

The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal of 200 Acres by John A. Murphy

Walpole, Mass., a little rural industrial town of 5,600 inhabitants in the eastern section of Massachusetts, has won for itself the distinction of being the first town in the state to establish a communal forest for future profit. The city of Fitchburg, Mass., has a municipal forest, and several cities and towns have planted areas of forest as a protection to their sources of water supply. Walpole, however, is the first to establish a forest which will be developed after the model of the celebrated communal forests abroad, developed not only for recreational purposes but as a source of future revenue.

The development plan shows four miles of roads, with paths, and with an amphitheatre to be used for choral singing, pageants and other town entertainments. Playgrounds and other recreation spaces are provided for, and a swimming pool in the Neponset River, which runs through the tract of land, thus making the possibilities of development most attractive.

This seems like a pretty ambitious project for a small community, but Walpole has already earned a reputation for courage and enterprise. The town forest which has just been established is not the result of spasmodic effort, but a feature in a carefully planned program of general town development. For the past three years this little New England town has been winning fame as a live, progressive community by its achievements in town building.

Through the efforts of the Town Planning Committee and the public-spirited generosity of Mr. George A. Plimpton, who donated 150 acres of land for development as a town forest, this latest achievement of Walpole has been made possible. At the annual town meeting this year Mr. Plimpton's gift was accepted and an appropriation of \$500 was made toward beginning development.

As regards its scenic attraction, the site of the new forest is admirable. Its several hills, and the Neponset River winding around their base, suggest infinite possibilities for the future of the town forest as an asset of beauty.

The Dedication on Arbor Day

On May 5, with the help of the Conservation Committee of the Walpole Women's Club, the town observed Arbor Day by the formal dedication of the forest and the planting of the first acre. The chairman of the Town Planning Committee and the Park Board, Mr. C.S. Bird, Jr., presided at the meeting. The exercises were conducted as a genuine community celebration and were attended by the Honorable Calvin M. Coolidge, Lieutenant Governor of the state, the officers of the town, Secretary C.O. Bailey, of the State Forestry Department, and other distinguished persons. The most impressive feature of the exercises was the planting of the first acre by the children of Walpole. One thousand boys and girls participated in this community demonstration. The first tree was planted by Lieutenant Governor Coolidge.

In his address the Lieutenant Governor referred to the work of Massachusetts in promoting reforestation throughout the state, and emphasized the duty of the present generation to provide for the needs of the future. "When you go out to plant a forest, as you are doing here to-day," he said, "as you go out to add to the material welfare and the material resources of your town, you are doing that which in the end will redound to be welfare of all the people of your community."

The address of the donor was especially illuminating as a demonstration of the new civic consciousness that is being developed among American business men; a combination of the practical and the ideal. He urged the importance of conserving the nation's timber supply, and paid tribute to the wisdom of the early settlers of the town who had planted otherwise valueless areas as a reserve supply of wood for heating their homes and for general uses. The discovery of coal and its use for heating and in manufacturing marked the decline of interest in the wood lot in the farming districts throughout New England. In referring to the crisis that has arisen because of the shrinking of our lumber supply, Mr. Plimpton said:

"It behooves the people of this community, and the people of the whole state, to conserve the forests for the simple item of lumber. I was told by the State Forester that these little trees which you will plant to-day will in forty years from now, if they grow and are unhampered, be worth from \$4 to \$6 each. In other words, if a person should come around thirty-three or forty years from now, he would find these trees, if cut down and put into lumber, worth from \$3,000 to \$4,000. Now if you plant your 100 acres with trees of this sort, see what you will have, for instance, in forty or fifty years. You will have several hundred thousands of dollars. We may not be here to see it, but our children may see this prophecy fulfilled. What is being done here is an example of what might be and should be done throughout the state."

