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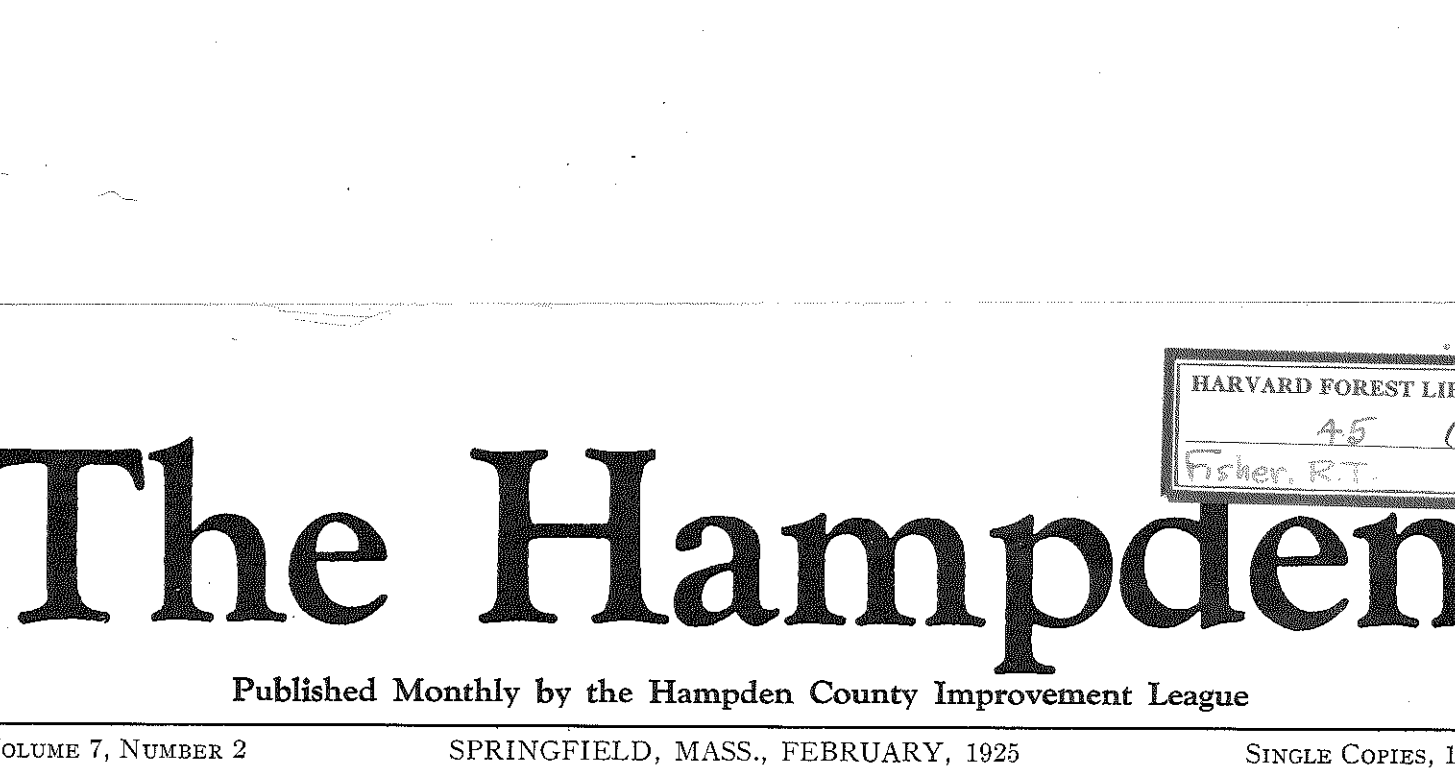
Marketing Massachusetts Forest Products

Professor R. T. Fisher, Director of the Harvard Forest and its Survey of Wood-Using Industries in Springfield, Tells How Market Studies Can Be Made the Basis of a Scientific Forestry Program

THE canvass of wood-using industries now being carried on in the Springfield district by representatives of the Harvard Forest at Petersham will have, it is hoped, a much wider significance than a mere collection of statistics. In a study where so many factors are involved, it is not safe to predict exactly what useful conclusions will be reached. The main intention, however, is to put the practice of forestry on a more business-like basis. The general public is now well aware of the fact that forests in general are alarmingly depleted, that the production of forest products in Massachusetts, to say nothing of New England, is far below the consumption. If the community is to get any use and income out of our thousands of acres of waste land, it is only by developing the business of wood production that it can be done. From the point of view of the owner of woodland, particularly the small owner, the abstract importance of forests cuts less of a figure than the question whether he can afford the cost of starting or maintaining a forest crop, and whether the current or final returns will pay him for the outlay. The great bulk of our forest land, both actual and potential, is privately owned. Except where practiced under public ownership, forestry is a business like orcharding or dairying, and unless the returns are sufficient and reasonably certain, it cannot be expected that private owners will undertake it.



There is no region in the United States where today conditions are more favorable to the practice of forestry than in central Massachusetts. The management of the Harvard Forest, which has now been in operation for sixteen years, shows that continuous growth can be maintained and all costs of maintenance and production met, including interest, with a fair profit besides. But not all timberland is so favorably located with respect to markets, or in such comparatively good growing condition as the Harvard Forest. Speaking in general both from the point of view of the timberland owner and of the consumer, many of the conditions of manufacture, distribution and utilization are unsatisfactory, and to this extent work against both a more desirable handling of the forest and a more economical use of its products by the consumer. A few examples will show how these difficulties work out.

