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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
TO NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE GARDEN CLUBS
AND AMERICAN FORESTRY ASSOCIATION
JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

Thank you for asking me here.

The arrangements committee for your next meeting will have a hard time topping the Tetons!

I am sure there is no more perfect inspiration for you ladies and gentlemen -- the veteran workers in the vineyard of beauty -- than this breathtaking part of Wyoming.

The President asked me to bring you his good wishes. The role of this forestry association for 90 years has been a fruitful one, and certainly all America has seen the stamp of the garden club ladies. Both of us keenly appreciate your tackling the next step -- the follow-through on the White House Conference on Natural Beauty.

For while Washington can rally together the leaders and experts, it is -- after all -- back in our hometowns, where inspiration becomes action and results take shape.

You who have been at this business of creating and preserving beauty in an organized way for so long must have paused sometime to ask yourselves, "Why am I so interested in beautification?"

A week ago at the ranch, when I began to sort out my thoughts and put together what I could say tonight, I asked myself that question, "What is it that makes it so exciting to me?"

If you will pardon my personal reflections, I think I found the answer in an old box of photographs that I was going through.

I became aware of how many of them from childhood and girlhood were golden moments I had spent in some lovely spot. They represented the good things in life -- the things I chose to remember after 50 years of living.

The days I remember from growing up were in the countryside of my own part of the world. Everything we do begins at home. Each of us is action-sprung from what nurtures us. And what nurtured me was walking through the piney woods in my own deep East Texas -- listening to the wind in the pine trees (there is no sound like it) and feeling the crush of pine needles underfoot, or paddling a bateau on a quiet lake that twisted between ancient moss-draped cypress trees.

Then, in Central Texas, where I went to the University of Texas and later returned to marry, I fell in love with the country of clear green pools in the rocky limestone ledges of the creeks and springs and crooked old live oaks in a pasture of bluebonnets -- perfect spots for exploring or a family picnic. There was always that wonderful sense of discovering a scene that became especially yours.

Later, as work claimed more of my life and adventure less, gardening in my own backyard brought me much joy. To make a quadrangle with the old apple tree already growing there, I planted a weeping cherry, a pink dogwood, and a crab apple, and laughingly told my husband my epitaph would be, "She planted three trees!"

My peonies and zinnias, which bordered the yard where Lynda, and later Luci, tumbled in the playpen, somehow looked more remarkable than anyone else's, no doubt because of the hours I spent cultivating and watering them.

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Now my husband's life has led me to you and other groups like you who have set about in an organized fashion to bring the golden joy of beauty to your towns and countryside.

If I can serve this goal, then I am most happy to actively work away. And I'll still settle for that epitaph, "She planted three trees!"

I do not need to tell you that I am not your only recruit. I'm sure it is a distinct pleasure to find followers in your home communities where you were once almost alone in battling to clean up the river, or waging the anti-litter campaign, or preserving the historic shrine, or landscaping the town square.

When I read the wealth of ideas and proposals that come into the White House from mayors, governors, experts like yourselves, and just plain John Citizens, I know we are really on the move.

We live in a time when 75% of our population dwells on just 1% of our land. Obviously, the great need for an attractive environment exists in our urban centers where most Americans spend most of their lives. And we are doing something about it.

In the next decade, I believe that our cities and states will take the longest strides in history. They will recognize that preserving the attractiveness of a city is a primary economic asset, a way to get payrolls. The city that is beautiful brings a high return on the dollar. The ugly city is the one which will decline and die.

I hope that our educational institutions -- whether vocational school or college -- are geared for this trend. I truly feel that the young man or young woman who prepares to be a city planner, a landscape architect, a forester, even a good gardener, is assured of a place in this most exciting new adventure, the remaking of our cities and towns.

I believe Americans are not just talking about beauty; they are acting. Things are happening because citizens are making them happen.

Let me tell you about a few:

1) A large business firm -- General Electric -- sent three men to the White House Conference on Natural Beauty.

Out of this came a research program to find a more economical way to bury transmission lines. There is another project to give better designs to light fixtures or to electric poles that have to stay above ground. In fact, I read a few days ago that the builders of one housing development -- for \$200 more per house -- can bury all the power and telephone lines in their suburb.

Think what these changes could mean to every street in the United States!

2) Labor has not been idle in this mission. For instance, Walter Reuther is not only pushing union support on a national scale, but he has done something about it in his own city.

Perhaps you heard him tell the story of organizing his neighborhood -- fathers, mothers and children -- into a Saturday clean-up of the polluted stream that flowed behind their houses. He said they got everything out of it from a tin can to a refrigerator.

3) The National Association of Homebuilders launched in May a program among builders to stimulate more attractive subdivision design. The Homebuilder's Association of Memphis is sponsoring a contest rewarding the builder who did the most to preserve trees in a subdivision. Perhaps we may be seeing the end of the day when the bulldozer moves in, destroying every tree, and identical, anonymous houses mushroom in its wake.

4) A wave of state conferences on beauty -- 20 at least -- is being organized at the direction of governors or universities. The State of Arkansas has appointed a director for a state-wide beautification program. The State of Arizona held a two-day conference on beautification in August for 1,000 people. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has set up a "Division of Clean-up and Beautification" under its Department of Natural Resources.

