

WHAT CIVIC IMPROVEMENT HAS DONE FOR ST. JOHNS

HOMES THAT WON PRIZES OFFERED FOR EXCELLENCE IN ADORNMENT OF HOUSES AND YARDS
ONE SUBURB THAT HAS MADE A VERY GOOD START

THE long arm of civic improvement which has encircled this fair country of ours and made beautiful scores of villages and cities beckoned the busy little suburb of St. Johns to come within its sheltering fold last Spring. It beckoned in a most inviting way and St. Johns had the tact and energy to accept the invitation. As a result she is now boasting of a full-fledged civic improvement league, and her citizens are beautifying their lawns, painting their houses, devoting time and careful attention to the culture of flowers and vines removing eye-sores in the shape of old and dilapidated buildings and fences—in fact St. Johns is being thoroughly renovated.

The story of the redemption of St. Johns reads something like "The House That Jack Built." To begin with, ambitious citizens taking natural pride in their homes and the future of their city, have done the work. The Civic Improvement League inspired them with this ambition and the spirit to be up and doing, and the league had the hearty indorsement and co-operation of the Mayor and the Town Council. The organization of the league was the result of an offer made by H. L. Powers, of Portland, to pay cash prizes for excellence in the culture of flowers and shrubs and the beautifying of grounds and lawns. And, backing up to the beginning of the story, this idea came to Mr. Powers as a result of a lecture given here last Spring by an officer of the National Civic Improvement League, under the auspices of the Portland League.

So the spirit of public improvement reached St. Johns over Portland's shoulders. This beautifully situated little river town has long been a pet hobby with Mr. Powers, and civic improvement is another subject on which he enthuses, so after this well-illustrated lecture was delivered he concluded that St. Johns offered virgin soil for an experiment and came forward with an offer of cash prizes amounting to \$150 for excellence in 11 different classes of improvements. The result of this offer has been the beginning of what promises to make this rapidly-growing town one of the prettiest and most artistic on the Willamette River. The ladies of the town put their heads together and talked over the situation. When they separated it was announced that a civic improvement league had been organized. The homes of St. Johns tell the rest of the story.

It has been said of this league that it is of more importance than any municipal body of that corporation, for every man, woman and child is interested in its work and advancement, and all are endeavoring to plan some method of helping promote its aims. The league is considering the adoption of a motto, which, if followed to the letter, will convert this town with its beautiful background of hills and river into a perfect garden. This motto is: "I resolve to make my premises more attractive than they have been before, in order that every passerby may take pleasure in them. I resolve to give my encouragement to every public enterprise that promises to enhance the beauty and healthfulness of the town in which I live." With such an aim in view there will be nothing to retard the progress and beautification of St. Johns. It has witnessed a remarkable growth in the past three years, nine new industries having been established there in that time. These have largely increased the population, and the new-comers have built homes. The majority of the residents own their property, which gives a greater impetus to the work of improvement that would otherwise be the case.

Joaquin Miller says that only man is ugly and dirty and cross, and that everything in Nature is beautiful, adding: "We do not plant enough flowers. We ought to plant them by the depot, by the roadside, by the schoolhouse, by the door and in the window." The people of St. Johns are going to do this. All over town people are discussing plans for beautifying their premises, competing for prizes next year, improving the appearance of the streets, and establishing parks. The schoolchildren are interested and a number of them were among this year's competitors. The "keep our city clean" spirit which invaded St. Louis with such happy results a few years ago has broken out in epidemic in St. Johns, and her residents are determined that the visitor shall hereafter see no piles of waste paper and rubbish lying about the streets, or unsightly dumps of tin cans and garbage at the rear of houses. The purposes of the league are aesthetic in the direction of cultivating a taste for municipal beauty, but it is also practical and believes implicitly that cleanliness is next to godliness.

One of the best things that has been done so far is the establishment of a park at the terminus of the car line. A picturesque group of fir trees enclosed with a neat, well-painted fence, and as soon as the old car barns are removed, which will be done shortly through the influence of the league, the area enclosed for parking will be enlarged and probably purchased for a permanent City Park. Other desirable plots of land within the corporate limits of the town are being quietly selected, and the league will eventually endeavor to make parks of these also.

A lively war is being made on the promiscuous placing of signs and advertisements, which mar the beauty of any public place. The recent franchise granted the General Electric Company stipulates that no advertisements of any character are to be permitted on the poles, and that the poles shall be painted, so as to present a comely appearance. In this respect St. Johns franchise is superior to that of Portland. The preservation of trees is another important step which the league has undertaken. No town can be beautiful without trees, but there are scores of people who do not realize that every tree destroyed takes materially away from the value of the property. Trees have been cut away with a free hand in this town. Its growth has been so rapid in the past two years that the general public did not pause long enough to consider that a wholesale slaughter of them was going on, but Mr. McCusker's remark that houses could be built but trees could not, fell on fruitful ground. So now that the population has reached the 100 mark, and an organization has been formed for the purpose of watching these matters, trees will be carefully guarded and young ones will be planted along the streets, so that in years to



THE SITE OF A MERRILLS HOME TWO YEARS AGO, WAS A PRIMITIVE WOODLAND.

