

Oakley Landie

RURAL HIGHWAYS

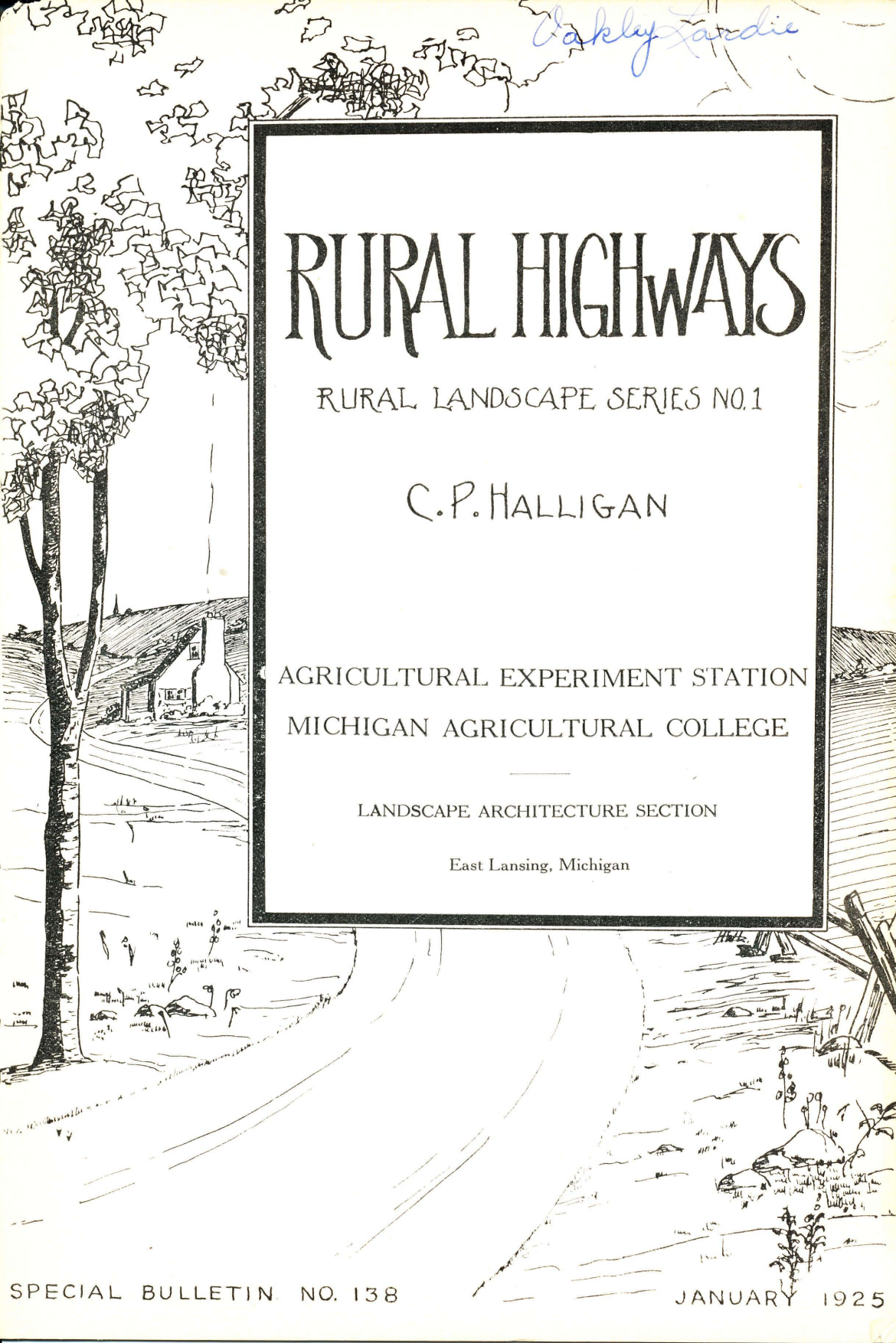
RURAL LANDSCAPE SERIES NO.1

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AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
MICHIGAN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE SECTION

East Lansing, Michigan



Rural Highways

By C. P. Halligan

Michigan is gradually awakening to an appreciation of one of its greatest undeveloped resources; namely, the beauty and intrinsic value of its native landscape. The possibilities of capitalizing this greatly neglected resource as a basis for a permanent and profitable industry, as well as for the general satisfaction and personal enjoyment of its own citizens, have not generally been realized until recently. We have been more concerned as a people in the development of our material resources,—the harvesting of our forests, the mining of iron, copper, and coal from the ground, the raising of crops upon the surface, and



(c) R. M. Harford

Fig. 1.—Such beautiful natural scenes of our rural sections should be capitalized by such planning and development as will reveal them in the fullness of their beauty to the vision of all that pass along our rural highways.

the promoting of manufacturing, transportation, and other forms of commercial effort.

Now, the wide-spread use of the automobile, the rapid extension of well constructed highways, and the resultant popularity of touring and camping, are all beginning to awaken us to an appreciation of the real value of our native landscape.

Practically surrounded by the Great Lakes, excepting on the south, Michigan is favored by summer climatic conditions that are delightful, invigorating, and healthful. Along the shores of these Great Lakes, and of the hundreds of smaller inland lakes that abound throughout the State, are beautiful scenic spots for healthful out-of-door enjoyment. These make the most delightful places for vacationing during the

