

Beautifying Florida

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I would like to prepare a paper on something about Woman's Clubs and Ornamentals. Since Women's Clubs are more useful than ornamentals, my thoughts positively refuse to flow with the ink in my pen, therefore, I stand before you tonight without any paper. But I will make a few remarks on the subject of Women's Clubs and parks and drive-ways.

I wish to thank the President for giving the Women's Club a place on your program. I bring you greetings from the State Federation of Women's Clubs and from the Woman's Club of Ocala. I will say just here that we have enjoyed very much having you here in Ocala. We feel honored in having you hold your sessions in our club house, and we hope it will not be thirty years before you come back to us again. (Applause.)

At one time in my life when I was associated at the Agricultural College in Lake City with Professor Rolfs and Mr. Hume, I was studying plants, and I thought that if I should be shipwrecked in mid-ocean like Robinson Crusoe and left alone on an island I would be perfectly happy if there were just a few plants around. Since then I have been working with Women's Clubs and with people and I am perfectly happy in working with them now; and tonight then, I ought to be very happy, because I am bringing

the plants and the people together, and I hope that in the future my work can be with both of these.

It has been my desire for a long time that my influence in this town should be for beautifying it by establishing a park in the city, and I can say tonight that my wish has been fulfilled this year, because the Women's Club of Ocala recently dedicated Tuskawilla Park and the Victory Arch. At the 13th biennial meeting of the Federation of Women's Clubs, in New York City, the statement was made by the chairman of forestry that, "the acquisition by the Florida State Federation of the Royal Palm Park is the most important single achievement of any state federation in the past two years."

If the white man, following DeSoto on down through the years, had taken the stand toward preserving our natural scenery that the women in the State Federation have taken, what a different State we would have now. Florida would indeed be the land of flowers, but sad to relate, the race, in its development, must go through the same stages that the individual passes through. It seems that man has certainly been passing through that destructive period; the period of destruction in the life of a boy, for since the time Florida was first discovered by the white man, what ravages have been made

on the forests and natural scenery of the State. They have certainly destroyed a great deal of beauty of our State. The forest fires have been allowed to burn and destroy the seeds in the soil and the humus, impoverishing the soil and making impossible the rich verdure we would have had otherwise.

Of course, you are all familiar with the devastation brought by the turpentine and the lumber men. This all goes to show that man has been passing through the period of destructiveness. But during the last few years, the word conservation seems to give us hope, that this period in the life of the race has been passed. But we are doomed to disappointment, for along comes the Dixie Highway, cutting out everything in its way; cutting out all the pretty little trees at the side of the road and leaving it perfectly bare; leaving the autoist exposed to the hot rays of the sun. Well, what can we do? We see that man has not yet passed through this period. Well, the only thing that we can do is to call on the women to come to the rescue, (Applause) so I recommend that everywhere we must organize Women's Clubs.

A great many of the larger clubs in our State have come from village improvement associations. This club in Ocala which now numbers over a hundred and fifty members, originated in a small village improvement association. We must establish these all through this State, along the Dixie Highway and have the women begin beautifying the highway in the wake of the men who go along destroying our beautiful shade trees.

As examples of what Women's Clubs can do to beautify cities and highways,

I might mention the park in Jacksonville, which I understand was developed through the instrumentality of Women's Clubs. Orlando has been greatly beautified by the work of Women's Clubs, and as I said recently, in Ocala we have started a park here. Then, I might mention the wonderful work started in St. Lucie County a number of years ago, by the clubs in that county. They planted palms, oleanders and other ornamental plants along all their highways.

We think Florida is destined to be the greatest State in the Union. I think Florida has passed her darkest days. She has a great future before her, a very bright future. If one had to depend entirely upon what is heard at this convention to give him the information of Florida's resources, of course, he would have the idea that it comes entirely from the fruit growers in the State, but we must not overlook the tourists. We depend on them very much for developing the State; for the interest that it brings into the State; for the money and various other things, so we cannot overlook the tourists in developing our State.

The tourists come here from the north, from the snowfields, and they want to see tropical vegetation. So I advocate the planting of tropical ornamentals and plants, which flower during the tourist season. Of course, we do not want to confine ourselves entirely to the plants which flower during the tourist season, but a portion of our grounds, at least, can be devoted to the plants that bloom during the winter months. For our own pleasure we can have other parts of our grounds decorated with plants which bloom later in the season.

I would like to mention a number of the plants which are native to our State, which can be used as ornamentals. Members of this committee will not appreciate my mentioning this I know, because they probably put me on this committee to help them advertise their wares, to help create the market for their cultivated ornamentals; but I cannot resist calling your attention to the numbers of native plants which can be taken from the woods and transplanted to our grounds. We have the wild plum and many others that I might mention, and I think we could make a beautiful Japanese Garden. It would of course, have to be Americanized, as everything must be at the present day, but in this Japanese Garden we could have the wild plum, the peach, a beautiful tree in the spring, as it blooms and later gives us fruit. Then we could have the bamboo; this, of course, is a cultivated ornamental. And in our woods toward Lake Weir you will find a beautiful little grove of haw trees. When these have come into their beautiful green foliage in the spring, it gives a very Japanese-like effect and this could also be used in our Japanese Garden. So let us not forget—although we depend largely on the cultivated ornamentals—that we have in our own forests beautiful ornamental trees which we can use in our landscape gardening.

When women began to find that their influence was good in the home, they found that it was good also in the town, and they began to use their influence in brightening the towns as well as their homes.

