NATIVE TREES OF RHODE ISLAND

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LEVI W. RUSSELL

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RHODE ISLAND.

BY

LEVI W. RUSSELL,

PROVIDENCE.

[FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT, 1899, OF THE RHODE ISLAND STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE.]

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By Levi W. Russell,

Of Providence.

Rhode Island is a natural forest region. Its conditions of climate and soil are highly favorable to a varied arboreal growth. Few continuous tracts of no greater extent in this country produce so many species of native trees as are found within the limits of Rhode Island. The effect of the south shore currents and the Narragansett Bay is to moderate the climate for quite a distance inland. This condition gives certain trees, whose range is generally farther south, a congenial habitat here. Thus we have, in the southern line of towns, the "pin" oak, rarely, if ever, found elsewhere so far north. There is one locality of the "post" oak, near the north shore of Wickford harbor, the farthest point north for which the tree has been reported. So, that fine ornamental tree, the "tulip," thrives vigorously here, not only as planted from nursery stock, but is growing as a stately, native tree in a few localities. Its general range is from Pennsylvania south to the Gulf States.

Of the trees which reach their full development farther north, in a colder climate than ours, there are very few which are not native here, and probably none not easily naturalized. Thus we have noted as "local," that is, found in a few places, the "canoe," or "paper," birch, that tree so useful to the aborigines of the north for boats and shelter. The "rock," or "sugar," maple, while not found in great numbers here, as in the "orchards" of Vermont and cool regions elsewhere, grows native, sparingly, in various

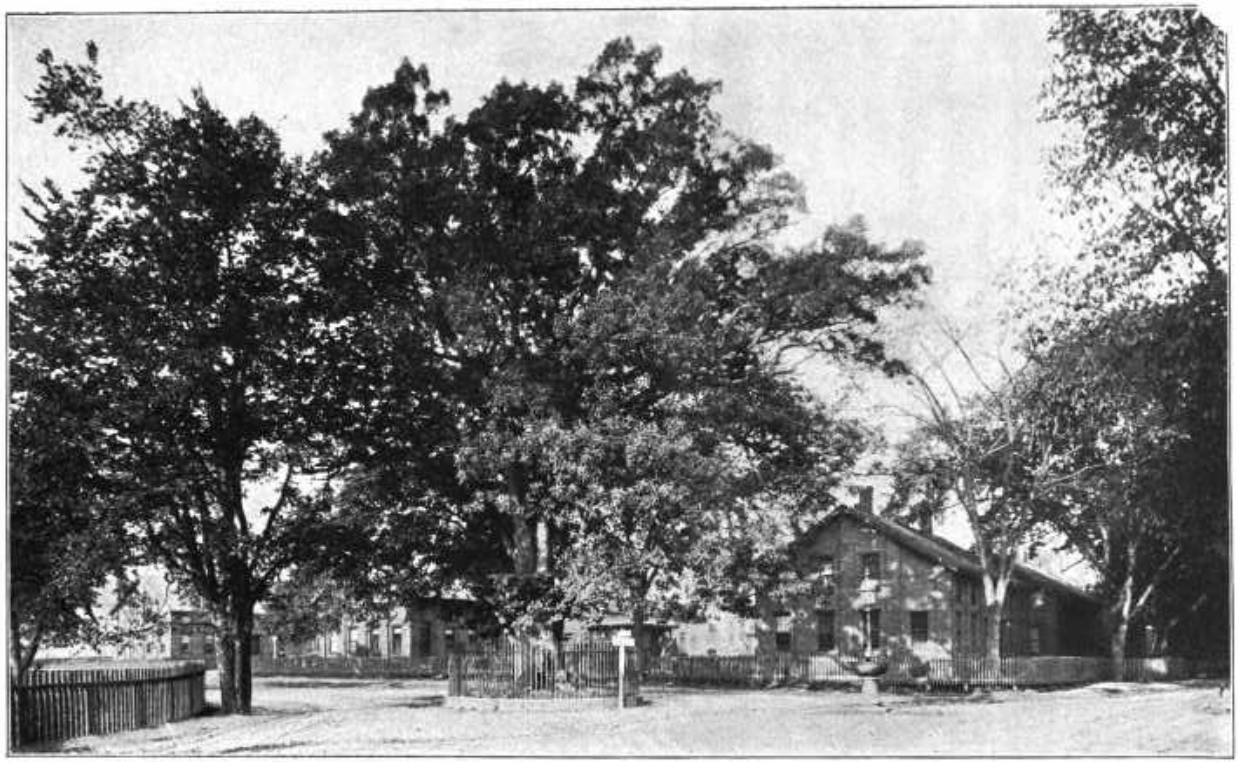
places in this State, and is perfectly at home as a planted tree. Of the evergreens, mention may be made of the hemlock spruce, one of the most useful trees of the northern woods. It grows here in a few cool, moist locations, showing all the grace and beauty for which the tree is noted.