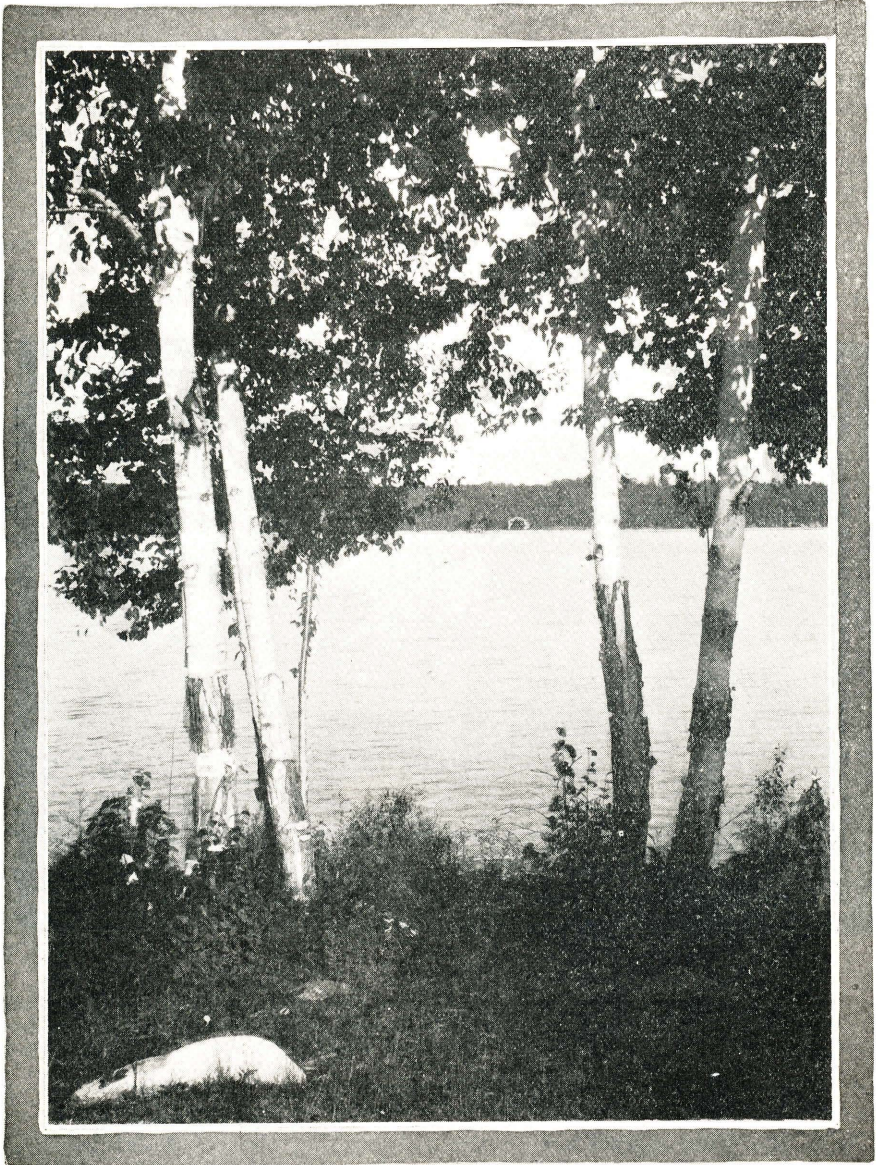


Fig. 2.—Vistas of neighboring lakes are always enjoyable and should be made available from the rural highway.

summer months. The wooded hills, the open glens, the barren sand dunes, and the rolling cultivated plains combine with the lakes and rivers to present a variety and excellence of landscape beauty that is surpassed or equaled by few other sections of the country.

Geographically, Michigan is located most conveniently to very large and heavily populated areas of the Middle West and South that are less favored in summer climate and landscape beauty, making this State a natural objective for touring and vacationing. The rapid increase in population of the many cities within the boundaries of the State, resulting in a more intense congestion and a greater degree of artificiality of living conditions, is creating an increasing demand from our own citizens for the charms of the open landscape.

Therefore, the landscape beauty that typifies so many sections of this State is an inherent asset of the present generation that is, and will increasingly continue to be, of great economic, social, and aesthetic value. As citizens of this commonwealth and as present guardians of this native treasure, we should assume the responsibility of preserving this wealth of landscape beauty for all future generations, as well as of doing what we can to develop and enhance it for a more general and reasonable enjoyment.

The Field Included

Such an effort involves first of all the acquisition and preservation of areas possessing distinctive and beautiful landscape characters for public enjoyment. Before the State Department of Conservation began acquiring reservations for State Parks, Michigan, with approximately 1,150 miles of shore line on the Great Lakes, owned, or in other words had reserved for public enjoyment, less than five miles of this shore line. In a similar way, the beauty spots and shore lines about the many inland lakes were rapidly being acquired and developed for private use, so that in but a short time this inherent wealth of landscape beauty would have largely passed into the hands of private interests for private use. Through the laudable efforts of the State Park Commission, many areas possessing distinctive scenic characters have now been acquired as State Parks, making them available for public enjoyment and insuring their use for all future generations. This work, however, should be supplemented by similar efforts expended by the several counties, townships, and towns, working along similar lines to make their own respective localities more interesting, attractive, and distinctive in their landscape beauty.

Rural landscape planning involves a much broader field of endeavor, however, than simply the conservation of the native landscape. It includes the landscape improvement of many of the utilitarian features that characterize a rural community, such as the embellishment of our rural highways, the planting of our schoolgrounds, the design and beautification of our rural cemeteries, and the arrangement and artistic development of our rural community centers. It involves the landscape construction of parks and playgrounds that may be available not only for the residents of the locality but also as tourist camps for visitors. It includes the laying-out and development of areas for golf grounds, a newer phase of rural planning that helps to make our rural communities more enjoyable for the vacationists. But most of

all it includes the capitalizing of these natural beauties of our rural sections by such planning and development as will reveal them in the fullness of their beauty to the vision of all that pass along our highways or sojourn in our midst. These are some of the phases of rural planning that will tend to increase the attractiveness and desirability of many of our rural sections and in this way prove of great economic, social, and aesthetic value to each community.

Economic Value

Michigan promises to become the great summer playground of the Middle West. Already our beauty spots and summer resorts are attracting thousands of visitors each season, and this results in the production of a great source of revenue to the State. A very conservative estimate shows that tourists alone are annually spending about eighty million dollars in our State. Many of these tourists, becoming favorably impressed with our advantageous conditions will doubtless become annual visitors and resorters in Michigan, and some of them will finally become property owners, purchasing desirable locations for summer homes. But this industry is still in its pioneer stage of development and promises to be of greater and more permanent value to western and northwestern Michigan, to the Upper Peninsula, and to many other more localized sections, than the primary business of lumbering and its many associated industries.



Fig. 3.—The beauty of winding rural highways may be greatly enhanced by the planting of naturalistic groups of evergreen and deciduous trees along their borders.

