

BUILDERS' COSTS AND ESTIMATES.

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(Concluded).

The weekly pay rolls are totalled and checked and extended on the morning of pay day, and they should then be up to date to the evening before pay-day. This is standard practice, and it will be seen that the keeping of these labour costs does not hold up the work on pay-day, but helps it on immensely. All of the hard work of pay-day is done in small pieces during the week.

A word might be said here about the extending of pay sheets. Workmen are rightly very touchy on the question of wages. If errors occur in working out the amounts (as they are very liable to) no end of dissatisfaction is occasioned. It pays handsomely, in time, and in satisfactory relations with the men, to use a good ready reckoner for wage calculations. A really good and reliable ready reckoner can be obtained from a bookseller for a couple of shillings, and it will save that in time the first day it is used, and be a clear profit-maker thereafter.

Just before leaving this question of time sheets, it may be well to restate the advantages to be obtained by using the daily time sheets here advocated. It is well known that many builders regard this as impracticable and unnecessary. Their use confers the following advantages:—

- (1) *Men do not put off making up time sheets—they can't.*
- (2) *Costing is easy if done daily, and a short period of time spent at this work daily is better than a long period spent weekly.*
- (3) *Immediate costs are available.*
- (4) *The foreman's supervision of the time sheets is worth something, for he has them before he has forgotten the work he had given to the men.*

Recording of Costs.

For the recording of costs nothing is better than the card system, though books specially ruled may give satisfaction. Such books must contain provision for date, cost unit symbol, name (of firm, article or other facts wanted), and a money column for costs. As all these columns are narrow ones, there is room in the ordinary book for three or even four sets to the page. All the cost units of one contract will often go on one double page, or three or four pages at the most.

Cards are, of course, much more elastic. Their use makes for quicker work, greater convenience in working, and economy. As costs units are finished and duly checked up and recorded in the job cost

record, the cost unit card can be removed from the active file, and transferred to another file for reference when determining rates for use in estimating. Thus, if there are ten jobs in progress, there will be ten cost unit cards for the cost unit "C.R.F." or roof framing. When the jobs are finished, these ten cards will have been transferred, one by one, to the reference file, and by looking at them it is possible in a few minutes to see how much each of the ten roofs cost for labour (or material) in total; how many hundred square feet of area was covered by each, and how they each worked out per 100, or for any other unit of measurement desired. A basis of comparison is thus available, without trouble in hunting through heavy cost ledgers and similar books. The information so gained is, of course, invaluable in making up future estimates, which would be based on actual costs and not on guess-work.

Costing cards may be ruled with provision for a heading giving name of subdivision and name of cost unit. It is best to adopt a separate colour for each of the five main subdivisions and another for sub-contracts. The three carpenters' subdivisions may be related colours—as yellow of different shades, etc. The use of colour in this way greatly facilitates reference and the sorting of cards is made very easy indeed. The body of the cards may be ruled with columns for date, particulars, estimated cost, actual cost, and then two more columns for showing the loss or the gain, as the case may be, on each item in the cost unit; that is, loss by cost above estimate, or gain by cost below estimate. These are facts the contractor must know, for each individual cost unit, before he can know accurately how he is coming out on the contract as a whole.

Provision should also be made for reducing the costs to standard rates, as cost per square foot for joinery, cost per hundred square feet for flooring, weatherboarding, etc, etc.

The size of the cards to be used is a matter that will come up very early for decision. It must be remembered that the equipment for card systems—cabinets, and guide cards, etc.—is made in standard sizes, and if the card adopted does not conform to these standards a good deal of extra money and delay will be incurred in having fittings and equipment made to special order. Cards may be 5in. x 3in. or 6in. x 4in. or 8in. x 5in., etc, but for most businesses the most generally useful size is the 5in. x 3in. If a cost unit is large, it may occupy both sides of the card, or even two cards, pinned together. This will seldom be necessary, and most cost units will fit easily on one side of a 5in. x 3in. card, the fittings for which are, of course, a good deal cheaper than those for the larger sizes. On these matters it is best to consult a firm specialising in card equipment before getting the cards prepared.

The arrangement of the cards is not difficult. They must, of course, be indexed. Without an in-