

2009 Sep 02 Alamosa Trees

by Marilyn Loser

Alamosa Trees: We HAD a City Forester

The year was 1938, Alamosa was 60 years old. The Rialto featured “Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm” with Shirley Temple, Adams State Teachers’ College began the north wing of what is (now) Richardson Hall, and the “Alamosa High School News Reel” reported that the Pep Club sold and delivered more than 225 tree seedlings to citizens. And Alamosa had a City Forester.

There were concerns back then that the removal of older trees would leave a “sun-backed city with no trees (Alamosa Daily Courier editorial, March 12, 1938).” The editorial continues:

“It has been necessary to sacrifice some of the oldest and most beautiful trees of Alamosa in order to have curbs and oiled streets, but that is no reason for leaving the city bare. The trees can and should be replaced.”

Two weeks later, another ADC editorial encouraged citizens to join the tree planting campaign and buy trees from the Pep Club. “A city trimmed with trees becomes unrecognizable if the trees are removed, and Alamosa would be entirely different if each resident would plant a few trees.”

Writing in the same issue Mrs. Herman Emperious chimed in suggesting “all of the trees on any one street should be as nearly uniform as possible.” I take exception with her idea of entire sections planted with one species. I find a variety of trees on a block to be more pleasing and healthier as it prevents the decimation of an entire population if the variety should become diseased or infected.

The Pep Club sold poplar (no species listed), Chinese elm, cottonless cottonwood, and Colorado blue spruce. Does this sound like the predominate trees in our downtown residential area? Emperious also suggests green ash, hackberry, thornless honey locust, and sycamore as worthy. She says cottonwoods, poplars, willows, and silver maples should not be used for permanent plantings as they are short-lived, weak, and susceptible to attacks by insects and fungus diseases. Although fast-growing box elders have many of the attributes of trees she doesn’t recommend, Emperious says the use of the box elder is warranted “as it is extremely hardy and drought resistant and grows well in alkali soil.” With the exception of sycamores, all of the above listed trees are found in Alamosa today.

City Forester, H. Gestefield, strongly advocated planting a variety of tree species in an April 1, 1938, letter to the paper. He suggested broad leaf cottonless cottonwood, Chinese elm, Canadian poplar, bolleana poplar, soft silver maple, and Russian olive for trees in the street parking (the area between the curb and sidewalk). “Each property owner has the

right to plant that type of tree he pleases as long as trees planted are approved by the city forester according to a city ordinance covering planting trees in distance and varieties.”

1938 was not the most prosperous of times. The Stock Market crashed nine years before and the country was still trying to pull itself out of the depression. Yet, Alamosa had a City Forester and a tree ordinance (Ordinance No. 2 – 1935) with more provisions than the current anemic ordinance.

Provisions in the 1935 ordinance that aren't included in the current one include:

- 1) Inspection of trees: “every person, firm or corporation shipping or bringing into the City of Alamosa for sale any trees ... shall forthwith notify the city forester.”
- 2) Trees to be planted 20-feet apart: “No trees shall be planted in any street, avenue or public highway nearer to each other than twenty feet and shall be planted as directed by the city forester.”

While our current ordinance requires removing dangerous limbs or trees, we don't have any city staff, such as a forester, with the needed expertise to oversee this issue.

1938 was also the first year Alamosans were able to enjoy what became Cole Park. “Alamosa has never had parks as other cities of her size usually have. However, just now there is an embryo park slowly taking shape at the foot of the bridge near the entrance of the city (Editorial, March 12, 1938).” [Cole Park will be explored in a future Alamosa Trees article.]

The editorial continues, “If Alamosans do not plant trees, they should change the name of the city, because Alamosa is a Spanish word meaning a grove of trees.” Various online sources give the meaning of Alamosa as cottonwood, grove of cottonwood trees, and an adjective meaning “of cottonwood.”

71 years later we are facing many of the same issues that Alamosa faced in 1938. To view currently suggested trees visit <http://www.AlamosaTrees.net>.

“He who plants a tree, plants a hope.” -- Lucy Larcom (poet, educator and editor in the 1800's)