Such evidence speaks well for the Commission Form of County Government.

On April 5, 1932, after four years of operation, a referendum ballot was submitted to the voters to either retain the Commissioner Form of County Board, or go back to the Supervisor Form. The resulting ballot was very decidedly in favor of retaining the Commissioners.

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Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

We are naturally interested in comparing the supervisory and commission forms at as many points as possible. Mr. E. L. Murch will compare the two systems on points not covered in the last two speeches.

Comparison of the Commission and the Supervisory Forms of County Government

E. L. Murch,
Weyerhaltser, Wis.

It may be interesting to you people to know background of the delegation from Rusk County. Perhaps you think that we are hand-picked Marinettis coming down here to give the opinion of the minority of the county and therefore we do not represent the true sentiment of the county. This is not the case. Mr. Justus is President of the Holstein Breeders Assn. of Rusk County and is supervisor of his town, Mr. Sillman is Secretary of the Rusk County Farmers' Union and I, the least respectable of all, belong to the American Society of Equity, The Milk Pool, The Holiday Assn., and have joined the most militant group of the Farmers' Union. If there is any possible chance to kick, believe me, I will use my mouth if not my brains and make plenty of noise about it.

If I were asked what were the worst mistakes of the commissioners, I would have to say as yet we have been unable to find any bad ones. If I were asked, what was the main reason why we changed from the Supervisors to the Commissioner Form, I would say as I look back to those meetings which were held throughout the county back in 1927 that it was the impossibility of placing responsibility and the use by the supervisors of that principle so well developed, if you will scratch my back, I will scratch yours.

To make that clear I will have to explain the law known on the Statute Books as improvement of town and village initiative. Under this law a town may raise this money by taxing all taxable property in the county. It is clear then that one section of the county had to pay for improvements in the other and if a town were to receive any benefit from the money it paid in, it must have road or bridge improvement work going on all the time. Much of this improvement was not needed and a lot of it was very wasteful. Our county had raised money and spent it liberally yet in the peak of our Coolidge prosperity we had not been able to get the money to pay for this work as fast as the county was committed to spend it.
I wish to say that the Commissioners have not had an application put through under this law since they took office. Our purpose, coming as we do from Rusk County which has experienced both the Commissioner and Supervisor Form of County Government, is to bring you our experiences under both forms in the hope that it may help you decide which is the most economical, most efficient, and the least onerous and least unwieldy.

A very important problem to us is delinquent taxes and here the commissioners have effected great savings. To prove this I will have to show how the situation is handled by the Supervisors and by the Commissioners. When land becomes delinquent the Government receives no revenue from it from private sources, and an endeavor should be made to get it back into private hands and if it cannot be used this way it should be entered into forest crop area. Our Commissioners are taking title to this land and selling it to farmers for woodlot and pastures and are blocking off large sections for private game reserves and the remainder is being entered into forest crop area where the zoning and planning laws utilize these marginal lands to their best advantage. The Supervisors are not in favor of the county taking title because these delinquent lands can be turned in as a towns' share of county taxes. One county has received as little as $200. cash money, the rest delinquent taxes. A forty cornering one has been used for this purpose until there are $250. back taxes. The Commissioners sell such forties from $40 to $150. The town has been reaping taxes as high as $38 yearly from this at the expense of the county. If I should buy this land the assessed value would have to come down and the town would receive about $4 or $5 yearly. The commissioners for some years have kept the county government going by the sale of these lands. We received $182,000.00 from this source last year.

Now I wish to compare the two systems as a facility. The Commissioners act as all committees. Therefore, matters pertaining to road and bridge problems, poor relief, equalization, etc. can all be taken care of at the same sitting. Matters which pertain to or effect several committees under the Supervisors system are handled by the same men at the same time in our plan. In this way the business of the committees is correlated and the county does not suffer the lack of team work due to grudges and jealousies which arise from personal ambition. One department is used sometimes for the benefit of the whole. For instance last year the court house was run on the appropriations of the road and bridge committees. The constant day-to-day contact of the three men with the county's business give them a wonderful understanding of all the problems that come up. This also makes it hard to sell the county at a long price, as an illustration a Casualty Insurance agent tried to raise Rusk County's rate due to high experience, when the particular experience was not due to county negligence.

