

Shade Trees

The following is an excerpt from *History of Portland*, By William Willis written in 1864.

Pages 728 and 729

In 1835 a period of extraordinary prosperity through the whole country, caused by the inflation of currency, and successful speculations stimulated by it, in which Portland was a large participant, a plan was proposed to the city government by certain enterprising and successful persons to construct spacious and ornamental highways around the hills at the extremities of the town. The proposal was received with general approbation, and the work entered upon with spirit under the administration of Levi Cutter as Mayor. These avenues were laid out, and grading commenced in 1836; the one on Munjoy's hill began at the eastern end of Fore street and extending around the hill a little easterly of the crest, six thousand sixty-four feet to Washington street, and is at first five rods wide, widening to nine rods, and called "Eastern Promenade." The other is on the brow of Bramhall's hill, a broad way from Arsenal street to Danforth street, three thousand seven hundred feet in length. They are both ornamented with trees, and afford varied and beautiful prospects, embracing the ocean, Casco Bay, and its islands, the White Mountains, and the range of elevated land from those lofty summits to Agamenticus hills by the ocean in York; while beneath the eye are charming landscapes of hill and plain and river, all forming a rare combination of scenery rarely to be found in any country.

In looking down from Munjoy's hill upon the central parts of the city, a stranger is surprised by the embowered aspect which is presented to his view—a city in the woods. The tall and numerous trees overshadow the buildings, which seem to be nestling in the midst of a forest, through which the lofty spires, the dome of the new City Hall, and some other lofty edifices penetrate and give bold relief to the scene. A gentleman curious in such matters, Capt. George H. Preble, in 1854, undertook to count the trees in the streets, and I give the result in this own language. "Our city contains about one hundred and thirty-four streets and lanes, and in our perambulations we have visited them all. Of this number seventy-two are adorned by shade trees, while sixty-two are without them. These later however are mostly lanes and courts. All of our principal streets have more or less trees upon them. Some of them, such as State, Danforth, and Cumberland, are beautifully embowered by them. The whole number in our streets is thirty-three hundred, distributed thus: Congress, three hundred and one; State, two hundred and forty-four; Danforth, two hundred and forty-four; Spring, two hundred and eight; Cumberland, one hundred and seventy-seven; Free, one hundred; Federal, ninety four; High, ninety-two, and others in less number. In the next ten years since that day, they have largely increased, for the fashion is so fixed, that no person builds a house on a respectable street but his first object is to plant trees about it. The principal varieties are elm, horsechestnut, and maple. The grove of oaks on Deering estate, between Portland street and Wier Creek, is a special beauty. Through the whole period of our history, Portland properly has been called the 'Forest City,' as New Haven is known as the 'City of Elms.'"