

Frederick D. Gardner

Governor of Missouri

1917 - 1921



A wartime Missouri governor, Frederick D. Gardner envisioned the needs of a state and nation at peace. And he worked toward that vision.

When he was asking Missourians to elect him Governor in 1916, he pledged "to construct a vast system of good roads that will eventually bring thousands of tourists and millions of dollars into the state." In his inaugural address he called for a law creating a bipartisan State Highway Commission.

Of the law and the commission he hoped to see, Governor-elect Gardner said: "This commission should be given broad powers, including authority to select a state highway engineer and to pay such salary as would guarantee a man of high attainments and successful experience. In 1917, the General Assembly enacted the Hawes Law.

Another step closer to his vision, Governor Gardner said in his first biennial message: " ... considering the amount of money available for the purpose, I am convinced that today we have on our statute books the best good roads law in the entire country ... "

But for Governor Gardner that wasn't good enough. In 1918 he proposed a \$60,000,000 bond issue to be paid from automobile licenses. In 1919, he said "The building of a completely connected system of 6,000 miles of hard-surfaced roads, reaching every county of the state, should be undertaken at the earliest possible day. It is estimated that this would cost 60 million dollars... a small sum for this great state to invest and repay during the next thirty years."

The governor backed his words with deeds, throwing himself and the prestige of his office into the bond issue campaign of 1920. When the issue was approved, he asked the legislature in his second biennial message to enact the laws needed to carry out its purposes.

Missouri historian Floyd Shoemaker wrote: "Frederick D. Gardner was governor of Missouri during the World War period and while he was a model war executive he also achieved legislation of lasting peace-time value."