When a C.W.A. Director or conservation officer or anyone else enters Rusk County and is entitled to a hearing the board is called together by telephone and that day or next the board sits down with the representative and as soon as possible an opinion or decision is reached. On account of this Rusk County was off in a
hurry on the C.W.A. program much sooner than other counties. I wish to emphasize the simplicity with which the three men operate. Mr. Krouse may have a problem brought to him or a problem may come to the chairman Mr. Ellingson. The two men talk to each other by phone. They decide to settle the matter, each step into their cars and in twenty minutes are in conference with Mr. Bissell in Ladysmith. Compare that with waiting for the semi-annual meeting of the general board.

This brings to my mind the meeting of the Board of Supervisors back in 1922. I had been appointed on a committee of the Rusk County Union of the American Society of Equity to investigate graft in the county. I found some of the talk was rumor but there was one case substantiated with state evidence of graft. I took the case before the board of 39 members which then consisted of a few active members and the rest inactive or inexperienced or uncapable. Most of the farmer members were unable to address so large a formal gathering so said nothing. The foreign born saloon keeper from a town adjoining me understood little of what went on and had to question the supervisor from my town during the intermission to find out how to vote. In regard to the town chairman in whose town the graft took place he stood up very embarrassed and read and said something about "It's all right now," I never could decide what ailed him. Whether he was stage struck or whether "The powers that be" had promised him road improvement for his town, at any rate, he showed he wished the subject dismissed. No one cared to lose his influence or his committee appointment which would reflect back into losing his position in the town by championing this case against the interest of the ring which at that time controlled the county.

Because you may wish to compare the chances for graft under the two systems and because it is such an all important consideration in considering any form of government I wish to point out that the large number of men on the board of supervisors was no insurance against graft. I wish also to point out that it would have been covered up had I, an outsider, not forced my way in and brought it to the attention of the county and that though it was fully aired in the county papers yet the ring was so well fortified in its control of the board that the ring stayed in control. One of the last acts of one of these ring leaders in the new order was to be caught by Commissioner Hubbard stealing bridge steel for use in his garage.

Rusk County has not come to Madison to tell other counties what kind of government they must use but we wish to say we have kicked back-alley politics out of our county by adopting the Commission form and we can now place responsibility on a few men and can view their proceedings as published from month to month. While we are not free from the possibility of graft, at least we feel we have as close an approach to a modern system of county government as we can get. We radicals of Rusk County are proud of it.

* * *

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

A very few counties in the United States have adopted what
we might call the county manager plan. The picture would not be complete without a presentation of this method of county government. Mrs. Isabelle McCarthy is going to tell us of the merits of the county manager form of government as compared with the commission and supervisory forms.

The Merits of the County Manager Form of Government as compared to the Commission and Supervisory Forms.

Mrs. Isabelle McCarthy,
Cottage Grove, Wis.

Ex-Governor John Harrell of Iowa in his inaugural address in 1929 said, "County Government is trying to do 1929 business with a 1900 model. It is high time a survey be made of our forms of County Government to ascertain whether or not the most possible service for the tax dollar is being given." Apparently such a survey has been made in three counties in Wisconsin and a change in local government deemed advisable. However, in all three counties the change was made to the Commission form of government.

There is another form of County Government being used quite extensively throughout the United States, but of which the average citizen has heard very little. This is known as the County Manager Plan. During the past few years several counties in Virginia, North Carolina and Montana have adopted this form of county government and it has proven very successful in all instances.

I should like to quote from H. S. Gilbertson's, "The County, The Dark Continent of American Politics," "The County of the future will employ a manager, chosen appropriately with sole reference to his fitness to manage public affairs, and without regard to residence, religion, or his views on the Mexican situation, who will pick up the authority of the county where the board of directors leave it off." If this is to be a fact perhaps it would be well if we consider the merits of the County Manager Plan as compared with the Commission or Supervisory Systems of Local Government.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is how the County Manager Plan is organized. The County Manager Plan is similar to the Commission Form of County Government in that they both provide for a small board of Supervisors. There are usually from five to nine members of this board and they are elected by the people from the county at large. This Board of Supervisors hires the County Manager and as he need not be a resident of the county it is usually possible to hire the best man obtainable, a man who has made a thorough study of county government and is a successful executive. The Manager is to the county what a general manager is to a corporation, thereby putting the county on a business basis.

The duties of the County Manager are very definite. They are as follows: