

TREES, FENCES AND HEDGEROWS.*

By Harold Parker, M. Am. Soc. C.E., Chairman Massachusetts Highway Commission.

In discussing the questions which are indicated in the title of this paper, it should be borne in mind that two causes for the results that have followed man's effort to beautify and improve what was first done from necessity alone must be taken into consideration, in order to bring before you the conclusion which I desire to make plain.

In the first place, before we can take into account the roadside trees, hedge rows and fences, we must consider that the road itself was the first development of the necessities of man. He had to have a road which led from one point to another, not only for his own passage, but for that of the vehicle which carried his produce, or later contributed to his pleasure; so that in the laying out of highways, as means of transportation alone, neither the comfort of those using them nor the beauty of their surroundings was considered, the aim of the road-builders being to secure the easiest means of getting from place to place.

It is not supposed to be a part of this discussion that I should consider the location, construction or maintenance of roadways, except in so far as the trees and roadside growths may be either a protection to the road itself or contribute to the comfort and happiness of those passing over it, which is, to be sure, a question of some economic advantage, and therefore has a value beyond the purely aesthetic.

Roads themselves have grown with the growth and wealth of population, and have usually kept pace with such growth, and, as the leisure and financial ability of communities increased, as well as the opportunities for improving their roadsides, the improvement of the roads and the beautification of the roadside surroundings became a sought-for consummation, and, as civilization increased, a practical interest.

In this way it may readily be seen that where population has concentrated for economic reasons, there has gradually grown up the desire for aesthetic effects, as is shown in the creation of parks and public reservations for the enjoyment of the people at large.

For the same reason the ornamentation of roadsides, extending gradually into the country from larger cities and towns, has developed and grown with the wealth of the people themselves; so that, as we look at it now in America, one of the considerations that are brought prominently to our attention, after building the best road that we know how, is the planting of roadside trees and other ornamental growths, and the erection of walls and fences that are no longer unsightly, but which will contribute to the beauty of the landscape and the unconscious advantage of those travelling over the road. This has now become so universally accepted that it cannot be ignored, even if those persons who are wholly practical consider it an unnecessary expenditure of money.

The development of this aspect has, of course, been different in Europe than in America, for there it has been so long and so gradual in its advance that it has attained in most of the civilized countries of Europe a finished result. There the roadside trees have been under intelligent care for generations, and produce on the mind of the traveller the most pleasing and salutary effect, even to those so ignorant that they cannot appreciate the reason therefor.

In France, and other parts of the continent of Europe, like the people themselves, the results have been largely of a formal or artificial character. In England, nature has been followed more closely, so that you get two methods of beautifying public reservations and the space between the travelled way and the fields of abutting land owners, which have grown by degrees from primitive conditions to the present artistic state.

* Paper presented at the First American Congress of Road Builders, Seattle, Wash.

In America, we have the advantage of both these methods worked out for our consideration, on which we can improve, but which do not give us immediately the results of trees of great size, or the finished appearance which comes through time alone.

To those of you who have driven horses or automobiles over the ancient highways of Europe, it must be painfully apparent that in comparison America suffers, notwithstanding the fact that in our older communities we have been striving for years to do in a shorter time what has there required many generations of careful work and study.

In almost all of the larger cities of the east in America very large sums of money have been spent in the acquisition of land and the planting of trees and shrubs which will thrive in their respective localities, and in the careful treatment of roadside conditions for many years, and the results of these intelligent efforts have been to make such cities more attractive to visitors and more livable to the inhabitants. It makes the conditions of life more healthful, and has a tendency to improve the people themselves.

The City of Boston in Massachusetts has expended over ten million dollars within the last twenty years in creating a park system for the use and at the expense of the metropolitan district, which, by the care that has been taken in its development, has become one of the most attractive and charming of any in the world; and this same theory has been adopted in many, if not all, of the larger cities, to a greater or less extent, paid for out of the public purse; so that, as I intimated in the first of this paper, so great has the insistence of the public become, that in the treating of public ways or reservations the question of beauty, as it is manifested through the efforts of trained and skilful men, has become a practical necessity, and the public is entirely willing to take upon itself the cost, however great, of such work.

What is true of the parks and other public reservations is true, to a greater or less extent, of the roadsides themselves. It is the custom almost everywhere to plant trees along the sides of roads, wherever practicable, and to save the natural growth on a new road. Wherever the road itself is improved it is noticeable that the land owners living along its borders instinctively improve the appearance of their possessions in proportion to the care that is expended upon the road and its immediate surroundings.

In Massachusetts, where the commonwealth builds and maintains its main lines of travel, and takes care of its roadsides, it is observed that farms and homes, previously deserted for years, are taken up, rebuilt and beautified everywhere along the borders of the road. No deserted farms can be found along State highways in Massachusetts. This, in itself, is an argument sufficient for the expenditure of such additional sums of money as may be necessary for improving the roadsides, as well as the roadways.

The Highway Commission of Massachusetts is required, under the law, to plant useful and ornamental trees along the borders of highways which have been made State roads. In order to do this intelligently and with the best results, the Highway Commission has employed a trained forester, and it has also established a nursery in which are cultivated trees and shrubs which are suited to all the climatic and physical conditions throughout the commonwealth. These trees are planted in locations suited to their character and kind, and are cared for under the direction of the forester, so as to attain their most complete and characteristic growth.

Where, in the course of the construction of State highways, it is necessary to make cuts through hills or embankments over low ground, it is the practice of the Commission to protect and beautify these cuts or fills by the planting of vines or shrubs which conceal their nakedness and prevent their disintegration. The work of the Commission along these lines has produced its effect upon the minds of those living along the roads, so that the ambition of the people to make their places more attractive, by the building of more or less ornamental fences, the removal of unsightly accumulations, and the general well-being of their homes, has been aroused, and the result is encouraging and satisfactory.