When one appreciates the vast extent of undeveloped and uncultivated land in these sections possessing such admirable landscape qualities and healthful, pleasing climatic conditions, one may be able to visualize the future economic possibilities that are available through the proper development and capitalization of these natural

landscape qualities. It is the one great economic resource indigenous to these regions which, if properly capitalized and judiciously cared for by the co-operative efforts of the communities and property owners, may be available for all future time.

Social Value

In the past the rural communities have been well supplied with beauty spots that could be used for picnics, baseball games, and other forms of community gatherings. These are a vital part of the life of a

rural community, and the use of them tends to develop a better community spirit and an individual pride and satisfaction for the locality

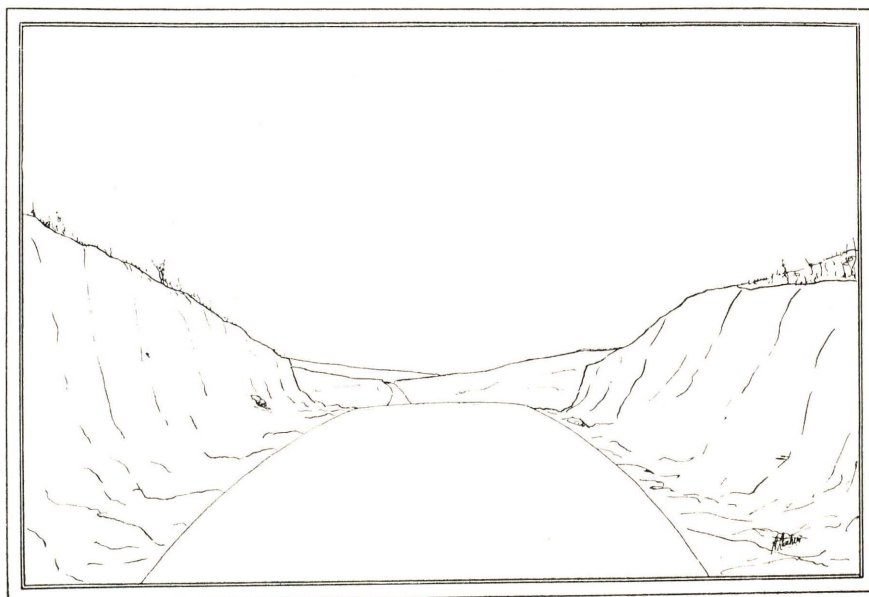


Fig. 4.—Steep, bare roadside banks mar the beauty of many of our roadside scenes.
See Fig. 5.

among its people. A lack of social intercourse, of frequent occasions where one may meet in a recreational way with friends and neighbors, is a common deficiency of many rural communities. Facilities for such common enjoyment should be provided, and to make them most efficient for these purposes the most beautiful and appropriate spots should be selected and developed to make them as serviceable and enjoyable as possible. It is only in such ways that one of the most pleasant and effective sources of rural recreation and enjoyment may be retained.

Aesthetic Value

The need of rural planning is greatest when considered from the aesthetic viewpoint. The love and enjoyment of the beautiful is an inherent characteristic of every individual, although some may develop this appreciation and sense of beauty to a higher degree than others. Of all the sources of beauty, none are comparable to the landscape, and none appeal more powerfully to practically all people. The love of country, love of community, and love of home are all very closely associated with the love of the landscape.

RURAL HIGHWAYS

Rural highways are the most popular parks of today for the automobilist, as the rural scenes and rural atmosphere are found more en-

joyable than any other. This suggests that along the important rural highways there should be developed a scenic treatment similar to that given to park or boulevard drives.

Judging from the development that has taken place thus far, it would seem that the idea prevails that a perfectly surfaced road is the only essential requisite of a well developed highway,—that the main pleasure we have to offer traffic by these newly constructed highways is that derived from the sense of traveling over them at high speeds. Such pleasure might be derived to an even greater degree by continuously speeding about a circular race track, where an even more perfectly surfaced road might be available. A rural highway, however, should offer more satisfaction and pleasure than most people derive from the sense of speeding. Such well constructed roads may prove very stupid and uninteresting for the visitor or resident of the community who prefers to move over them slowly, if there is something to interest him—to make it worth while.



Fig. 5.—Roadside banks should be clothed with vines, shrubs, and trees to harmonize them with the landscape and make them pleasing to view.

Rural highways should be designed and their environment developed to make them pleasing and interesting, capitalizing all the adjacent roadside scenery that may be available by developing and revealing it so that it will be readily seen and thoroughly appreciated. This involves not simply the ornamental planting along the roadsides but also the occasional removal of trees obstructing desirable vistas, the removal of unsightly objects, the abolition of the roadside dump and the bill-board nuisance, and a reasonable control of public service utilities in the erection of poles, stringing of overhead wires, and butchering of roadside trees.

In laying out a new highway, or in reconstructing an old one, after the general line of the highway has been considered, some competent or well informed person should be engaged to investigate thoroughly and analyze the landscape characters over which the proposed road is to pass, to see what modification in location or of grades might prove advisable for an efficient capitalization of the landscape scenery without materially changing its directness, cost, or serviceability. Very

