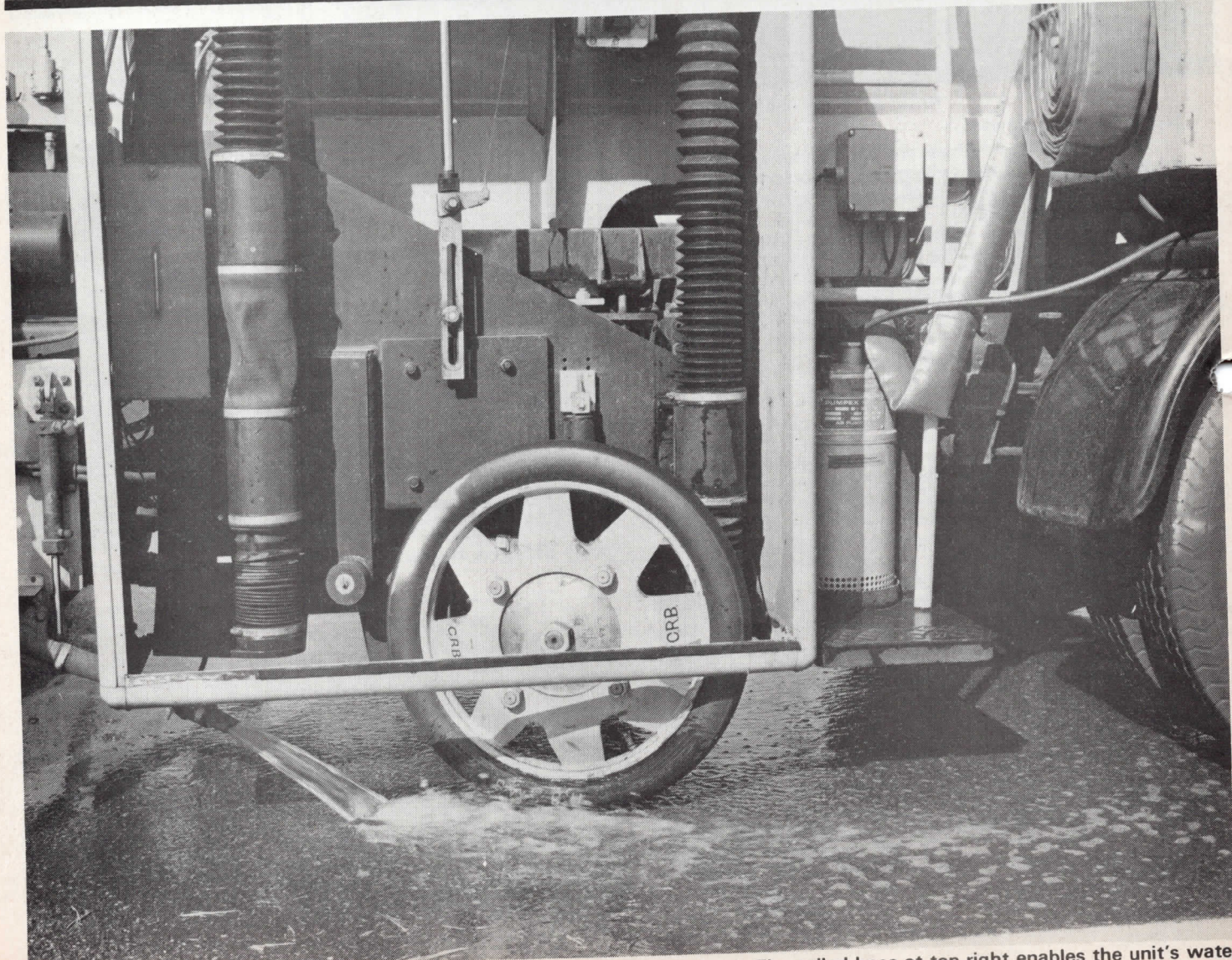
SIXTY YEARS OF SERVICE (CONT.)



Hard to believe: patrolman on the Serpentine Road in 1936



Pouring off Trinidad tar on the Western Highway at Myrning in 1928



Close-up of the test wheel in contact with the road surface which is watered. The coiled hose at top right enables the unit's water tank to be refilled from streams, rivers, dams, etc.