

NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
FOR  
RESTRICTION OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

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PROGRESS IN 1925



*Copr. Life Pub. Co.*

*Courtesy of LIFE*

IF YOU WISH TO ENJOY AMERICAN SCENERY GO PREPARED

## PROGRESS in 1925

Every rural billboard carries one message. No matter what the design or the coloring, or whether it refers ostensibly to chewing-gum or school-girl complexions, the message is the same — America the Ugly. We are awakening at last to the fact that we cannot save the beauty of our landscapes and at the same time use them as a background for advertising. We must make our choice between Beauty and the Billboard.

Many organizations have long striven to bring this truth home to the public. Two years ago, December 1923, the National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising was created to co-ordinate these efforts, to act as a clearing house for organizations interested in this problem, and to initiate certain new methods in the campaign.

### *Policy*

The National Committee announced its policy as one of Restriction rather than Abolition. "We urge the restriction of all outdoor advertising to commercial districts where it will not injure scenery, civic beauty or residential values."

### *Method*

The Committee also announced its method of direct approach to the advertiser, "believing that the national advertisers will be quick to respond to public opinion if expressed with sufficient strength and in the right spirit." All organizations accepting this policy and method were and are invited to cooperate.

### *Results*

Today over 100 organizations, many of them national, are on the list. Our state leaders in 39 states are actively campaigning through the agency of hundreds of committees.

A great power of public opinion has been developed throughout the country. It has been expressed in thousands of letters to the advertisers and in hundreds of articles in the press and magazines.

Twenty-nine national advertisers have endorsed the restriction policy and have promised to confine their billboards to commercial districts as rapidly as present contracts expire. Many other advertisers, although not committed in writing, are giving up the use of rural boards. Very few new boards are going up in rural districts and a noticeable number of the old boards are disappearing or standing idle.

Many states are seeking to regulate the nuisance by law. Even the signboard companies themselves are feeling the pressure of public opinion and are promising to show in the future a greater regard for the landscape.



## ANTI-BILLBOARD AGITATION IN MANY STATES

### *California*

The Standard Oil Company of California last year, on its own initiative, removed nearly 1200 large billboards from the highways of five western states. The directors of the company announced: "This company feels that the splendid scenery so characteristic of nearly all of the highways of California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Arizona should be unmarred, and on that account is willing to sacrifice the advertising value of the signs."

### *Connecticut*

Having for some time prohibited signs from the right-of-way, Connecticut has now passed a law taxing the boards on private property 3c per square foot per year (Pub. Acts 1925, Ch. 148). Connecticut's new zoning law (Pub. Acts 1925, Ch. 242) probably permits their banishment from residential districts, and regulation otherwise.

### *Florida*

A State Highway Beautification Commission:—

In Florida the State Chamber of Commerce has created a State Highway Beautification Commission, and thirty-five cities and counties have cooperating commissions for the sole purpose of beautifying the highways. Thousands of signs have been removed from the highways themselves, and a vigorous fight is on against the signs standing on private land. Florida's slogan is "Swat the Sign and Save the Scenery".

Daytona Beach Incident:—

The Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce recently announced a plan for 1000 highway billboards in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. Word came to the National Committee and was passed on to our state leaders. At once letters of protest poured in from organizations and individuals all over the United States. The plan was given up and the Daytona Beach advertising will be confined to more popular media.

### *Georgia*

The city of Atlanta proposed to erect large billboards for many miles on all roads leading into Atlanta. Protests from all over the country assured Atlanta that such advertising would ruin one of her greatest assets — natural beauty, and would arouse more ill-will than good-will. Atlanta promptly decided to use only mile-posts, signs measured in inches instead of feet.

### *Hawaii*

The Outdoor Circle of Honolulu, with the cooperation of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, the Hawaiian Tourist Bureau and others,

has waged a long fight to eliminate billboards entirely from the Hawaiian Islands. "Situated as we are — a tiny Paradise in the Pacific — we believe that we are justified in working for entire freedom from billboards in these islands." Certain chewing-gum and tobacco companies are the only national advertisers that have refused to heed public opinion in Honolulu. Billboards are now confined to commercial locations, and the company controlling the boards has offered to restrict them to their present locations and number, if the anti-billboard organizations will retreat from their stand for complete elimination.

### *Maine*

The Honorable Ralph O. Brewster, Governor of Maine, recently called upon the people of his state to save the beauty of the highways as a great commercial asset. In response to this call the Benoit Company of Portland removed over 400 billboards from the highways of New England. "The beauty of Maine's highways," the Benoit Company states, "will not be handicapped in the future by signboards belonging to this concern. Our purpose is to do our bit in beautifying Maine, and to be the forerunners in a movement which, if universally adopted, will greatly benefit the state."