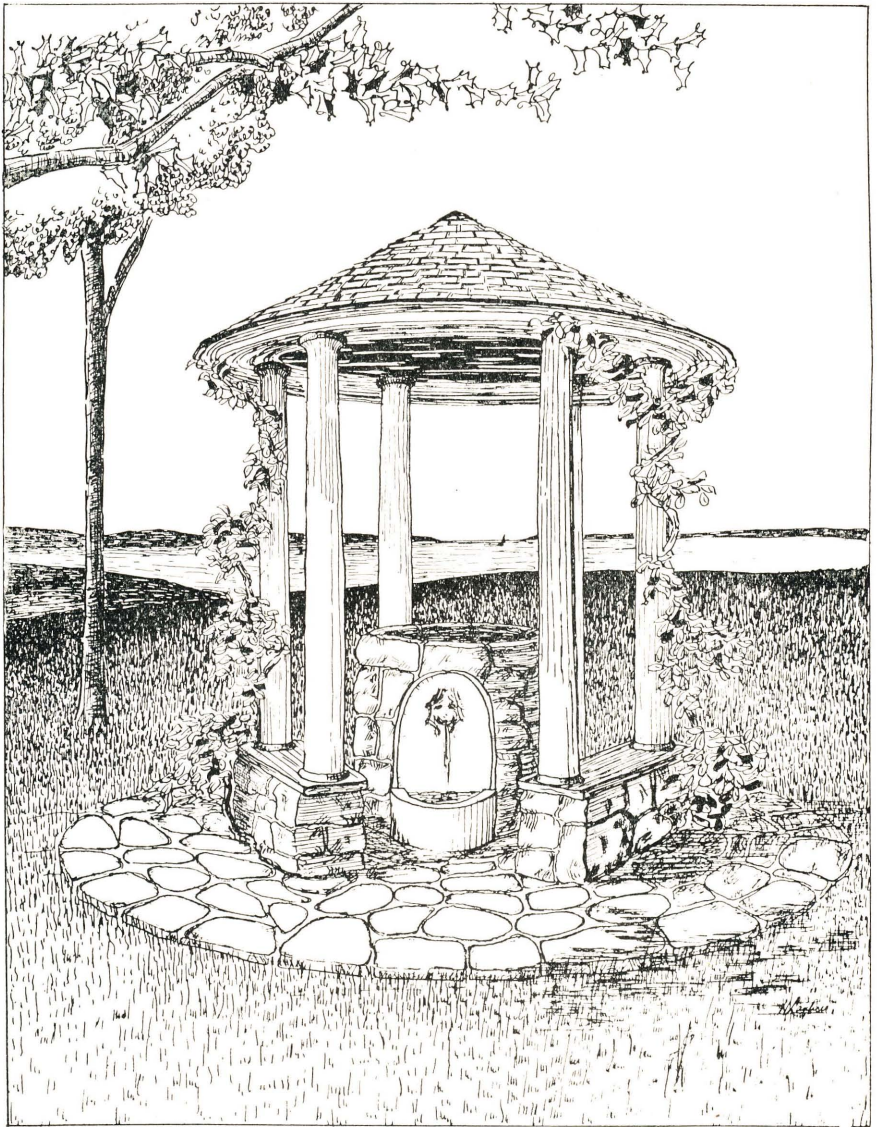


Fig. 6.—A suggestive development of a water supply into a beautifying element in the development of recreational or resting spots along our rural highways.

frequently slight changes in alignment may expose most admirable vistas of nearby lakes, distant rivers, or open fertile plains. Such action may reserve for public enjoyment excellent specimens or groups of matured trees that would take more than a generation to replace. It may prevent the necessity of excessive cuts and fills that scar and mutilate the natural beauty of our country roadsides.

Roadside Grades

In a naturalistic landscape, as far as is possible, the road should seem to lie upon the surface of the ground without interruption of the natural grades of the environment. The surface of the banks of necessary cuts and fills should simulate the natural surface where possible. Where this is impossible, their modeling should still be as unbroken a continuation of the natural surface as one can arrange.

Where there is any considerable natural beauty of hill and valley and tree, and particularly where the hills are small, steep, and variously sloped, an irregular system of curving roads, taking advantage of topography, will not only be more appropriate and more beautiful but almost certainly much cheaper.

Roadside Views

Since the enjoyment of views from the road is a matter of considerable importance, pains should be taken that the highways lead to the various outlooks and objects of interest, if this can be arranged without materially affecting their directness and convenience. Views taken up and down the road must be considered; they are inevitably seen

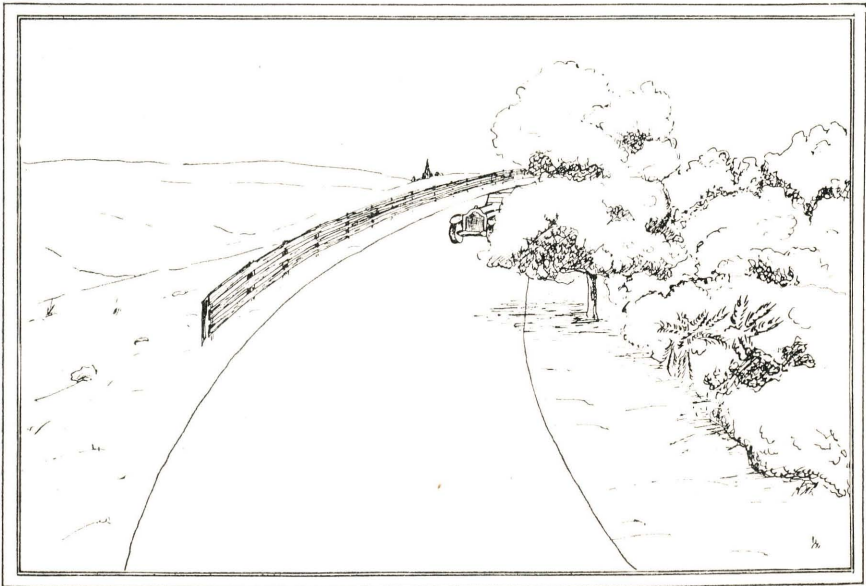


Fig. 7.—Improperly planted roadside curve obscuring the vision of approaching vehicles and neglecting the development of the offscapc.

by everyone who travels upon it. Where a road changes direction, a view out at the point of change, continuing the line of the road which approaches it and centering on an interesting distant object suitably enframed by the planting about the road itself, is a desirable possibility which one should have in mind. Views to be enjoyed from the road, where the spectator looks simply to the right or left, should of course be enframed by the planting along the road itself, but they should not be enframed with so small an opening that the traveler has been carried by before he has had time to enjoy the view.