The greatest compliment I ever heard paid to a woman was this. A young

man made the remark to a mother, that he loved to come there because it seemed as if people lived in that home. And that is the way it ought to be. We want them to look as though people lived in them.

When we dedicated our park the other day, we told the legend of Micanopy and Tuskawilla. Once upon a time a great Seminole chief had his campfire on the site which is now known as Micanopy. But unlike the other Indian chiefs, Micanopy loved not to wander but was content to sit down about his fire smoking his pipe in peace. The reason of Micanopy's contentment was this. In Micanopy's wigwam there was a beautiful woman, Micanopy's squaw. This beautiful woman was not only beautiful but she was known far and wide for her wifely qualities and the art with which she kept the home fires burning. His wife was Tuskawilla and she it was who charmed him so that he cared not to wander. That we thought was a very beautiful and appropriate name to give our park.

And we want always to bear in mind that it is the charm of our park that is going to hold our people, and this is what we want to do in our State. We want to beautify our State and make it so charming that people will not only want to come here and spend the winters, but will want to come here and live.

Mr. Mills: I am sure we are all delighted and appreciative of Mrs. Gray's splendid talk, so much more interesting when she can stand up and talk it.

I do not know where the report comes in, but possibly Mr. Cook and myself are interested in having Mrs. Gray advertise the cultivated ornamentals. I believe I

would like to say here that I think I can claim the honor of being the first one to popularize around Jacksonville, one of your native plants. I do not think even our esteemed President, ever saw its use or appreciated its worth until he saw a specimen growing in my yard in Jacksonville. I call things by their common name; I let Prof. Hume and some of the other college graduates call them by their technical names. I speak of the common palm found scattered in places in Florida, and commonly known as the Needle palm. I found in planting around Jacksonville, that one of the great difficulties is to find some ornamental that is tropical and yet something that won't get too big after a while for the place where you put it.

I have a little palm planted 14 or 15 years ago that today stands eight feet high with a spread of twelve or fifteen feet; just one magnificent, symmetrical, splendid mound of green, splendidly hardy, tropical beauty and it never has been affected by a freeze. I never saw one touched by a freeze, and yet it has all the beauty and tropical appearance of any other palm. There are other plants, as Mrs. Gary suggested that we can use in decorative and ornamental planting. I am particularly interested in the plants that do not get too big for the place.

For the last ten years, I have been interested in the beautifying of a cemetery. Now that may be a dead subject, but a very live one to me, because that is one place of all others that we want beautiful. But we don't want the things that eventually get too large because there are lots and lots of places where we need the little effect of the palm or shrub, but we don't want it to get to be a tree after a while,

because it is out of place. I have found in that work that this Needle palm comes in very nicely, and also one or two of the Sago palms.

I am also using for that purpose the so commonly called Sacred Bamboo of Japan. I think Prof. Hume told me the other day it was called *Nandina domestica*. It is the palm they used to spread before the temple in Japan. I have one at the side of my house that has never gotten above the top rail of the porch, and it makes a beautiful filling in plant. It is of slow growth, slow to reproduce or to propagate, but beautiful in effect and splendid where you need the small and not the large shrub.

Now there is just one tree in Florida at this time I want to pay my respects to. When I first came to Florida, I am frank to admit that the Magnolia appeared to me to be about the finest tree in Florida, and I had a great deal of regard for the water oak because of its easy transplanting and quickness of growth. But in the last ten years I have learned to take off my hat to that kind of tree, to my notion the greatest tree in Florida, the live oak.

I tell you folks, don't waste any more time planting water oaks on your streets. One time in a trial in court, where the destruction or death of a water oak was at stake, they got me up there for expert testimony. The lawyer asked me this question: "What do you consider the average life of a water oak"? And I said 25 or 30 years and he said "don't you know that there are trees in this town 40 years old." I said "you asked me the average life of the trees and I can show you plenty planted out that died in 15 or 20 years."

Just when the water oak tree gets to be the perfect, magnificent tree you want it to be, it begins to go back, but you can see live oaks, the beginning of whose age runs back behind man's memory. I have stood and looked at one of the giant specimens of the most magnificent tree the Almighty ever put in the ground, and to me the greatest natural evidence of the power and ability of a Creator. When you see a live oak with a limb running out 50 to 60 feet like that one, carrying all its weight of branches and foliage, swaying in the storm and not breaking off—can you do it with steel, or iron or bronze, or brass, or any other agency of man put out there fifty feet with no other support, that will stand the strain?

Folks, it speaks to me of the Almighty, and I say I stand before it with awe and I take off my hat to it as the one great supreme, magnificent tree that Florida ought to be proud of, and ought to plant

wherever we need shade in our homes, our streets and in our parks. But I say, don't crowd it; give it plenty of room; make it the perfect, symmetrical, magnificent specimen that it will be under favorable conditions.

I thank you.

Mr. Hume: I think Mr. Mills was thinking of a tree in Jacksonville, standing near Keystone Park. If you have an opportunity to see that tree, don't miss it; I don't know where there is a live oak anywhere in Florida that compares with it—I mean for the size of the branches, for its general symmetry, its general beauty and its enormous size. I suppose I do not exaggerate when I say that tree is upwards of two hundred feet in its spread of branches. It is a wonderful specimen, and worth anybody's time to take the trip across the river to see it and it fully comes up to what Mr. Mills was saying in regard to the live oak.