ORNAMENTAL TREE PLANTING.

Read by P. S. Bennett before the Convention of the Northern Wisconsin Agricultural and Mechanical Association, held at Fond du Lac, February 25th, 1875.

Much has been said and written in regard to Fruit Tree Planting. Its profits have been exhibited, varieties discussed and recommended, directions given as to culture, pruning, and in short everything deemed necessary to success.

This is all very well. Indeed, in the early periods of a country, necessity naturally prompts to this. Nor will it ever cease to be important. But as the real necessities of a people are met, they naturally turn their attention to something in the line of luxury and ornament. This disposition, if kept within the empire of a discriminating judgment, is highly commendable.

Especially is it proper to render our homes pleasant and attractive by nature’s own gifts.

A portion of the value of fruit trees even, lies in the beauty and fragrance of their bloom—*their vernal crop*. And if in addition to this they are symmetrical in form, we feel somehow remunerated for our care of them, even though the autumnal crop fails us.

But these do not meet all the demands of the case.

Variety adds much to the beauty of a landscape, natural or artificial. A vast unbroken plain or a million choice flowers of the same kind, cannot delight us as long or as intensely as a proper variety, even on a greatly diminished scale. Among our fruit trees along our walks and way-sides, tastefully arranged ornamentals are requisite to give the best effect. If they are not equally attractive to all they are not repulsive to any, and probably add value in the estimation of every one.

Nor are they exclusively ornamental—though in this light alone their liberal planting may be defended.
They are useful as wind breaks, and may be for timber when our native forests shall have disappeared.

The question is now pertinent, what kinds shall we plant?

It is difficult to answer in a word. So many circumstances are to be taken into the account, that no rule of universal application can be given. But beyond all question, variety should be an important object.

When grounds are small this variety may be very limited; but when ample, it should be greatly increased.

I would advise, that in the selection of ornamental trees, a large draft be made from the Evergreen family. "But we cannot make them live, we have tried it over and over." But you can make them live; I have tried it "over and over." Indeed I have tried both ways, and think I understand why so many evergreens die. A few simple directions, carefully followed, will lead to success; disregarded, failure will be the inevitable result.

First of all I would say, never buy an evergreen just from the forest, except for a Christmas tree.

Many have done this because they were cheap, the seller and purchaser both thinking they were worth the small price paid for them. But everybody should know that an evergreen of desirable size just from the forest, is utterly worthless to plant. The strong probabilities—almost certainly—is that it will die in six weeks. But if it survives, it will seldom make a tree of moderate beauty. It started wrong, and is harder to reclaim than a spoiled child.

This is especially true of the Swamp or Black Spruce. It is often attractive in its native morass, but removed thence, the lower limbs soon die, and it becomes an eye-sore rather than a thing of beauty.

The Balsam will do a little better if it bears the shock of transplanting. But it rarely meets expectations when thus treated. The bare statement of these facts, without the reasons for them, must suffice at present. Another thing equally important, is to handle even nursery grown evergreens prop-
erly. This is indispensable. Carelessness here is absolutely fatal. An exposure of the roots of an evergreen to the sun or to a drying wind for a few minutes, will hermetically seal the pores, and thus render them impervious to moisture. This insures their death. They should therefore, be purchased only of those who are supposed to know how to handle them, and to have honesty enough to properly care for them.

In planting them, no green manure should be used as mulching—saw-dust or straw will be found preferable. And as there is an immense surface from which moisture is constantly thrown off, water may be applied to the mulching somewhat freely, especially if the soil is dry. Of course it is understood that in planting evergreens, all the care is needed as to adjusting and covering the roots with well pulverized earth, that any tree requires. Thus treated, they can be transplanted with success.

At this point comes the question very naturally, "What kinds of evergreen shall we plant?"

It is very proper here to specify a few varieties, and by exhibiting their characteristics, learn what we may as to their relative value.