Where admirable landscape scenes or vistas are available, or roadside springs, shady groves, or other inviting landscape features prevail, an opportunity is afforded further to capitalize such spots as inviting temporary stopping or resting points. Here the visitor may rest and enjoy the scene to its fullest extent. An appropriate, simple, inviting, and naturalistic development of such a spot indicates to the stranger the presence of some such worth while feature. A desirable vista point along one of the trunk lines from which an unusually pleasing view of a nearby river, a distant expansive lake, or a vast open landscape can be enjoyed, may be given some appropriate name, such as "Lookout Point." The roadway may then be widened to provide for parking, and a few simple, harmonious seats installed, along with a proper design of walk, stairs, or such other supplementary treatment as will enhance the general beauty of the spot and lead the visitor unconsciously to the principal vantage point. A roadside spring may be developed by appropriately naming the spot, by designing a parking area, by disposing of a few seats, or by building a rustic

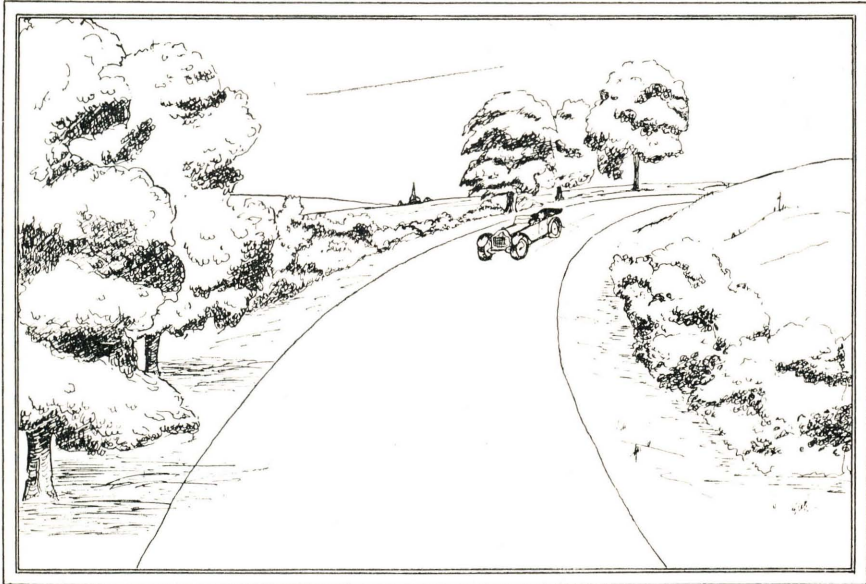


Fig. 8.—A properly planted roadside curve permitting an unobstructed vision along the inner curve and enframing the vista of the offscap.

shelter house there and developing the general naturalness and beauty of the spring itself, harmonizing all of these elements of development into a unified composition.

Other types of unusually attractive landscape features that may be enjoyed, either at points immediately along the roadside or within a short distance of it, may be developed in similar ways, thus pleasantly directing the visitor's attention to them and capitalizing their beauty to the greatest degree.

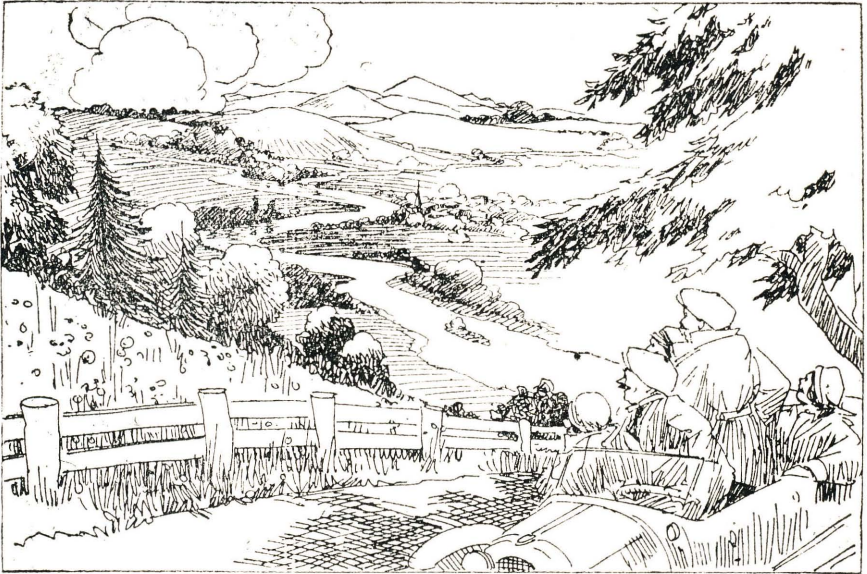
In these ways we may encourage tourists and visitors to travel leisurely through our communities, entertaining them as they go with the particular kind of enjoyment that they are naturally seeking; namely, the enjoyment of the beautiful native landscape features that typify our localities. To neglect the development of these enjoyable features promotes the desire to speed through our communities in the shortest available time, losing this source of enjoyment and sense of appreciation of the real landscape beauty.

BILLBOARDS

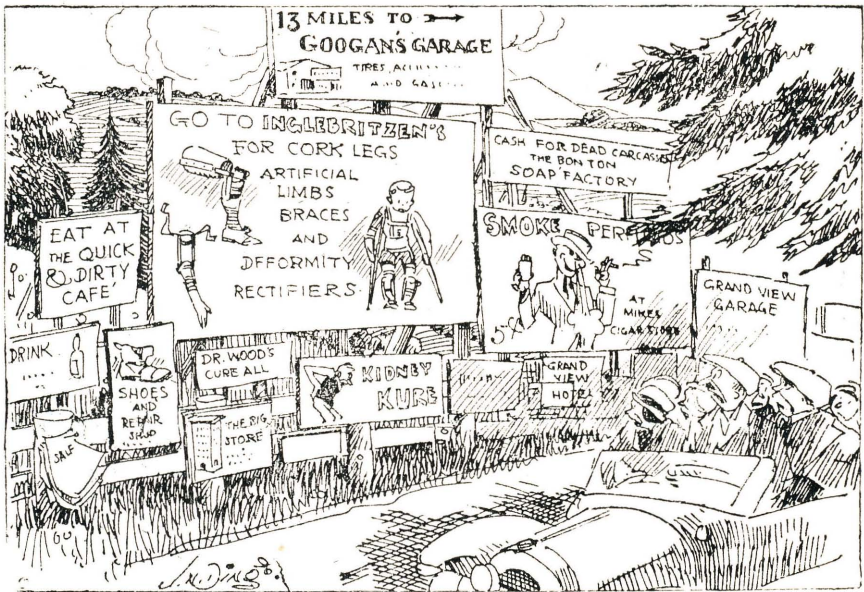
Billboards are a common source of ugliness and of displeasure along our rural highways. They are offensive to the sight in that they give us unsought advice and because they obscure the landscape or distract our attention from its beauty. The billboard is a general nuisance, and judicial opinion on this subject reflects public sentiment. Since they are offensive to the sight and to good taste, and since it is through the sense of sight that the pleasures of rural landscapes are perceived and enjoyed, billboards are in the same class as nuisances which are offensive to the other senses. The most scenic, sightly, and conspicuous points along the main rural highways are the very spots desired and selected by enterprising advertisers whose aim and ideal seems to be to transform our rural highways into "rural buy-ways." They inform us what to eat, drink, and wear, and just where to go if we desire eternal happiness. The very scenes and characters of the city that one is trying to evade in his retreat to the country precede him along the rural highways.