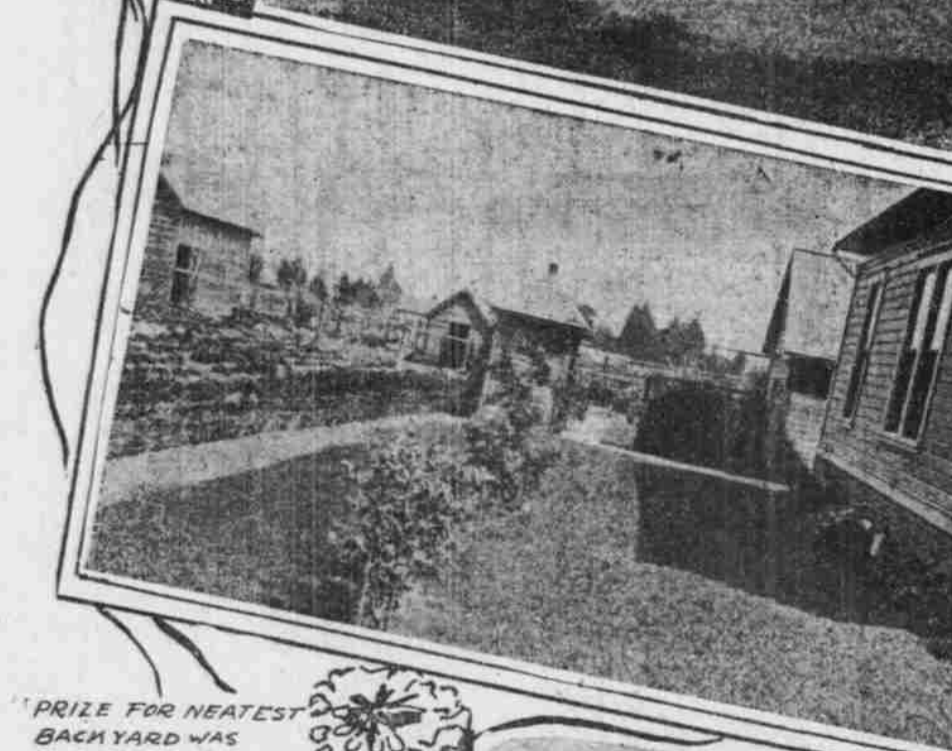


CIVIC IMPROVEMENT HAS MADE THIS A PRETTY HOME

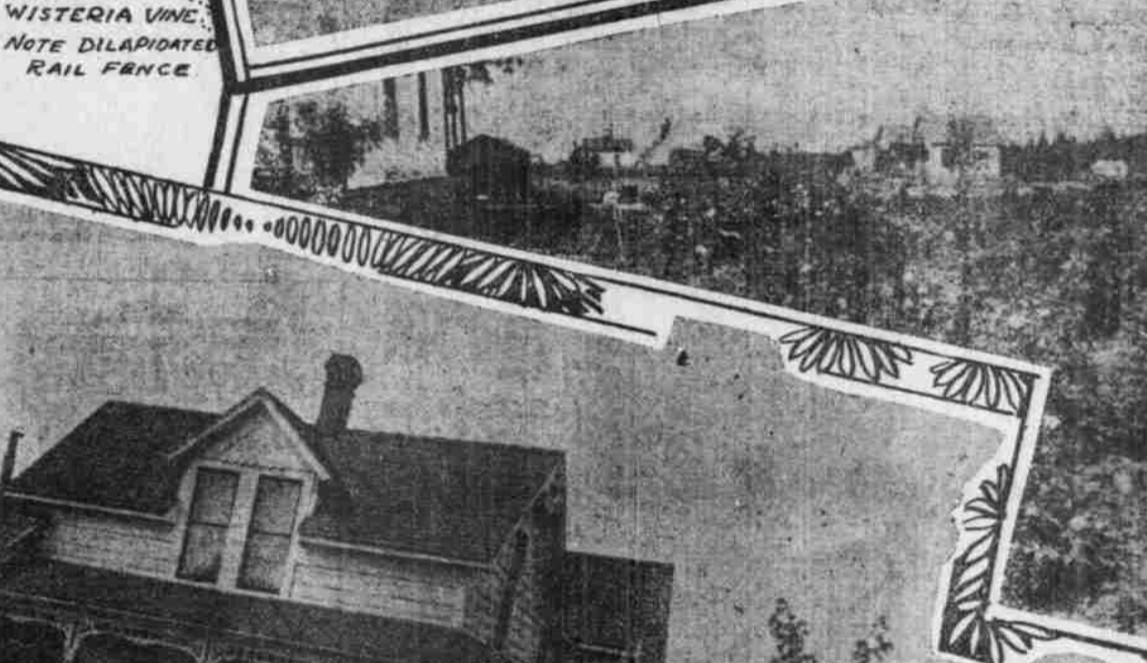
LUXURIANT GROWTH OF WISTERIA VINE. NOTE DILAPIDATED RAIL FENCE



MRS. D. J. HORSEMAN'S WELL KEPT LAWN TOOK 2ND PRIZE. THE FLOWER CENTER PIECE TOOK FIRST HONORS IN CLASS 6



PRIZE FOR NEATEST BACKYARD WAS AWARDED TO MRS. D. A. MERRILL



MRS. L. B. CHIPMAN'S ROSES TOOK 1ST PRIZE IN CLASS 11



BEST VINE GROWN IN 1904 COVERING PORCH EFFECTIVELY (WILD CUCUMBER)

VINE BEAUTIFYING A SHED.

matter to get the public interested in a new idea of this kind, but the officers and members worked in harmony and faithfully. The offer of the prizes was made through them, and then people began to think there was something to the movement, after all. Not all the classes were completed for, but a number of the prominent citizens went to work with a will and began to work on their lawns, plant vines to cover unsightly places, clean up back yards, cultivate flowers and do many things which so enhanced the appearance of their residences that they were almost unrecognizable. When the time came for awarding the prizes, to eliminate any idea of unfairness or favoritism, the matter of selecting judges was put in the hands of the Portland Civic Improvement Company, and Mr. Thomas McCusker, president of that organization, and Colonel L. L. Hawkins, of the Park Commission, responded to the invitation to select those worthy of being termed excellent. These gentlemen spent much time in going over all displays, and in some cases did not make any awards of certain classes because the effort made was not sufficient to entitle the competitors to considera-

tion. Mr. Powers having specified in his announcement that the prizes were for excellence. In the report submitted and read at a large gathering of citizens, Mr. McCusker said:

"There is yet room for improvement, but the showing made was highly complimentary to the competitors, and both the citizens of St. Johns and her Civic Improvement Association should be proud of the efforts made.

"The committee has been agreeably surprised to note the marked improvement which has taken place in St. Johns within the last year and the interest which her citizens are taking in the work of civic improvement, and if this work is continued we predict that St. Johns will be the banner suburb of Portland within five years."

