

Riverfront, et al.

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# Splendor In The Trees

Edwin Clume

A VISITOR from Texas stood at a window high in a downtown office building recently and remarked, "Look at all those trees. I've never seen anything like it."

Of all the things Memphians take for granted, the city's arboreal splendor is probably among the most striking cases.

So it was with the Mississippi River, until downtown decay and the resulting loss



of tax revenues bestirred Memphians to begin taking advantage of the city's No. 1 asset. Now Volunteer Park is nearing reality. And someday the bluffs may come alive with the kind of commercial and residential development that can make downtown the urban jewel it should be.

The city's pristine water — so pure it can be drunk straight from the ground — was another example, until the incidents at Toone and around the Hollywood dump brought painfully home the growing national awareness of how vulnerable natural resources are to the neglect and pollution of man.

And so was the unique potential of the penal farm property, until plans to build a model city there made Memphians cry out, "Wait. This is a legacy for the future. It must be preserved for public use."

Occasionally Memphians are reminded of how much trees add to the quality of the city's life. Some years ago, for instance, there was a heated dispute about trees being cut down on North Parkway as a safety measure. A few residents even stood in the path of city workers.

Today other residents, on a block of Idlewild between Union and Linden, are freshly concerned about the fate of their own trees after a crew working for Memphis

Light, Gas & Water Division sliced away the street-side limbs of two big oaks to keep power lines clear.

"They were mutilating them," John Baker of 199 South Idlewild complained. His concern reminds the rest of us of a bounty we may regard too lightly.

MEMPHIS HAS BEEN luckier than many cities where diseases such as Dutch elm or high-density construction rent and tore down their green canopies. Midtown, especially, has been blessed by the arching grandeur of oaks, elms and sycamores, by the cool luxuriance of magnolias, by the grace and color of dogwoods and crape myrtles. The trees shade fine, old houses of a kind that will never be built again. They shelter memories and musings. They make good neighbors.

From a perch over downtown, it's possible to imagine a different land beneath the trees, where out of sight a people of industry and talent and warm affections lives in prosperous harmony. That, of course, is what all Memphians want their future and the city's future to be like.

Dreams flourish in the shade of trees. And Memphis is a tree town. It should continue to be despite our embrace of less agreeable necessities.

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