Business interests of rural towns are defeating their own aims by consuming and obliterating scenic spots along the highways or by allowing outside interests to disfigure the landscape in this way and thus deprive the tourist or rural resident of their enjoyment in their journeys to or from the town. In the words of the Earl of Ballcarres, one of the leading British opponents of this evil, "What we claim is that the landscape does not belong to the man who chooses to pay a few shillings for it per annum, but it is an asset of the people at large," or as Hamerton has expressed it, "the land belongs to its owners but the landscape belongs to him who beholds it." One of these days the people of the rural communities will appreciate the fact that landscape beauty is a valuable economic asset, and then we will see the end of the existence of the advertising fiend destroying our roadside views, which means destroying values,—values that belong to the entire population and that no individual has a right to ruin.

**THE MAGNIFICENT VIEW YOU DISCOVERED ON YOUR TRIP
LAST YEAR--**



—AND LIKED SO MUCH THAT YOU DROVE SIXTY MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY
TO SHOW IT TO YOUR FRIENDS THIS YEAR.



(Courtesy of the Register and Leader, Des Moines, Iowa.)

Fig. 9.

TELEGRAPH POLES

There are other sources of ugliness and displeasure that characterize our rural highways which might be considerably minimized by reasonable control. The multiplicity of poles for wires, and the resultant topping and butchering of trees growing under them, are most frequent, displeasing, and inharmonious developments of rural roadside scenes. There is nearly always a reasonable way of preventing these conditions where public sentiment is aroused and citizens co-operate in solving the problem. Frequently in rural districts poles may be erected along less important highways. Arrangements may sometimes be made whereby two or more public utility companies may be induced to use the same poles. The underground cable is common in the cities as a substitute for poles and overhead wires and will probably replace them in the rural districts as soon as the general public values its landscape beauty sufficiently to warrant the increased cost of underground installation.

However, as long as poles and overhead wires remain along the highways, no satisfactory means is available for entirely preventing the evils in the pruning and frequently butchering of roadside trees. The branches of trees are certain to grow upward and to in-

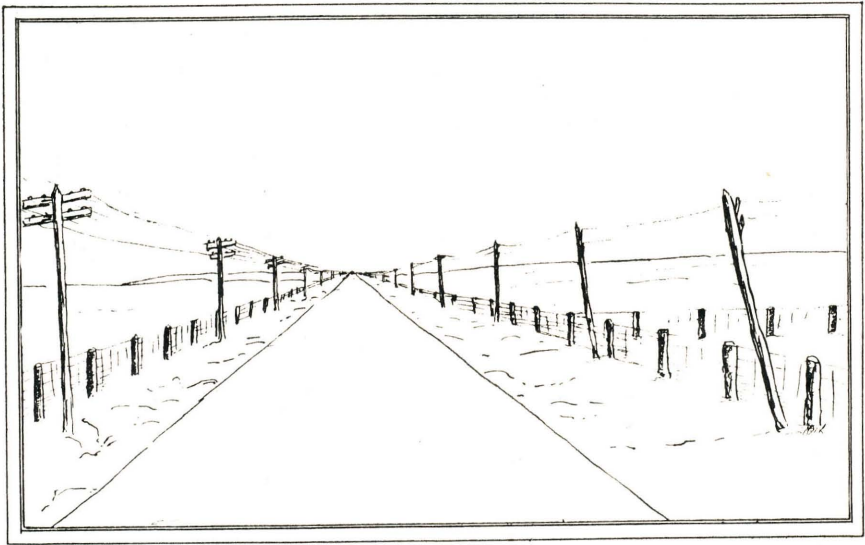


Fig. 10.—Telegraph poles and overhead wires are sources of ugliness that characterize many of our rural highways.

terfere with the wires overhead. The topping of such trees to prevent this difficulty necessarily spoils their natural form and beauty. Where the pruning is done by a well trained man, in sympathy with the natural character of beauty of trees, the degree of injury may be reduced to a minimum; or sometimes the companies may be induced to raise their wires by using higher poles. The laws governing the

protection of street trees and the rights of property owners regarding them have been compiled in Michigan Circular Bulletin No. 41, which may be obtained upon request.* There is always some way of abolishing these and other unsightly elements that commonly disfigure the landscape, but there is never an excuse for ugliness.

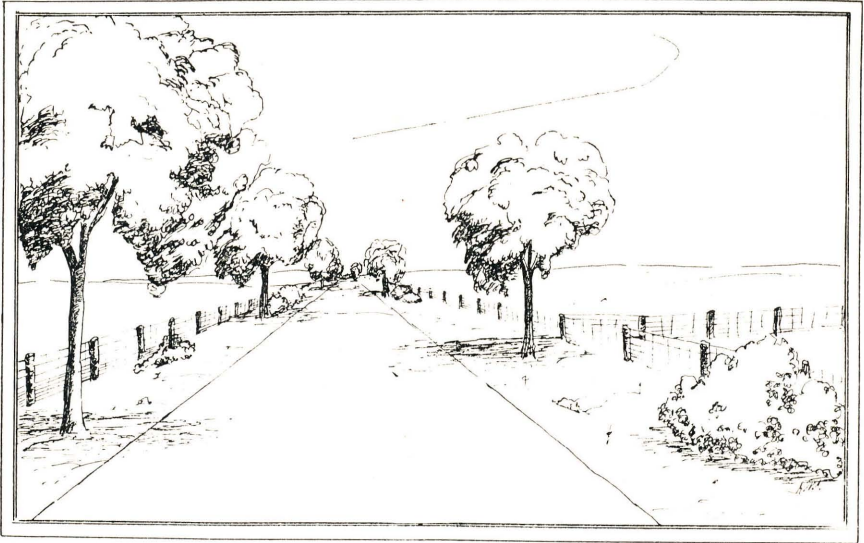


Fig. 11.—The substitution of trees and shrubbery for telegraph poles and overhead wires would greatly improve our highways.

