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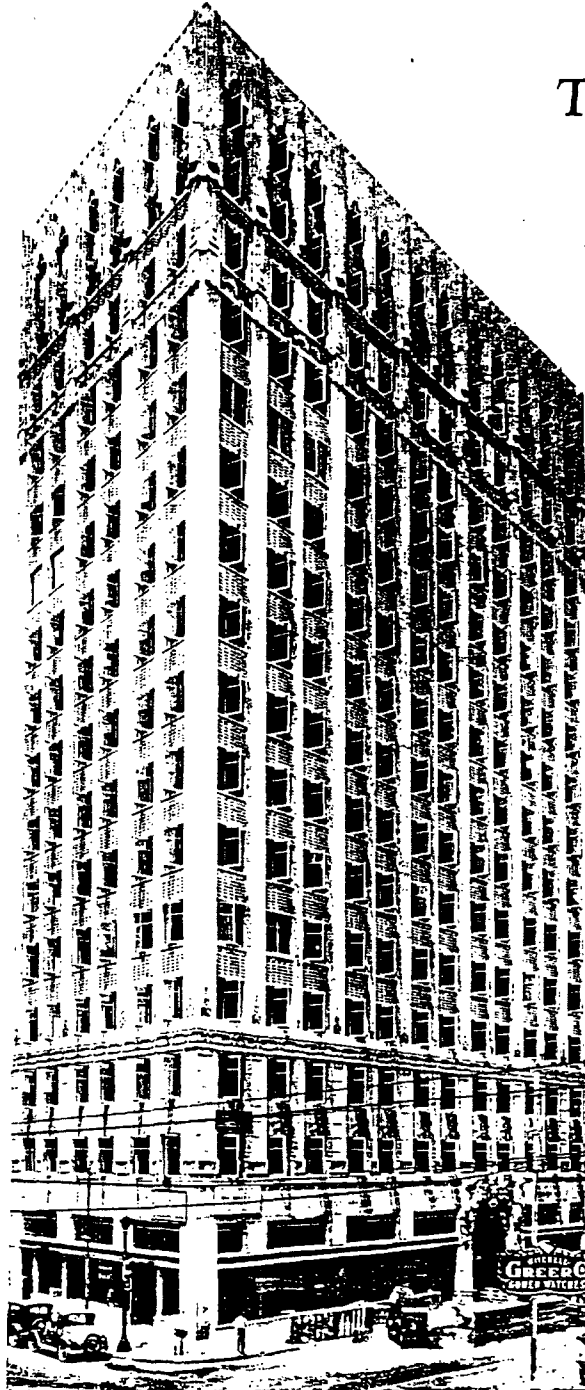
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"Luck seems to favor the man who doesn't count on it"

HIGHWAY AND MUNICIPAL NEWS

DON LEE
Editor

Prequalification in Wisconsin*

THE classification of contractors was first put into effect in Wisconsin in the beginning of 1925. The method used prior to this time was to let anyone bid regardless of whether he had experience, equipment or finances. After opening bids, it had to be determined who was the lowest responsible bidder. In many cases the low man was not responsible and the award had to be made to the next bidder. This method caused a great deal of trouble and general dissatisfaction. When the low bidder was told he was not responsible, he immediately went out and set up the claim to the public that the highway officials were not giving him a fair deal. The idea of the qualification of all contractors for the kind and amount of work was to do away with having to reject the low bid. Under the classification method, the low bidder gets the job because he is not permitted to file a bid unless he is qualified to do the work bid upon. All notices to contractors for taking bids on work contain the following: "Bidders must be on qualified list for the type and quantity of work to be bid upon at least two days before the time set for opening bids."

It has been stated that the Wisconsin plan is a form of restrictive competition or bidding by invitation, and it is extremely doubtful whether it would meet the requirements of the laws in other states.

Determine Responsibility First

The object of competitive bidding is to determine the lowest bidder. At first this was the only one, and in many instances, is the only one today, but common sense and public good, however, required that the awarding officials should be given some power in determining the responsibility of the lowest bidder. Therefore, most laws state that the award shall be made to the lowest responsible bidder.

*EDITOR'S NOTE:—For several months, this page will be devoted to explaining Prequalification as it has been adopted in several other states. With this number, "Prequalification in Wisconsin" is discussed and in subsequent issues this subject will be treated upon as it pertains to South Carolina, Tennessee and California.

The awarding official must, therefore, determine the responsibility of the bidder, either before or after taking the bids, and the Wisconsin plan is to do this before taking bids.

The information that is filed by the division offices on each contract job gives the main office a record of the performance by the contractor. This record takes into consideration the following: The name of the contractor, the name of the job, length of the job, total amount of the contract in dollars, date of the letting, date of the contracts, agreed upon date of starting the work, agreed upon date of completion, final estimate in dollars; date of final acceptance, loss of time due to weather, loss of time due to conditions beyond the control of the contractor, loss of time due to the contractor's fault, the number of working days, the total construction units, the average number of construction units per working day, the progress, whether normal, subnormal, or unusually rapid; what part of the work was sub-let, the name of the subcontractor and his address, general progress, whether excellent, good, fair

or poor; whether the job was financed, equipped, organized; whether the contractor bills promptly, delinquent; whether there were claims filed; what attitude the contractor takes in final settlement; whether he had trouble or made final settlement easy; the general attitude of the contractor toward the work, whether cooperative, agreeable or antagonistic.

After taking into consideration these items mentioned on the list, the division engineer classifies the contractor in one of the following classifications: General contractor, paving or surfacing, grading only, bridges, concrete, timber structures, and paving only. Each classification provides for other classifications to be included in the contract. The maximum amount in dollars is allowed to have under each classification.

A general contractor is permitted to bid on any one or more of the classifications, but he is limited to the amount under any one classification. For example, the general contractor is permitted to bid on bridges up to a certain amount in money or a certain span. For any reason, there is no limit included in the contract. If a contractor is qualified to build, he must build this bridge to some qualification. The maximum amount of work he will always be limited to. For example, we may have a general contractor who can have a bridge included in his contract up to \$30,000, or a certain span, but his total amount of work can be under contract up to \$200,000. A grading and paving contractor is one that can handle grading and gravel or stone surfacing up to a certain amount. The size of his contract is the same for the other classifications.

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