

Joseph Parmley wore many hats during his career—homesteader, stockman, publisher, real-estate agent, politician, promoter of Missouri River development, and advocate of world peace. He is best remembered, however, for his work for good roads in South Dakota and his role in creating the Yellowstone Trail (United States Highway 12).

Joseph William Lincoln Parmley was born 12 January 1861 to Joseph Parmley and Jane Ashton Parmley in Mifflin, Wisconsin. He graduated from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, in 1883. Boarding a train west, he traveled to Aberdeen and then walked forty miles to the new town of Roscoe. There, he cofounded the *Roscoe Herald*, using it to promote his fledgling real-estate business. He also began his public service career in 1883, becoming superintendent of schools for Edmunds County. Parmley later relocated to Ipswich and held several county offices until his election in 1905 to the South Dakota House of Representatives, where he served two terms.

In 1907, Parmley proposed a bill empowering counties to collect taxes and contract road work. The idea represented a departure from the old system, which allowed landowners to work off taxes by maintaining the roads adjoining their property. Although it initially failed to win approval, Parmley's plan provided a blueprint for the State Highway Department and a cohesive road system. Parmley also recognized that good roads would bring tourists to the region, and in 1912, he organized a meeting in Lemmon of town boosters from across the Northern Plains. The Yellowstone Trail Association, a national organization dedicated to promoting a highway from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound, grew out of this gathering.

Parmley next promoted the "Canada to Canal Highway," extending the length of North America, and worked to create the International Peace Gardens on the Manitoba-North Dakota border. Within South Dakota, he pushed for highway bridges across the Missouri River and development of the river's hydroelectric potential. At one time or another, he also served on the South Dakota Board of Regents, State Highway Commission, South Dakota Horticultural Society, Mount Rushmore Advisory Commission, and State Historical Society.

Parmley's last political appointment came at the age of seventy-eight, when Governor Harlan J. Bushfield selected him to help plan the state's golden anniversary celebration. Parmley died the next year, on 19 December 1940, and is buried at Southside Cemetery in Ipswich.

by Greg M. Wysk

Dakota Images



Joseph W. Parmley

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