This kind of talk proved very pleasing to the good people of St. Johns. The meeting at which this was read was a large one. Everybody came, for the announcement of the prizewinners were to be made and Mr. McCusker was to deliver a lecture, illustrated with lantern slides of the prize-winning exhibits. It proved a great success and a triumph for the members of the little league which has accomplished so much in its first season. It must not be inferred, however, that Mr. McCusker's lecture was all honey, for where he deemed criticism necessary he did not hesitate to give it. When the views were exhibited he carefully pointed out the defects in each and explained where they might have been improved. The fact that all yards have to be surrounded with fences on account of the cow nuisance prevented the photographer getting as good views as he could have done otherwise, but as the bovine curfew will in all probability ring before next season, better results will be obtained another time. One of the Councilmen, speaking before Mr. McCusker, stated that there had been greater improvements made in the four months since the organization of the league than had been accomplished in the 23 years he had resided there, and this, the lecturer stated, was most complimentary to the earnest women who had taken up the work. But with all that has been accomplished, there is a state of perfection and excellence yet to be attained, which he endeavored to point out. The picture of a residence with a beautiful and luxuriant wisteria vine growing over the front veranda was thrown on the slide, and the beauty and perfection of the vine commented upon. There was an expression of satisfaction on every face in the house. But after they had all admired the vine Mr. McCusker preached a little sermon about a hole in the fence and the loose planks which were scattered about on the ground; also the condition of the street in front and the piles of rubbish in the adjoining vacant lot. The idea of surroundings or settings to the pretty pictures made by artistic improvements to the home was thoroughly impressed upon the audience and comprehended by them. The fact that many had been expecting to receive prizes in certain classes from the fact that they were the only contestants, but none were awarded, served to open their eyes to the standard to be attained by civic improvement. In regard to harmony in all improvements the lecturer said:

"In beautifying your homes, houses, etc., your motto should be Harmony. Without harmony there is discord to the sight as well as to the ear. In painting a

(Concluded on Page 33.)