

1948

## American Magazine "Is Your Town Fit to Live In?" Speech

Louis-Phillippe Gagné

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LEWISTON RECEIVED A NASTY POKE IN THE NOSE IN THE JULY ISSUE OF THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE.

IT IS NOT A KNOCK-OUT PUNCH BUT ONE OF THOSE FAST, HARD LEFT JABS TO THE FACE THAT MAKES A FIGHTER WANT TO FIGHT BACK - AND DEFEND HIMSELF.

ON THIS BEAUTIFUL JULY DAY WITH BLUE SKIES, AND A REFRESHING NORTHWEST BREEZE LEWISTON, MAINE, SEEMS TO BE A PRETTY GOOD PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE.

HOWEVER, AN ARTICLE IN THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE FOR JULY REFERS TO LEWISTON AS "CLOSE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST OF CITIES IN WHICH TO LIVE IN THE COUNTRY". THE ARTICLE IS ENTITLED "IS YOUR TOWN FIT TO LIVE IN". IT IS A PRETTY GOOD ARTICLE. IF THE AUTHOR, GUY GREER, HAD OMITTED THE INSULT TO LEWISTON, WE IN LEWISTON WOULD PROBABLY NOT PAY ANY ATTENTION TO THE ARTICLE. IT MAY BE THAT IT IS JUST THE PUNCH IN THE NOSE THAT LEWISTON NEEDS TO MAKE ITSELF GET BUSY AND DO SOME OF THE THINGS IT HAS BEEN NEGLECTING. IN HIS AMERICAN MAGAZINE ARTICLE THE AUTHOR OPENS WITH THIS PARAGRAPH: "DID YOU EVER STAND OFF ON A HILL AND TAKE A GOOD, HARD LOOK AT YOUR HOME TOWN? OR LOOK DOWN ON IT FROM AN AIRPLANE? IS IT A PLEASANT, CLEAN-CUT, COMFORTABLE PLACE TO LIVE, A NICE, SAFE PLACE TO RAISE KIDS? OR IS IT A DINGY, CONGESTED, DOWN-AT-THE-HEEL SORT OF PLACE THAT KEEPS YOU IN AN IRRITABLE MOOD? YOUR PERSONAL STAKE IN YOUR HOME TOWN IS PROBABLY MUCH GREATER THAN YOU EVER REALIZED."

THEN CITY PLANNER GREER SUGGESTS THAT YOU COMPARE YOUR CITY WITH OTHER CITIES IN THE MATTER OF TRAFFIC CONGESTION, CLEANLINESS, SLUMS, HEALTH, SAFETY, RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES. WE, AS CITIZENS OF LEWISTON, PROBABLY OUGHT TO DO MORE THINKING ABOUT THESE MATTERS THAN WE DO.

IN ONE PART OF THE ARTICLE CITY PLANNER GREER TELLS WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN SUCH CITIES AS DETROIT AND PITTSBURGH TO GET RID OF THE SOOT AND SMOKE NUISANCE. THE AUTHOR MAY HAVE BEEN THINKING OF THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER WHEN HE WROTE THE FOLLOWING: "THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR EITHER THE SMOKE OR THE SMELLS. BOTH COULD BE PREVENTED IF THE



INDUSTRIAL PLANTS WERE CONSIDERATE OF NEAR-BY RESIDENTS".

ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLE AS A WHOLE IS CONSTRUCTIVE IT IS DESTRUCTIVE, INSULTING AND UNFAIR IN ITS REFERENCE TO THE CITY OF LEWISTON.

THE REFERENCE ISN'T THE RESULT OF THE AUTHOR'S OWN STUDY, BUT AS A QUOTE FROM WHAT HE SAYS WAS AN EXTENSIVE SURVEY OF THE LARGER UNITED STATES TOWNS AND CITIES MADE BY DR. E. L. THORNDIKE AND HIS STAFF AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. HE SAID DR. THORNDIKE IN HIS STUDY SOUGHT TO FIND "WHERE THE GOODNESS OF LIFE WAS GREATEST".