At the very head of the list I place the Norway Spruce. This for majestic beauty, is the king of the forest. Nor is it surpassed by any in symmetry of form. Properly started in the Nursery, it makes a perfect cone. No evergreen, except the Arbor Vitæ, will bear transplanting as well, while its foliage never becomes dingy like the latter. It makes good hedges and wind-breaks, but will spread itself with more lordly pride when isolated. Here it shows to the best advantage, towering to an enormous height, and challenging universal admiration.

Next in value and scarcely second in beauty, is the Austrian Pine. This is a fine compact tree, and like the Norway Spruce, of perennial dark green foliage.

It is also coniform, but does not attain as great a height as the latter, nor does it bear transplanting quite as well. It
ought to be more extensively planted in our yards and lawns.

Several competitors contend sharply for the third place in the list.

Weeping Spruce, properly trained, would perhaps win if the case were submitted to an unprejudiced umpire.

But it is difficult for those who were reared among hemlock trees—for these are the Weeping Spruce of our tree catalogues—to see how they can be made things of beauty. Yet they can, and when complete success in training is secured, few are more graceful and attractive.

But, as they do not bear transplanting very well, they will never become extensively popular.

The Balsom Fir, when grown from seed or brought from the forest very small and grown in the nursery, with several transplantings, becomes a beautiful cone-shaped tree and perhaps ranks next to the Austrian Pine. It has, however, given some evidence within a few years that it is rather short-lived when subjected to cultivation. Should this prove to be a settled fact, it must take a lower rank than it has formerly held.

On the whole, however, and for all purposes, the Scotch Pine presents strong claims for the third rank among evergreens.

It is of rapid growth, bears transplanting well, will live to a great age, while its heavy and emphatically evergreen foliage render it an object of attraction.

This, together with the Norway Spruce and Austrian Pine, must be grown from seed. None of them, so far as is known, has ever been found native on this Continent.

We have, it is true, two species of spruce indigenuous to America—the black, which, as I have said, is worthless; and the white, which makes rather a pretty tree, is difficult to obtain and every way inferior to the Norway.

Next to those recommended, the Red Cedar, the Arbor Vitæ and the White Pine naturally come in. The first two will bear the shears well, and can be pruned into any desirable shape and kept within almost any limit. This renders them very valuable.
The Arbor Vitae will do well either isolated or in a hedge. But the Red Cedar must stand alone. In a hedge the limbs die and destroy its beauty.

The Irish Juniper is a compact, upright, prim grower and would be very desirable if it could withstand our rigorous winters. But, with a sigh, we must give it up, as we do the Rhododendron and some other tender shrubs.

There are several varieties of the Arbor Vitae, such as the Siberian and Tom Thumb, of which I cannot now speak particularly.

But those mentioned above as hardy and reliable are quite sufficient in this line.

Of deciduous ornamental trees, there is a considerable variety, the most important of which may be named in this paper with very little as to their merits.

The Lombardy Poplar has long been a favorite. Its rapid growth and symmetrical form have been its chief recommendations. It will still be planted, but, in the opinion of the writer, had better be for the most part confined to the wayside.

Soft Maple is nearly as good a grower, and in every other respects a more desirable tree. It should be assigned, as a rule, to about the same place — the wayside. Neither is suitable for a wind-break unless planted in a grove.

The American Chestnut will probably do well in light soil, while the grand old White Elm will thrive anywhere, and always reward for the labor and care bestowed upon it. Its stately form and gracefully-drooping branches will always make it a favorite.

For private yards and lawns the Horse Chestnut, the Ash-leaved Maple, the Wisconsin Weeping Willow and the Mountain Ash should be freely interspersed among the evergreens before mentioned.

I mention the Mountain Ash last, not because it is least in importance, but rather because it is a fitting climax to them all. Of these there are several varieties, the American, the
European, the Oak-leaved and the Weeping—all hardy and beautiful.

The birds that gather their crimson product in autumn and winter, well nigh repay by their cheerful songs their cost and care; thus leaving their value in all other respects as net gain.

