The Right Development of Mount Desert

Eliot Charles William
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Author: Eliot Charles William

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THE
RIGHT DEVELOPMENT OF
MOUNT DESERT

BY
CHARLES W. ELIOT

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The summer resort to Mount Desert is chiefly due to four things: the cool and equable climate, the beautiful conformation of the island itself, the availability for sailing and fishing of the waters which surround it, and the roughness and wildness of its hills and shores. The island is by far the handsomest piece of land on the Atlantic coast of the United States, its hills being the highest on the whole coast, and its valleys being cut low between the hills. The greater part of the island has never been inhabited or cultivated; so that the hills remain rough and wild, and are wooded wherever the characteristic spruces, alders, birches, maples, and mountain ashes can find soil for their roots. The population clings to the shores, and to some of the lower hillsides which, when cleared, afford fields capable of bearing grass and other crops.

The support of the permanent population is now derived almost exclusively from the summer residents; and this support is a much better one than the people of the island enjoyed
before the advent of these seekers for health and recreation. One has only to compare the houses in which the permanent residents on the island now live with those they occupied twenty-five years ago to be convinced that the present condition of the population is decidedly superior to its former condition. Similar improvement appears in the roads and schools of the island, and in the churches.

Is this new prosperity to be maintained and increased? To answer this question one needs to understand thoroughly the sources of the prosperity. With the exception of the granite industry, which fluctuates much but is unchanged in character, the former industries of the island have for the most part been replaced by industries which relate to the wants of the summer population. A clear comprehension of the wants and wishes of the summer residents will lead to a satisfactory answer to the question before us.

(1). The summer residents want houses and hotels; and the building, altering, and repairing of these structures occupy a considerable number of mechanics the year round.

(2). They want good roads and a variety of loop drives. The summer residents are therefore interested in the appropriations annually made by the three towns of the island for roads and bridges, and in the manner in which these appropriations are expended. They do not want
wide roads, such as cities and the suburbs of cities are forced to maintain; but they do desire roads with moderate grades and smooth surfaces. A width of eighteen feet is ample, except in the villages. The habits of the Mount Desert road-makers were formed when the roads had to be made and repaired at the least possible cost. The spare stones, which were many, were thrown out upon the roadside, where they defaced and made barren what ought to have been the green borders of the road. The bridges were never thought of as possible objects of beauty, the only question being how the brook or gully could be spanned in the cheapest manner. When a bank beside the highway afforded some dirt comparatively free from stones, it was dug into in the most expeditious way, and left so steep that it could not clothe itself again with green. The roadsides, therefore, frequently exhibit ugly scars. The grades and surfaces of the roads have been greatly improved during the last twenty years; but as yet little attention is paid to the beauty of the roadsides. During the past winter and spring fifteen miles of road were defaced with rows of hideous poles carrying wires; and to accommodate these wires the trees bordering the road were cut away in many places to a width of from fifteen to twenty feet. This injury to the island was done without notice to any of the summer residents whose places were on or
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near the roads defaced. To gratify the desire for good roads and pretty roadsides involves a large annual expenditure; so that the maintenance and progressive improvement of the roads of the island will always afford a considerable amount of employment for men and teams.

The summer visitors want good roads because they desire to drive all about the island. This desire gives employment to a large number of men, horses, and vehicles, and to blacksmiths and repairers of vehicles and harnesses. Here, again, the permanent population has very legitimate and profitable employments; for the drives of the island are numerous and beautiful, affording real delight to people who are forced to live in cities or their suburbs the greater part of the year, by the great contrast of the island scenery with city scenes. To protect and increase these employments it should be the constant endeavor of the three towns of the island—first, to improve the lay-out of the roads and their surfaces; secondly, to build new roads; thirdly, to preserve the beauty of the roadsides and bordering woods; and, fourthly, to exclude electric cars and automobiles from the highways, because these vehicles imply broad roads, noise, and city-like commotion. When a new road is made, it should be carried where it will afford beautiful prospects over the sea, a pond, the walls of a gorge, or a large
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forest area. It would be a legitimate expense for all three of the island towns to undertake the watering of the public highways. Bar Harbor already waters its streets. Nothing would promote driving so much as keeping down the dust; and moreover a road made of mixed stone and gravel keeps its surface much better if it is watered during the hot and windy weather. Indeed the best macadamized road cannot be kept in good condition unless it be watered. The more frequented a road is, the more it needs watering to keep its surface good.

(3). The summer residents want fresh milk, eggs, chickens, and vegetables raised on the island, and fresh clams, scallops, lobsters, and fish drawn from its waters. The island traffic in these articles has been steadily increasing, and now furnishes good means of support for numerous families among the permanent residents. There is no more legitimate source of profit for them; inasmuch as these articles raised on the island, or taken from its waters, are much better than the same articles brought from far by railroad or steamboat. Moreover, the industries which supply this demand require intelligence and skill, and are on that account useful to the island population.

(4). A considerable proportion of the summer visitors want to go sailing, and to make excursions on the water in launches or sailboats; and
these desires are the foundation of an excellent industry for the permanent population. The sailboats used in summer for this purpose can be used in the fall and spring for lobstering or fishing. It is a part of this industry to provide and maintain convenient landings at numerous points in the harbors of the island.

(5). The advent of thousands of summer visitors gives profitable employment to many women who do laundry work; and this is a desirable source of profit because it is a household industry.

(6). Shop-keeping gives a summer profit to some of the permanent residents, the number of shops, or stores, for the sale of provisions, dry goods, hardware, groceries, and shoes far exceeding the needs of the winter population. The storage and delivery of coal, wood, and ice, and the raising of trees, shrubs, and flowers for sale are also sources of profitable employment.

(7). Lastly, the hotels and boarding-houses of the island give employment to a large number of young people, both male and female, during twelve or thirteen weeks of the summer.

To ask how Mount Desert is to be developed as a pleasure and health resort is equivalent to asking how these various profitable employments on the island are to be maintained and increased. To this end what sort of summer visitors is most desirable? Is a cottage population more desirable than a hotel and boarding-
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house population; and, if the cottage population is the more desirable, are very rich cottagers the most valuable, or is a mixture of the rich with professional people and other people of moderate means more likely to promote the interests of the permanent population? Or would throngs of excursionists be more valuable than either cottagers or boarders by the week at hotels? The last question may be confidently answered in the negative; because there are no large cities near Mount Desert to afford an adequate daily supply of excursionists. To support a Coney Island a Brooklyn is necessary, and a Metropolitan Boston for a Revere Beach. There are no signs that any dense population is to live within two hours' ride of Mount Desert. It is easy, with or without deliberate design, to change the nature of the resort to any region by the sea or in the mountains, or to any place possessing valuable springs of water for bathing or drinking. For example, the resort to Saratoga, Newport, and Bar Harbor has changed in a very noticeable manner within the last twenty years. All three of these places serve to-day different classes of persons from those who formerly resorted to them. There are several places within sight of Mount Desert, and enjoying the same climate, which testify that it is hard to establish a successful summer resort, and easy to impair or degrade one already established.