ROADSIDE PLANTING

The planting along the country roadside can be made an important factor in its beauty,—indeed, where there are no particular distant views, perhaps the greatest factor.

“To the untrained eye, the country roadside is a mass of tangled vines, shrubs, trees, and flowers; to the trained eye, it is a scene in that wild garden which one comes to love as he loves no bit of cultivated soil however well ordered and well maintained.”

This wildness, freedom, and naturalness of plant growth along the roadsides should characterize our rural roadside plantings, rather than the restrained, artificial effects of evenly spaced trees or plants in monotonous lines, or of unplanted banks and cleared roadsides that often mark our rural highways when attempts have been made to produce a trim and tidy appearance.

The particular character of the planting will vary much with the surroundings. The rocky hillside, the flat, fertile meadow, and the rolling cultivated plain, each possesses its own distinctive character

*Address request for Circular: Dir. R. S. Shaw, M. A. C., East Lansing, Michigan.

of beauty. This indigenous type of beauty should be developed to its best expression, so far as this is possible in a narrow strip along the road,—for itself alone or as a foreground for a more distant view. The harmonizing of the narrow strips along the highways into the larger landscape beyond, the enframing of vistas that may be obtained from the roads, and the screening of undesirable vistas are important functions that the plantings should perform. These things should determine their design and character.

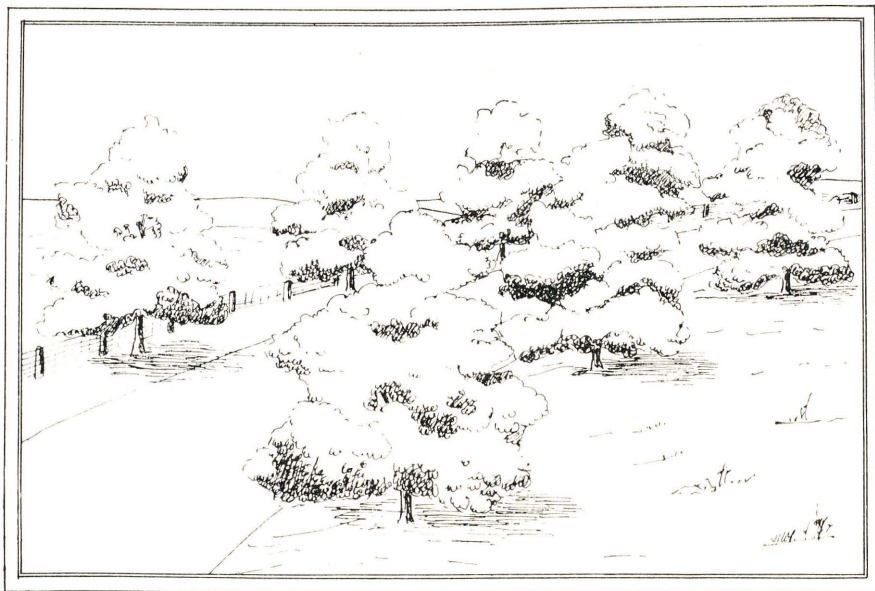


Fig. 12.—Trees planted along highways traversing a naturalistic landscape should not be disposed in definite rows.

Plantings may perform other important functions under special conditions. Along abrupt slopes or upon steep roadside banks, plantings are important in preventing severe erosion of the soil and in covering the bare and displeasing surfaces that otherwise mar the landscape. While such banks may be re-graded into graceful slopes that harmonize with their surroundings, much may be accomplished by simply planting them to hardy vines, shrubs, and trees adapted to the particular soils and exposures, thus transforming the banks from unsightly spots in the landscape into pleasing, harmonious ones.

Where the highway curves abruptly, much care should be exercised in planting the boundaries of the curve. The inside border at such points should be left fairly open to permit a free, unhindered view of vehicles approaching from the opposite direction. The outside border should be planted heavily enough to give the effect of strength and stability, such as a wall or stout fence might provide. The arrangement of the plantings, however, should be such as not to obscure desirable vistas of the landscape, which it is important to develop and maintain at these particular points.

To be most comfortable and pleasant to those who travel upon them, roads must be shaded. On our suburban streets and ordinary straight country roads traversing a comparatively level landscape, a more or less consistent and equally spaced line of trees may serve this purpose best. Where the landscape beauty is important, however, and the highway is winding over hills or across vales, such a line of trees might well prove very inharmonious in the scene. In such cases, informal plantations of trees and shrubs are to be desired, and the whole should be so composed that the road will seem to be passing through a fortunately pre-existing series of groups and masses of native plantings.

Native Plants for Roadside Planting

Such public roadside plantings may properly become the conservation grounds of native species. It is a common but unfortunate fact that in many parts of the country, especially where agriculture is particularly effective, many of the finest native species are rapidly disappearing. If our roadside plantings rather typified the original native growth of the hills and valleys, the woods, and the open fields of the sections through which they passed, it would greatly help to develop and maintain the native plant character of those localities, besides preserving for future generations many of the indigenous species that otherwise may disappear. Fortunately, Michigan is endowed with many kinds of native plants that are very beautiful for roadside adornment, so desirable, in fact, that many of them are being propagated and handled by nurseries in this country and abroad.