DR. THORNDIKE AND HIS STAFF MEASURED 310 TOWNS. HE PUT PASADENA, CALIFORNIA, AT THE TOP OF THE LIST AND HE PUT LEWISTON, MAINE CLOSE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST WITH CHARLESTON, S. C.; HIGH POINT AND DURHAM, N. C.; SAVANAH AND COLUMBUS, GA.; JACKSON AND MERIDIAN, MISS.; AND WOONSOCKET, R. I.

MR. GREER ADMITS THAT THE THORNDIKE "SURVEY WAS MADE SEVERAL YEARS AGO AND THAT THE SITUATION IN SOME OF THE TOWNS MIGHT BE SOMEWHAT BETTER OR WORSE TODAY."

LET'S LOOK AT THE REASONS DR. THORNDIKE GAVE FOR PLACING THESE TOWNS, INCLUDING LEWISTON, AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST.

THESE TOWNS WERE PLACED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST, GREER SAID, LARGELY BECAUSE OF THEIR POOR RATING IN SUCH MATTERS AS SCHOOLS, PARKS, SANITATION, LITERACY, HOME OWNERSHIP, CRIME, TRAFFIC CONDITIONS AND HOSPITALS.

LET'S CONSIDER THESE BRIEFLY AS THEY WERE LISTED. IN LEWISTON WE HAVE PUBLIC AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN STUDYING NATIONAL STATISTICS THEY DID NOT TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION OUR PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS. THE STANDARDS OF OUR LOCAL SCHOOLS ARE HIGH. OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS ARE SOMEWHAT NEGLECTED. OUR HIGH SCHOOL IS NEGLECTED. IT NEEDS PAINTING INSIDE. THE OUTSIDE BRICKS AND CEMENT TRIMMING NEED REPAIRING. IT IS COSTLY TO THE CITY OF LEWISTON TO NEGLECT THE CARE AND UPKEEP OF ITS PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS, AND IT IS A POOR ADVERTISEMENT. THE HIGH SCHOOL LACKS A GYMNASIUM AND AN



AUDITORIUM. TEMPORARILY IT IS WITHOUT AN ATHLETIC PART, BUT THAT SITUATION IS BEING CORRECTED.

LEWISTON SCHOOLS ARE NOT NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST IN THE NATION. ANY SUCH STATEMENT BY DR. THORNDIKE OR MR. GREER IS UNTRUE.

WE HAVE PARKS. THEY, TOO, ARE SOMEWHAT NEGLECTED. THEY ARE NOT USED BY THE PUBLIC AS THEY MIGHT BE, AND ARE USED IN OTHER CITIES. LEWISTON WOULD RANK LOW IN ITS PARK SYSTEM COMPARED WITH MODERN CITIES.

SANITATION. LEWISTON HAS AN EXCELLENT SEWER SYSTEM, GARBAGE AND WASTE COLLECTION, AND AN EFFICIENT HEALTH DEPARTMENT. IT IS HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY LEWISTON SHOULD RANK LOW IN THIS CLASSIFICATION. ITS WATER SUPPLY IS TOPS.

LITERACY. IT IS TRUE THAT LEWISTON HAS A LARGE PROPORTION OF ITS PEOPLE WHO ARE FRENCH, BUT A GREAT MAJORITY OF THEM CAN READ AND WRITE BOTH FRENCH AND ENGLISH. LEWISTON DOES NOT DESERVE SUCH A LOW RATING ON LITERACY.

HOME OWNERSHIP. LEWISTON HAS A THRIFTY CITIZENSHIP, AND THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WORKING AND SAVING TO PAY FOR THEIR OWN HOMES. MANY WORKERS IN OUR SHOPS ARE OWNERS OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS. WHEN YOU THINK OF HOME OWNERSHIP IN LEWISTON, YOU MUST THINK OF AUBURN ALSO BECAUSE AFTER ALL LEWISTON AND AUBURN MAKE ONE COMMUNITY AND THE HOME OWNERSHIP IN THESE TWO CITIES DOES NOT RATE LAST PLACE.