It is here, then, in territory not far from Narragansett Bay, that conditions seem to meet and mingle, which favor and ensure, the growth of trees covering, in their native habitats, a wide range of latitude and corresponding difference in climate.

The variety of soils in the State is an effective element in producing variety in tree growth. In some regions of our country one might travel many miles and find but a single kind of tree, in forest masses, others, if they grew at all, being dwarfed and useless. In Rhode Island the limits of a single farm sometimes show vigorous specimens of most of the nearly fifty native species found in the State. Much of the picturesqueness of the country scenery in Rhode Island comes from constantly changing variety in the arboreal growth, noticeable as one travels the highways leading from town to town. This fact is not appreciated as it well might be. There is no element of natural beauty so freely exposed to our view as that seen in our native trees and shrubs; and there is none so easily and so cheaply manageable about home grounds and dressed highways as that derived from the same source.

The economic value of the woodlands of this State is greater than what might be inferred from its limited area. Although no mountains appear, much of the ground in the northern and western sections is exceedingly rough and full of troublesome rocks for the farmer. A large part of this land is, and should be, given up to growing wood. Portions have been subjected to two or three clean choppings, and there are probably but few acres of woodland in the State which have not been culled of the best trees. But the lands thus devoted to this crop have been left to chance-seeding, or to growth of sprouts from stumps of trees removed.

According to the State census of Rhode Island, taken by the



WHITE OAK, ("CATHOLIC OAK") LONSDALE.

late Amos Perry, for 1885, there was from 25 to 30 per cent. of the land area devoted to the growth of wood. This, however, lies mostly in the western towns of the State, while there is very little woodland in the shore towns, and almost none upon the islands. The following table of contrasts, taken from the 1885 report, is interesting:

Woodland of Several Towns shown by Per Cents.

West Greenwich	57;	New Shoreham	0
Coventry	51;	Portsmouth	2
Glocester	50;	Middletown	2½
Scituate	47;	Jamestown	5
North Smithfield	44;	Bristol	8
Tiverton	42;	East Providence	17
Johnston	38;	Warwick	19

The above table is carried sufficiently far to show the great inequality existing in the distribution of woodland in this State. The dearth of even shade-trees in some of these towns is a painful feature, and ought to be remedied as soon as trees can be made to grow. All these lands were originally covered with forests. Sufficient and properly selected areas should still be devoted to tree growth, to break the sweeping winds and conserve moisture for springs and small streams. In European countries the government compels by law the reserve of a certain percentage of each owner's grounds to be given to tree growth. There the folly of clean tree-cutting, even on small areas, has been experienced, and enormous sums are now being spent in renewing forests, both on government and on private lands. Here we must depend upon the intelligence and disposition of individual owners of land estates to manage tree-cutting and tree-planting. In a general way, the economic and the ornamental values of trees are both acknowledged. What is lacking is that active interest which comes from a careful observation of the characteristics of the different kinds—their likes and dislikes of different soils and locations, their rate of growth, the space they individually need for

full development, the adaptability of the different kinds for ornament or shade in special localities, and whether they will or will not, when grown, harmonize with their surroundings. For growth in forest masses there are many questions which require an intelligent answer to ensure the most profitable investment for years to come. The white pine requires one sort of ground, the chestnut another, the oaks another; the white cedar takes to a swamp, and the gray birch will grow anywhere from a swamp to a deserted gravel-pit. Some tree, native in this region, can be found which will thrive on any acre of ground in Rhode Island not permanently under water, or made of bare rock.

It is the chief purpose of this paper to call attention to the prominent characteristics of the principal native trees of the State, and to show something of their adaptability for economic and ornamental purposes. They are tabulated below with both their common and their Latin names. Common names vary in different regions, but the Latin names are constant and are understood by botanists everywhere.

Table of the Principal Forest Trees indigenous to Rhode Island.

White oak	*Quercus alba.*
Swamp white oak	*Q. bicolor.*
Post oak	*Q. stellata.*
Chestnut oak	*Q. prinos.*
	Var. *monticola.*
Red oak	*Q. rubra.*
Black oak	*Q. tinctoria.*
Scarlet oak	*Q. coccinea.*
Pin oak	*Q. palustris.*

NOTE.—To the above list of oaks should be added to the scarlet oak the variety *ambigua* (rather scarce), the bear, or scrub oak, *Q. ilicifolia*, and the little "chinquipin" oak, a shrub scarcely five feet high.

Shag-bark hickory	*Carya alba.*
Mocker-nut hickory	*C. tormentosa.*
Pig-nut hickory	*C. porcina.*