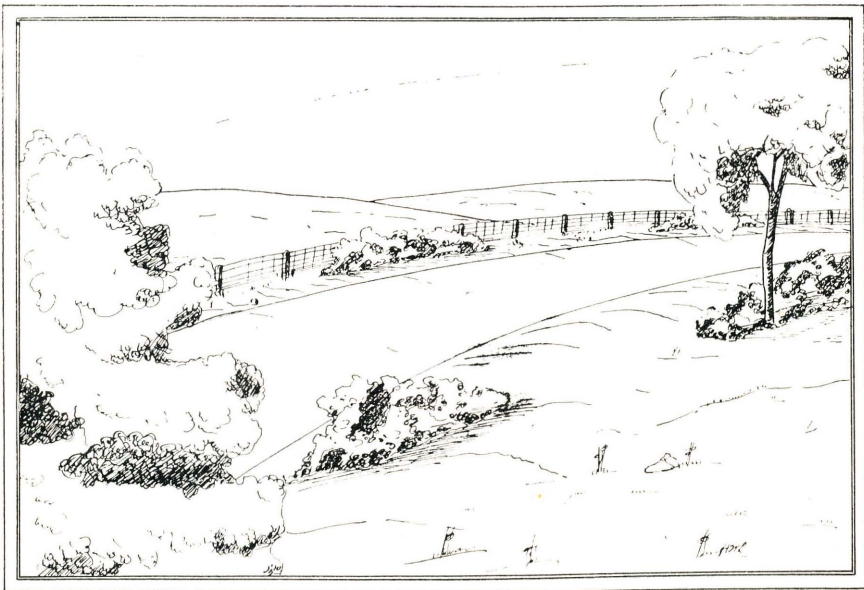


Fig. 13.—Trees and shrubs should be disposed in naturalistic groups and masses to develop the free and natural effect that characterizes the country.

There are indeed few places as rich in their native flora of species so well adapted for landscape planting as in this State. On the rather fertile soils, retentive of moisture, the American elm makes an ideal roadside tree, while the cork elm thrives on drier and less fertile soils. The sugar maple delights in a fertile upland soil and proves a permanent and most desirable tree. On the sandy loam soils, that are more subject to drouth, the red oak is most adaptable, although, like all of the previous kinds, it will grow on any well drained soil of fair fertility. The pin oak, with its finer textured foliage, is also a very desirable tree on the sandy loam soils, especially as far north as Roscommon County. For the light, sandy soils, the birches and poplars prove best adapted, while the evergreens, such as the white and red pines and the white spruce, may also be advantageously used as roadside trees upon such soils in the rural sections. The soft maple thrives on a variety of soils, and is a very rapid grower, but its susceptibility to borers and to splitting makes it less desirable than the hard maples, oaks, or elms. However, on rather infertile sandy soils, on bottom lands, where the water-table is within a few feet of the surface, it proves most adaptable. For the fertile lowlands, we also have the basswood, the alders, the willows, the cedars, and many other kinds. There is no lack of native trees suited for roadside use. It is rather a matter of selecting the particular kinds best adapted to the soil and climatic conditions of each particular location. The willows will not appear at home on a hilltop, nor the white pine on the lowland.



Fig. 14.—Each season of the year portrays its own character of beauty in the landscape.

There is also a wealth of native shrubs and flowering trees to select for rural landscape planting. The Michigan prairie rose and sumacs are very attractive plants that thrive even on rather sandy and infertile soils; while junipers, of the prostrate forms, are attractive elements that already characterize many of the sandy slopes along the roadsides in some sections of the State.

The many species of native viburnums and dogwoods, the American holly, and willows are all beautiful and especially characteristic along roadsides on the lowlands, where the soil is fairly rich and moist. The hawthorns, mountain ash, and wild crabs are small or shrub-like trees particularly pleasing on the upland soils, both in flower and fruit; while the fall colorations of the sassafras, growing tree-like or shrub-like on the lighter soils along the roadways, add their attractive scarlet note to the sugar maples in painting the fall landscape. There are so many beautiful types of native shrubs to select from that one should be guided more by the problem of adaptability to conditions than by one's personal whims in determining the kinds to use.

The native ferns, vines, and hardy herbaceous plants, such as the daisies and asters, the golden rod and brown-eyed susans, should be more commonly considered as the finishing touches in the composition of roadside landscape pictures. What rural roadside scene would appear complete without a few of these dainty forms relieving the coarser and more readily discernible characters of the landscape? At times great masses of them paint our rural scenes, but more frequently it is in scattered groups and colonies that we note their presence along the roadside, adding the detail and variety to the landscape which tend to hold and maintain our interest and enjoyment.

Just as there are "sermons in stones, and books in running brooks," so to those who love nature—

The dainty little snow-drop, or violet of blue
Is the product of the ages, a symbol of the new;
In harmony with Nature for generations past
A part of God's own picture, forever,—to the last.

The development of pleasing rural landscapes and well planted highways and rural homes is not simply a measure of our own taste and pride of ownership. It is the external sign by which we would have the country's health and beauty known.

There is not a village nor rural community in Michigan, however badly planned at first or ill-built afterwards, that may not be redeemed in a great measure by proper planning and development work. It is never too late nor too early to project improvements of this kind. As Emerson has said—

There is never an end in nature,
But every end is a beginning.

Every spring and every autumn should witness a revival of associated efforts on the part of the civic authorities, of community associations, and of able citizens to improve and embellish the external conditions

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Rural Highways

Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station

Special Bulletin

C.P. Halligan, Landscape Architecture

Issued January 1925

19 pages

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of their localities. Those least appreciative of the results as regards beauty, may be aroused as to the effects of increased value to the property thus improved.

Citizens working as private individuals cannot generally accomplish the ideals of rural highway improvement. This result, as with much of the rural landscape improvement work, can only be accomplished through the co-operative and organized efforts of a community's many citizens. Therefore, it offers a worthy and desirable field of service for any and all local organizations interested in the development and improvement of their communities. Much good work may be accomplished by local Chambers of Commerce, Business Men's Clubs, and Women's Clubs in initiating and promoting projects of this kind, as well as in directing the appreciation and interest of its citizens to the desirableness and need of such improvements.

A great deal has already been accomplished in many rural communities. Some of these communities were not of the most prosperous type, demonstrating the fundamental fact that where the attention of citizens has been directed to the existing need of such improvements and their forces have been properly organized for co-operative effort, there are few of these landscape improvements that are beyond the power of attainment of the average rural community. The public desire and the will of attainment, rather than financial resources, are the principal requisites of accomplishment in this work.