CRIME. LEWISTON IS FREE FROM MAJOR CRIMES. WE HAVE SOME PETTY CRIMES, BUT WHAT BETTER PROOF COULD WE HAVE THAT LEWISTON IS MADE UP OF LAW ABIDING CITIZENS THAN THE VOLUNTARY OBSERVANCE GIVEN TO THE BAN ON THE SALE AND USE OF FIREWORKS OVER THE LAST WEEK-  
END. LEWISTON DOES NOT RANK AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST IN CRIME.

TRAFFIC CONDITIONS. THE EASE WITH WHICH WE GET TO AND FROM OUR WORK ISN'T APPRECIATED. WE CAN GO TO THE MORE CONGESTED AREAS OF OTHER CITIES AND SIT IN TAXI CABS AND BUSSES ANYWHERE FROM FIFTEEN MINUTES TO AN HOUR WAITING FOR TRAFFIC CONGESTION TO



TO CLEAR. DURING BUSY HOURS WE MAY WAIT A FEW MINUTES TO CROSS THE NORTH BRIDGE, BUT WITH THE NEW HIGHWAY AND TRAFFIC LIGHTS WE SUFFER VERY LITTLE INCONVENIENCE.

HOSPITALS. FINALLY, HOSPITALS ARE IN THE LIST. WE HAVE IN LEWISTON TWO HOSPITALS - THE ST. MARY'S GENERAL HOSPITAL AND THE CENTRAL MAINE GENERAL HOSPITAL. EACH ONE OF THESE HOSPITALS FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS HAS CARRIED A CLASS "A" RATING BY THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, AND THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION. A CLASS "A" RATING BY THESE TWO ORGANIZATIONS IS THE HIGHEST RATING THAT ANY HOSPITAL CAN CARRY. THAT PUTS LEWISTON AT THE TOP OF THE LIST IN HOSPITALS, AND NOT AT THE BOTTOM.

WE WHO HAVE LIVED IN LEWISTON ALL OUR LIVES RESENT THIS INSULT, BUT WE KNOW THAT THE SURVEY MUST BE FOUNDED ON MISINFORMATION.

WE MAY BE DIVIDED ON SOME LOCAL QUESTIONS, BUT WHEN AN OUTSIDER ATTACKS THE FAIR NAME OF OUR CITY IN THIS WAY WE ALL JUMP TO ITS DEFENSE. WOULDN'T IT BE FINE IF WE DIDN'T THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT DEFENDING OURSELVES, BUT GAVE MORE TIME TO IMPROVING OURSELVES? LEWISTON IS NOT ONE OF THE WORST CITIES IN THE COUNTRY. I HAVE LIVED HERE ALL MY LIFE AND I THINK IT IS ONE OF THE BEST. I SPENT A WEEK IN PHILADELPHIA AND WASHINGTON DURING THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION AND I WOULDN'T THINK OF SWAPPING LEWISTON FOR EITHER ONE OF THOSE PLACES IF I HAD TO LIVE THERE. I SAW SOME SLIMS IN BOTH CITIES MUCH WORSE THAN ANYTHING WE HAVE IN LEWISTON. ON THE OTHER HAND I HAVE SEEN MANY CITIES NO LARGER THAN LEWISTON WITH BEAUTIFUL PLAYGROUNDS, SWIMMING POOLS, FULL TIME RECREATION DIRECTORS AND CLEAN PARKS WITH GRASS NEATLY MOWED AND SHRUBS TRIMMED. WHILE WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT DEFENDING LEWISTON, WHY WOULDN'T IT BE A GOOD TIME TO GO AHEAD WITH SOME IMPROVEMENTS THAT WE ALL KNOW WE NEED?