Immediately after the addresses the children were marched to the acre that had been prepared for planting. The ground was divided into twenty sections. A supervisor in charge of each section instructed the children in the planting of the five-year white pine transplants which were set out. A stake was fixed beside each tree bearing the name of the child who planted it. The development of the present area, and the additional tracts which it is hoped may be secured, will be in charge of the local Park Board. The actual work, however, will be directed by a committee made up of the chairman of the Park Board, Prof. John G. Jack, of the Department of Forestry at Harvard University, and Mr. Alfred MacDonald. Mr. George T. Carlisle, Jr., will be associated with them as consulting forester.

Planning the Forest for the Future

A detailed plan covering the future development of the forest has been prepared by Mr. John Nolen as a part of the general town planning scheme which he has recently developed for the whole town. It is proposed that a certain portion of the development work be undertaken each year, thus insuring orderly progress without entailing any appreciable increase in the burden of the taxpayers.

Fifteen acres of white pine and red pine have also been planted. Some of the roads have been established and planted with double rows of Douglas fir, Scotch pine and red spruce. The spruce

is large stock intended to define the roads and to lend value to future landscape effect. During the coming winter it is proposed to remove the less desirable growths, such as scrub oak and grey birch, and by improvement thinnings and general cleaning prepare the areas selected for planting in the spring.

In places where there is danger from fires the roads have been laid out 50 feet wide and a 10-foot strip plowed at each side to act as a fire break. The situation of the forest allows the fire hazard to be reduced to a minimum, both by natural protection and by careful arrangement. The river and a considerable width of land separate the forest from the railroad on one side, while the town water mains are laid along the other boundaries. It is intended that there be developed a system of cooperation between the forest fire station, located about three miles from the forest, and the pupils in the High School. On signal from the station a company of boys could reach any part of the forest in twenty minutes.

Future work will, of course, depend somewhat on the character of additions to the present site. This initial unit is admirably suited to a pleasing variety in development. It is the present intention to plant the main body of the forest with white pine and with small areas of red and Scotch pine for the sake of variety and interest. In some of the more swampy areas white ash or other varieties will be planted. In addition to the recreational and other features that have been planned, consideration has been given to paths leading to points of interest not accessible from the roads. Vistas have also been planned so that from the highest points one may be able to catch glimpses of the river in the near distance or secure other equally interesting and attractive views.

Stimulating Interest in Town Forests

It is the purpose of the Park Board to commemorate the dedication of the town forest by the erection of a suitable tablet at the entrance to the forest. A record of the names of all the boys and girls who took part in the planting will be kept. Such a record should prove a powerful influence in promoting the growth of healthy community spirit, apart from its being a source of pride in after years to the future citizens of Walpole as indicating the part they played in establishing the communal forest idea in the state and in planting the first acre in the first town forest in Massachusetts.

While the Walpole town forest is the first of its kind to be established, the development of the communal forest idea is to be seen in the plans of the town of Sharon, Mass., for forest development on certain areas of its lands. Brookline, Mass. has already planted 15,000 white pine trees on about 15 acres of watershed land located in Dedham, Mass. Other towns are awakening to the possibilities of the communal forest idea, largely as a result of the earnest work of the Massachusetts Forestry Association, which has been holding town forest contests and tree planting contests that are open to all cities and town throughout the state.

Social Value of Such Enterprises

The citizens of Walpole are justified in being proud of their enterprise. To anyone familiar with their spirit the loyalty to community interests represented by the new town forest is in no way surprising. The people of Walpole are practical enough to recognize that the town forest is in no

way to be regarded as a luxury. The future of Walpole will be along industrial lines. Thus the town forest is assured of a future market for its product in supplying the local industries with their needed supply of lumber. In addition, it has a further practical value as a means of protection for the source of the town's water supply. Wholly apart from its commercial value or the other advantages that can be measured in terms of dollars and cents, its recreational and esthetic value, its power to promote the health and enjoyment of the future citizens of the town are immeasurably greater. It should be a source of inspiration to every community throughout the country as an example of what can be accomplished through community loyalty.

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