5) There is a rising tide of civic interest. Ask any mayor or city manager! I daresay, if he has not already named a civic beautification committee, he is considering it.

6) And now to another front, there are scientists and inventors hard at work to find a better way to rid the landscape of car skeletons with some modern, new, economical way to crush and salvage cars. I am pleased that the salvage industry itself is looking for answers to the problem.

7) More manufacturers are seeking a simple and catching anti-litter message for their products. Besides being unsightly, litter is costly to pick up. Ask any highway department head and he'll tell you the cost with a groan!

There is great opportunity for some technician to develop paper products that will disintegrate in the rain, instead of remaining to clutter up our roadsides.

8) Most heartening to me is the call to youth groups all over this country given by the Girl Scouts of America for a springtime conference on beauty in Washington. It is the youth of this land who will inherit our country and shape tomorrow's landscape. Just one small example -- it is, after all, their sense of taste that will determine whether they thoughtlessly toss the cold drink bottle out of the car window or carefully deposit it in the next container.

Throughout the land there are evidences of a general changing state of mind. There is a new desire and a more discerning eye for beauty.

I know how much more I notice the overturned trash cans at the ranch or the paper plate that was thoughtlessly tossed into the lake.

And with our new interest, we have come to learn; it is far easier to cut down a tree than to grow one. It is far easier to pollute a river than to restore it. It is far easier to devastate a flowering countryside than to make it bloom again.

It is not enough simply to stake out a few splendid areas -- like the Grand Tetons and say: "Here is a place for beauty." Our national parks and forests and wilderness areas are important but not enough. Beauty cannot be set aside for vacations or special occasions. It cannot be the occasional privilege of those who come long distances to visit nature. It cannot be reserved, "For nice neighborhoods ONLY."

I am quite sure that ugliness -- the grey, dreary unchanging world of crowded, deprived neighborhoods -- has contributed to riots, to mental ill-health, to crime.

That is why I am so especially delighted when an imaginative park-playground, balanced for all ages -- such as the one Mrs. Vincent Astor created in crowded Harlem -- is undertaken.

Most of you know the Philadelphia story. The leadership of Mrs. James Bush-Brown changed the character of dozens of city blocks from bleak, demeaning surroundings into an environment bright with color and beauty. Her window-box campaign in slum areas added dimension and dignity to the lives of uncounted hundreds of people.

In Washington, several business firms took on the task of landscaping schools where there had been only a shred of bedraggled grass to break the monotony. One interesting side effect, since the grounds were completed, there has been a dramatic decline in vandalism. Before, broken windows were the weekly occurrence.

But along with progress, we must also be conscious of the pitfalls. One of the greatest dangers is for the energies of local committees to become dissipated by local squabbles. It is sometimes inevitable, and always good newspaper copy, that the cutting of the freeway will have a head-on collision with retaining the recreation area or the historic landmark. If you win the convert or find the ally in City Hall -- who sees the value of that historic landmark, or that stand of cypress trees along the highway -- planning for the future will be easier.

Often there is no perfect solution. The time comes when you must combine the functional with the aesthetic as best you can and move ahead.

Every gardener knows that with much basic planting, if something is to grow in the spring, it has to be planted in the fall. That is one reason I'm so glad you are gathered at this particular time to pool your views. The next two or three fall months are irreplaceable. Let's not lose them!

I know the people of this country will be disappointed -- as I will -- if Congress goes home this year without enacting legislation on highway improvement. I believe they will pass a bill.

Even though we do not get all of the features we want, if we get a measure of them, it will be a step forward.

And I want to express my appreciation, as I know you will, to the members of Congress who have recognized the national responsibility in this field.

We are a very lucky land. We are blessed with a natural majesty and splendor as great as any which has every been home for a civilization. Because we had much, many felt it was inexhaustible. But we know this is no longer true, if, indeed, it ever was.

And let us never forget: Man needs beauty. From it, he draws strength and inspiration and peace of mind, all so essential to his well-being.

Throughout history, beauty has been among the most cherished values of man. It has inspired songwriters and poets for generations, from that grand old hymn, "For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies," down to that much-quoted Ogden Nash verse:

"I think that I shall never see
A billboard lovely as a tree"

Perhaps the chief difficulty in promoting beauty on a national scale comes from the very fact that it is such an intangible quality.

You cannot measure it with a slide rule. It does not fit into the gross national product or tally up as personal income. Yet we know that the loss of beauty diminishes our lives, and its presence enriches us -- as individuals and as a nation.

For the purpose of this great land is not simply to pile up wealth and power. It is -- in the words of our oldest declaration -- to assist in the pursuit of happiness. It is to improve the quality of life for each person -- and, thus, the quality of the men and women which the nation produces. History will judge us not by our abundance or by our mighty arms or our vast influence -- but by our people: Their values, their wisdom, their skill, and their happiness.

In this scale of ultimate judgment, beauty will weigh heavily -- and I see in your faces the determination and strength that we will preserve and enhance it.