After the reading of Mr. Bennett’s paper, the following discussion ensued:

Mr. J. M. Smith:
You spoke of the White Elm. Do you mean the Rock elm? The Rock Elm is not a pretty shade tree, although it is the whitest in the bark and wood.

Mr. Bennett:
The White Elm is probably the same as our Water Elm that grows in the forests quite generally. It is raised now largely by nurserymen, and when young the branches stand quite erect, but when older and larger the limbs droop. There are several kinds of elm. The Rock Elm is a white elm, as the President has suggested, but I think it is distinct from what is called the White Elm. In fact, so far as I know, the Rock Elm is different in the appearance of the bark; different in the wood itself; not so different in the color of the wood, as I understand it—though I am not so well acquainted with the Rock Elm— but different in the grain. The White Elm as a timber, I suppose, is not very valuable.

Then there is the Slippery Elm, or Red Elm, another variety. Still, the White Elm of our nurseries that I mention is the same as the common elm. The variety that is common in our forests in this country.

Mr. Herman Jones:
I think you are mistaken. I have been in the habit of working this Rock Elm. It is almost invariably red, and the sap white, much of it not half an inch thick and the balance red.

This elm you are speaking of is an elm that we, in Connecticut, near New Haven, called the Water Elm, and it be-
comes a very beautiful weeping elm; and the Red Elm you speak of is another elm entirely.

The Rock Elm and the Red Elm are good for nothing for shade. That we know very well. The Red Elm or Slippery Elm is one thing, and the Rock Elm is almost invariably red, from the sap; that makes a good, tough timber.

Mr. Smith:

I had occasion to examine this matter some few years since and we have in our forests four distinct varieties of elm.

Red Elm is a light-colored wood, light-colored bark, straight grain, and valuable for timber. At the top the branches are short, angular, hmbly-looking, and usually a very poor top. It makes a very poor shade tree indeed.

The kind our friend Bennett alludes to, which is put out for shade trees—either one of the other three is utterly worthless for a shade tree—is denominated sometimes the Weeping Elm. It has been called the American Spreading Elm. The wood is a light red, and it can be readily distinguished by anyone after a little trouble. It makes our most beautiful shade tree and perhaps, all things considered, the best shade tree in the world.

We have another elm called the Brook Elm, which is entirely distinct from this spreading elm. That grows on low, wet ground, and is utterly worthless, even for firewood—holds water equal to a sponge. It is a short-lived tree; never grows large, and usually begins to rot at the top and becomes an ugly-looking tree even in its native forests.

Then you have the Red Elm, or Slippery Elm. That has the darkest-colored wood, perhaps a little darker than the Brook Elm. That is a moderate-sized tree; forms a good-shaped top, but the top is too thin; never makes a spreading top; not a bad shape, but never a large tree, and never makes a thick, shady top.

I speak of it because a great many have made mistakes. We have at Green Bay a good many persons who, in putting out trees, have some of these worthless elms in their number.
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Some of them are dying already, and the sooner they become dead the better for the city and all interested.

It is a matter of importance that persons should not make mistakes in the elms for shade purposes. There is one elm and that is the only one that is valuable, and that is the most valuable of American trees.

Mr. J. P. Roe:

I will inquire whether Mr. Bennett has noticed a failure or falling off in the vitality of the Mountain Ash. As far as my observations have gone, they seem to be going off. Some of them that I set out, very choice trees, with a great deal of care. I found they were perishing. On close examination what appeared to me to be the apple tree borer. I extracted the borer in one instance and the tree has lived through and is apparently thriving.

Mr. P. S. Bennett:

I would say in reply that Mr. Roe's latter remarks relieved me somewhat. I was fearful that the question implied that the tree itself was failing. There are enemies to almost every good thing. I do not know that we can guard against the borer effectually if we try.

I have been fighting them for a long time. They assail various kinds of trees and all we can do is to keep up the fight. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

The Mountain Ash is one of my favorite trees and I should be sorry to have a very destructive enemy come up that we could not successively meet. There are several varieties of Mountain Ash, and in some respects the different varieties have their peculiar claims.