### *Massachusetts*

Massachusetts has led the country in the fight for regulation of billboards. Realizing that any law regulating the boards on purely esthetic grounds ran the danger of being declared unconstitutional, Massachusetts in 1918 adopted, by a large majority, an amendment to the state constitution giving the state the right to regulate and restrict "all advertising within public view". Under this amendment Massachusetts has developed laws for reasonable restriction. These laws are now under fire in the courts, the Organized Outdoor Advertising companies having refused to obey them on the professed ground that they are not constitutional. The fight will probably be carried to the Supreme Court of the United States, and if the Massachusetts amendment and regulations are sustained, it will be a long step forward in the struggle to conserve the scenic beauty of our land from the depredations of private greed.

### *New Jersey*

In certain New Jersey counties the county assessors are now directed to tax the billboards, adding from \$200 to \$300 for each 200 square feet of board to the taxable property of the company owning the board.

Atlantic City club women are organizing a drive for legislation to protect the beauty of the shore roads.

### *New York*

The Adirondack Park Law:—

Through the cooperation of the National Committee and many organizations in New York State, a law was passed in 1924 (L. 1924, Chap.



512, adding §61-a to the Conservation Law of New York) prohibiting signboards within the Adirondack Park (excepting signs on the place of business or within village limits) except upon permit from the Conservation Commission. The statute recites that it is passed "in order to conserve the natural beauty of the park" (which includes both public and private lands) and "to abate the public nuisance which has arisen through the unrestricted use of signs and billboards therein". Under this law the Conservation Commission of the state has removed nearly 2000 billboards. Advertisers are now fighting to prove this law unconstitutional.

#### The Lake George Highway:—

Through the cooperation of the civic organizations and merchants of Glens Falls, the signboard companies, and this committee, the scenic highway running from Glens Falls to Lake George has been largely cleared of billboards and thus restored to its natural beauty. Seventy billboards have been removed from private property bordering on this famous road. It was the unusual efforts for removal concentrated on this highway which started the present movement against the rural boards.

#### *Texas*

Many civic bodies cooperating with the organization of The Old Spanish Trail have cleared thousands of billboards from the trail and have beautified many miles of highway with trees and shrubs.

#### *Wisconsin-Maine-Minnesota-Tennessee*

—have all recently passed laws prohibiting all signs on the right-of-way, and thousands of billboards have been removed from their highways.

These items are but a few straws gathered from various parts of the country; but they are sufficient to show which way the wind now blows.

#### *Attitude of the Signboard Companies*

The past ten years have seen great improvement in the billboard industry. The boards are better built; the copy is better designed and more carefully censored. But this is not enough. The time has come for an equal improvement in location.

That the signboard companies themselves begin to realize this is evidenced in their recently adopted Standards of Practice which state that they will hereafter erect no boards in residence districts, no boards adjacent to parks surrounded by residences, and no boards which "mar or impair the scenery". If this program is carried out *with the Public as Judges*, there will be great improvement in the future.

The Organized industry also agrees to remove all poster panels from rural highways within five years. If these panels are not re-located at the entrances to the cities and villages, this also will be a great improvement.

Unfortunately this ruling does not include the *painted* billboards, but applies to *posters* only. The Industry still considers the highways as legitimate ground for advertising purposes, and apparently intends to erect painted boards along the rural highways so long as the advertisers will use them.

### *Organized Outdoor Advertising Opposes Legislation*

In view of the respect for public opinion and for scenic beauty which the Outdoor Advertising Industry professes in its new Standards of Practice, there is an apparent inconsistency in its present stand against restriction by legislation. The Organized Industry favors legal restraint of unorganized boards, but opposes all laws which restrict its own boards. For itself it demands "Self Regulation".

Consequently, while boasting that it will no longer "mar or impair scenery", it today opposes the Adirondack Park law, designed to protect the beauty of a great recreational playground, and is actively fighting the Massachusetts regulations which seek only a reasonable restriction as to size of the boards and distance from the highway.

### *Self Regulation a Myth*

The public realizes that Self Regulation has never protected us from the atrocities of the billboard and never will. Even if the Organized Outdoor Advertising Industry should, on some millennial day, entirely repent of its sins along the highway, the unorganized industry would still flourish and could be controlled only by law.

### *Regulating Billboards is Really Regulating Public Thoroughfares.*

Laws prohibiting signs within the highway limits are not sufficient. Billboards are agile fence-jumpers and ruin the scenery when they stand on the farmer's side of the fence just as fatally as when they stand on the state-owned right-of-way.

The fact that the boards stand on private property for which the billboard companies pay a small rental does not give these companies a right to destroy the great health-restoring, character-building power of the beauty of our land. The boards derive their value entirely from the highway. For this value the billboard companies do not pay. On the contrary, the billboard companies are robbing the public, the owners of the highway, of one of its greatest assets. *Regulating billboards is really regulating highways and the proper use thereof.*

To quote Justice Trent of the Supreme Court of the Philippines (Churchill v. Rafferty, Collector, 32 Philippine Rep., 580): "Ostensibly located on private property, the real and sole value of the billboard is its proximity to the public thoroughfare. Hence we conceive that the regulation of billboards and their restriction is not so much a regulation of the



use of private property as it is a regulation of the use of the streets and other public thoroughfares."