A very few years ago native white pine found a considerable outlet in the building trades. Now not only white pine but a large percentage of northern New England spruce has been superseded for this use by western lumber. It is true that at present the bulk of our native pine is of too poor a grade for ordinary building material, and has been used largely for box lumber. Nevertheless, it is also true that much of the western lumber is no better than what could be made from the best of our native pine. The western

material has been manufactured by large mills, sawed true to dimension, and well finished. It has also been available promptly and in large lots. On the other hand, the native pine has come to be cut chiefly by small portable mills, not always with the best equipment, and under conditions which often made proper seasoning impossible. Generally, too, there are no facilities for finishing. Thus, many retailers no longer like to handle native pine and their customers are becoming educated to prefer the imported varieties. Is it possible that by better methods of manufacturing and handling, a percentage of this local retail business might be regained for white pine? When we consider that the freight bill alone on much of the western lumber is $15 a thousand, it would seem to be economical for all concerned to find a way to use similar lumber that could be delivered at from $2 to $4 per thousand.

Another important problem is how to eliminate waste. Under present methods not more than 35% by volume, and usually less, of the individual tree is actually utilized in the finished product. Two-thirds, therefore, is lost in the woods, the sawmill, or the shop. Besides, this direct waste of material, there is an indirect waste in cost. Most of the lumber got out by Massachusetts mills is shipped rough in the form of boards, which thus pay freight on a considerable percentage of material that is lost in the shop or factory. The practice of sawing lumber round edge, that is, through and through the log leaving the bark on, is general in central New England and has resulted in important economies. In certain industries, however, attempts have already been made to cut the board up into standardized pieces or roughed out sizes from the boards as they come from the log. This practice is reported as in vogue at the sawmill of the Ford Motor Car Company. With a large number of different sized pieces to be got out, it is possible to utilize closely almost any size log or odd length of board, and instead of having to pay freight on the waste in bark, edgings, crook, and unsoundness, only material actually usable in a motor car is shipped. To apply this principle to native lumber would involve changes in woods equipment and in factory methods. It may not be possible, but it is certainly successful in some industries and may prove feasible for some uses here. By similar methods, it might be possible to utilize varieties of timber not now salable.

So far in the development and promotion of forestry, the chief emphasis has been placed upon production, upon the methods and cost of planting and upon the growth of timber crops, in Massachusetts, chiefly white pine. It seems to be timely to recognize both that our native woodland contains a good many other varieties of timber, and that some are either not marketed at all or cannot always be marketed to advantage. In the sum total of our wooded area hardwoods outweigh softwoods. It is only by developing the greatest possible value in timber crops that an incentive can be provided for production. Ordinary woodland such as grows up after cuttings or develops on abandoned land is producing not only more and more of the comparatively worthless varieties of trees, but also a poorer and poorer grade of lumber. This situation makes it increasingly easy for importations from other parts of the country to take and hold the markets, and the growing shortage of supplies, the use of substitutes, and the increasing distance from which wood must be shipped are constantly changing the methods of utilization. It would seem, therefore, that an analysis of the actual conditions of manufacture and distribution would help not only to make existing timber more valuable, but to indicate what kinds and qualities of timber are most desirable to grow. In many of the towns of Hampden, Worcester, Hampshire and Berkshire Counties, more than 60% of the total area is classifiable as woodland. Of this total of not less than half a million acres, only a small percentage is actually producing anything better than cordwood. Experience on the Harvard Forest has shown that it is possible at a definite cost and at the right time to convert much of this unproductive forest into a potentially valuable crop. It is to make this potential value a recognized value and thus more effectively demonstrate the business possibilities of forestry that the present canvass of wood utilization in Springfield has been undertaken. If the results prove promising, the study will probably be extended to other localities in the state.

1925 Membership Dues Come In Rapidly

SIXTY per cent of 1925 membership pledges to the Hampden County Improvement League were paid before the end of January. This is considered by League officials a very satisfactory rate of payment of pledges. Some payments were made at campaign time, but most of them in January.

To the close of January 2,247 memberships were paid, totalling $22,940. In dollars and cents this is slightly more than sixty per cent of the total pledged. In number of memberships it is slightly less than sixty per cent, the larger subscribers proving to be a little more prompt in making their payments.

One interesting fact about the payments now coming in, bears out the argument the League has so often used to the effect that prosperity in the small towns helps business in the cities of the county, and that is that a large percentage of the payments from rural sections are made by checks drawn upon city banks. When the farmer or merchant in the small town is doing business, he banks his cash in city banks, and he certainly spends some of it in city stores and theatres and for the purchase of goods made in local factories. Every dollar of added production due to the League's work anywhere in the county finds its reflection in additional money in circulation and therefore additional prosperity in all our communities. Never has the truth of this been more clearly demonstrated than in the handling within these past few weeks of checks on city banks coming in to the League office from points ten, twenty and thirty miles away in the county.

This is an added reason why consumers should make it a point to buy milk, fruit, vegetables and farm produce from local sources in preference to produce from more distant points. The money spent locally comes right back, helping to make everybody in this section more prosperous. Money sent to distant points subtracts just that much wealth from Hampden County, and furthermore it encourages waste in freights, extra handlings, and all the extra costs that are uneconomic when a local supply is available.

Prompt payment of 1925 dues is urged upon all League members who have not yet sent in their checks. Payment now saves the further expense of stationery, postage and clerical work, and means that the money paid to the League goes more nearly 100 per cent to the purposes for which it is given.