

Riverside Park and Others

The Day – July 1, 1903

It is not particularly complimentary to the city of New London that it allows as fine a piece of park property as there is in the state to remain unimproved for years simply because the authorities are afraid to ask for an appropriation sufficiently large to pay the cost of making the park accessible to the people, for whose interest it was presumably purchased. At last the people who live in the upper end of the city have made up their minds that it is folly to wait for the authorities to act and have wisely decided to bring the matter to a focus by presenting a petition that can hardly be ignored.

New London has been singularly backward in making provision for parks. When the chance was given to secure the whole of the Ocean Beach property at a very moderate cost, the city could not see the advantage of the movement. The late Harry J. Savage, when a member of the court of common council, brought the necessity of buying the property to the attention of the city fathers. A committee was appointed to look into the matter, but it was decided unwise to pay \$15,000 for the property. Later when the place has been bought up by the Post Hill Improvement Co. the citizens were willing to pay almost twice as much money for only a small section of the land and the beach, the heart of the property being sold to private individuals. Incidentally the Riverside park property was secured in the same transaction, not because the city particularly wanted it but because it couldn't very well escape buying. The wisdom of purchasing even the remnants of the Ocean beach property is too obvious to need any argument at this late day. It is one of the best investments that the city ever made despite the fact that the possibilities of the beach were so entirely overlooked at the time when an immeasurably better bargain could have been made.

Having purchased the beach property the city has since that time devoted nearly all of the annual appropriation for parks to its improvement. It is a well founded suspicion that the interests of the cottagers have been quite as much the cause of the attention to the beach on the part of the city as the accommodation of the public, but incidentally the public has been benefited so that there is no room for any remonstrance.

The expense of Ocean beach park has made it necessary to ignore the Riverside property entirely except at a time when in a benevolent spirit the brush was cleared up to furnish an excuse for distributing money among the people who were out of work. A vote passed at a city meeting that the park should have attention was simply the waste of so much time and effort. The petition of so many responsible citizens can hardly be so lightly treated and it may be expected that something will be done before long.

Riverside park belongs to the people and no better use can be made of the people's money than to put the property to use for which it was intended. It cannot be converted into cottage sites for the more fortunate citizens who have the money to indulge in such luxuries, but it can be made an outing place for the people to whom the shade of the woods, the magnificent view of the river and the fresh air, will prove a great benefit. Nature has done so much for Riverside park that there is little left for man to do. All that is needed is to make the place accessible and its popularity will at once show the city fathers what else must be done to accommodate the people. Not ever person cares to go to the beach, and with such a property as Riverside park in its possession the city is not doing its duty by the people if it does not utilize it.

One large park is an essential to every city that has any pretensions to being great, and of course everybody who lives in New London is satisfied that the city will in time become one of the foremost in the state. If most cities had that property it would have been utilized years ago, but New London is notably backward in such matters as has already been pointed out.

A movement in the right direction has been made. Men of standing in the community have been started right by petitioning, and if that petition is ignored there are other ways by which the people can force their claims on the attention of the men who are supposed to serve the public interest. The sooner the park is opened up the better. The first step will be followed by others and there is no reason why Riverside park should not become as much of a source of pride to New Londoners as Roger Williams' park is to dwellers in Providence, or Forest park is to the people of Springfield.