### *The Next Step*

If control of outdoor advertising cannot be obtained in any other way, this committee strongly urges each state to follow the example of Massachusetts and secure an amendment to the state constitution granting the right to regulate and restrict advertising within public view. We believe the day is coming and not far distant when the courts in the United States will recognize the natural beauty of the land as one of its greatest resources, a part of the patrimony of the people, to be protected by law for the benefit of the entire nation. But if the courts of any state, by their decisions, paralyze the legislative arm when raised to protect this common heritage, resort to constitutional amendment should follow.

### *Program for 1926.*

New doors are constantly opening for the spread of this committee's work. We mention but a few of the items set down for the new year:

1. The wide circulation of this report.
2. The circulation of an illustrated eight page pamphlet entitled "What Attracts the Tourist to Your Town?" and emphasizing the value of a beautiful approach, the artistic town marker, the attractive hotel sign, the most effective town advertising, etc.
3. The circulation of information concerning the laws of the states, the ordinances of municipalities, etc. We have many calls for this information.
4. Keeping up with litigation involving billboard regulations, and assisting the prosecutors of violators with information, suggestions, precedents, etc. Also participation in the framing of measures to curb the abuses of outdoor advertising.
5. The wider diffusion of a sound public opinion concerning such abuses, through publicity, education, etc. This forms a large part of our work. It includes the publication of articles, the presentation of lectures all over the country, the organized expression of public opinion through our cooperating organizations, etc. All this involves a heavy correspondence which is constantly increasing.
6. Suggestions for work to our cooperating organizations. We carry on a large and burdensome correspondence with them.

The extent of our work is limited by lack of funds. Our workers give their services. But we have substantial expenses for printing, stenographic and clerical service, office rent, postage, traveling, and the like. Our only source of income is our friends who believe in the work. Do you approve of our purpose and work? Do you wish us to push on? Will you open the way for further success by giving us financial support? Gifts of \$5 and \$10 are welcome. Of course, gifts of \$25, \$50 and \$100 help just that much more.

Checks should be made payable to HAROLD A. CAPARN, Treasurer, and mailed to —

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RESTRICTION  
OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING,

119 East 19th Street, New York City.



*We urge the restriction of all outdoor advertising to commercial districts where it will not injure scenery, civic beauty or residential values*

## National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising

119 EAST 19TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MRS. W. L. LAWTON, Chairman  
MRS. C. OLIVER ISELIN, Secretary

HAROLD A. CAPARN, Treasurer  
ALBERT S. BARD, Counsel

### CO-OPERATING ORGANIZATIONS

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|--|--|
| American Civic Association                                     | Florida Development Board (State Chamber of Commerce)      |
| American Federation of Arts                                    | Maine Automobile Association                               |
| American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society              | Massachusetts Civic League                                 |
| American Society of Landscape Architects                       | New Jersey Home Bureau                                     |
| Garden Club of America   | New York State Association of Real Estate Boards           |
| General Federation of Women's Clubs                            | New York State Automobile Assn.                            |
| National Academy of Design                                     | New York State Forestry Association.                       |
| National Conference of State Parks                             | New York State Home Bureau                                 |
| National Garden Association                                    | New York State League of Women Voters                      |
| National Highways Association                                  | Society of Farm Women of Pennsylvania                      |
| National Society Women Painters & Sculptors                    | South Carolina Good Roads Association                      |
| Society of Little Gardens                                      |  |
| Women's National Farm and Garden Association                   |  |
| Adirondack Mountain Club                                       | Charleston Board of Trade                                  |
| Federated Garden Clubs of New York State                       | Charleston Junior Board of Trade                           |
| Federated Women's Clubs of                                     | Citizens Union of New York City                            |
| Alabama  | City Club of New York                                      |
| Arkansas   | Committee on Regional Plan of N. Y.                        |
| California   | Community Arts Association of Santa Barbara, Cal.          |
| Colorado   | Conservation Council of Chicago                            |
| Connecticut  | Fine Arts Federation of N. Y.                              |
| Delaware   | Halifax Country Garden Club (Fla.)                         |
| Florida  | Lake Placid Club   |
| Idaho  | Lake Placid Educational Foundation                         |
| Illinois   | League to Protect Riverside Park                           |
| Indiana  | Long Island Federation of Women's Clubs                    |
| Iowa   | Municipal Art League of Chicago                            |
| Kansas   | Municipal Art Society of New York                          |
| Kentucky   | Nacoochee - Hiwassee Road and Recreation Association (Ga.) |
| Maine  | New York Water Color Club                                  |
| Maryland   | Old Spanish Trail  |
| Massachusetts  | Outdoor Circle of Honolulu                                 |
| Michigan   | Philadelphia Congress of Art (50 organizations)            |
| Minnesota  | Sorosis  |
| Mississippi  | Women's League, York, Maine                                |
| Montana  | Women's City Club of New York                              |
| Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Maine |  |