There is the American Mountain Ash, which is a slower growth than the European, but makes a pretty tree, the top is almost uniformly a different shape. They are quite easily distinguishable on that account from the other, from the difference in the color of the bark and a little difference in the form and appearance of the leaf, but not very much. And then the Oak Leaf Mountain Ash is the most beautiful of any variety
that I know of except the Weeping Mountain Ash. I am speaking now of the upright varietie.

The Oak Leaf Mountain Ash is more rare and of a higher price and a little more difficult to propagate, but so far as I know it is quite as har-l-y in every respect, as the American or European. I do not know of anything wrong with the vital-ity of the tree.

Mr. J. M. Smith:
I would like to ask Mr. Bennett if the Chestnut has been tried in this State to any extent, and if so does it succeed.

Mr. P. S. Bennett:
I am glad to have you ask that question, not because I can answer it, but because I would like to have something drawn out.

Some years ago or about the time we went into the horticultural and nursery business we started in pretty largely with the American Chestnut, thinking that we would make a pretty good thing out of it. The first attempt was an utter failure.

I want to say this, from what I can learn I think this will be found to be true, that in soil where there is much lime the chestnut tree will not do well. I think on light soil, especially sandy soil, even in our rigorous climate that they will succeed. That is my opinion, and if they will succeed it seems to me they are well worthy of planting.

If on light soils, sandy light soils where there is very little or no lime, they will succeed; they will be a valuable tree for propogation on various grounds.

In the first place, they are a very rapid grower.

In the second place, the timber has considerable value; then they can be cut down and a second crop come up, and can be raised over and over and over, for, I don’t know how many thousand years.

My father never tried it, as the boy said, but unquestionably they will reproduce themselves in that way almost eternally. Then there is still another source of value, and that is in their
fruit. Chestnuts bear a high price, and I have no doubt, but even in this country, if they can be made to grow, a pretty good thing can be made in that way out of chestnut trees.

Mr. Johnathan Stoddard:

About six miles south of Green Bush, ten years ago, I let a neighbor have some chestnuts and he planted them. One of them grew perhaps ten feet high. It stood on heavy clay soil, growing, and as healthy as any tree in the forest.

Mr. J. M. Smith:

Does it stand in the forest?

Mr. J. Stoddard:

No sir. It is on the prairie. It is exposed, unless he has planted, within late years a few apple trees around it. It stands like anything else on the prairie, in a very bleak place.

Mr. P. S. Bennett:

How much lime is there in the soil?

Mr. J. Stoddard:

A great deal. It is based on a lime foundation. As soon as you get down a few feet from the surface of the land.

Mr. A. F. Glaze:

I was raised in a country where the chestnut tree was a native, and I know some that have been attempted to be raised in this country in the immediate vicinity of Ripon. Some of them in this county and some in Green Lake county, that I am familiar with. I do not think it can be done; that is to raise them to any size. Mr. Miller, who is perhaps known to most of the inhabitants in the county, has, I guess, five or six trees. He brought to my office once, some chestnuts from them. I have not seen the trees for about three years, but at that time they were probably about the size of a man's leg. I do not think they will ever get any larger. Those in Green Lake county maintained a sort of existence for four or five years, and finally died.

Those were on light soil, similar to the soil they grow on in Ohio, but I am certain that the chestnut tree cannot be made a success either as timber, or shade, or fruit in this country. I
have nothing to say as to the reason, for I was not in that business, but Mr. Miller took a great deal of pains in raising those trees. I know he resorted to a great deal of expense in order to preserve them; bestowed a great deal of care upon them, and did succeed in raising them sufficiently large to get chestnuts from them, but I do not think they have grown any in height in six or eight years.

Mr. J. P. Roe:

On motion Convention adjourned to 7 p. m.

FOND DU LAC, WIS.,

February 23rd, 7 p. m., 1875.

Convention called to order by President Smith.

Mayor H. H. Dodd, of Fond du Lac, was introduced by the President, and gave the following address of welcome, which was responded to by J. M. Smith, President.