Heritage News • March 2012

From the Olmsted Report:
“...If all the street trees of Ypsilanti were to be wiped out of existence it would unquestionably be a very great loss to the community, a loss that would be reflected in a substantial shrinkage of land values. Lots sell better on a street that is made attractive by trees at their best, as compared with similar lots on a bare street or one with a few small sickly specimens.

“...Street trees have already been driven from Congress Street (Michigan Avenue) and Huron Street near the junctions and from Cross Street and River Street near the railway station. These streets represent the beginning of a treeless business district, such as is all too common in our cities but entirely unnecessary in the case of Ypsilanti.”

Fabled Firm Studied Ypsilanti’s Landscape
-James Mann [previously published in The Depot Town Rag, October 2008]

The Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm sent representatives to Ypsilanti in 1913 to prepare a report for proposed improvements that would form the basis for a general city plan. The founder of the firm, Frederick Law Olmsted, who had planned Central Park in New York, did not personally come to Ypsilanti, but his presence would have been noted if he had—he had died a few years before.

The report, dated December 31, 1913, concerned possible improvements in the roads, trees, parks and playgrounds of the city, as well as suggestions for dealing with what the compilers saw as the problems of the city. The report suggested the city acquire the land on the banks of the Huron River for use as a park system. It noted the benefits to the public the use of Frog Island and what is now Riverside Park would have.

A system of parks, the report suggested, should run along the river from the northern limit of the city to the southern limit. This would allow the public to enjoy the natural beauty of the Huron River that was in little need of improvement. “The river with its many advantages as a naturally beautiful feature of the city is now almost wholly ignored, or worse, it is defiled and treated as a menace to adjacent property.”

The report referred to the Water Tower as an imposing shaft of stone, but “surmounted by an ill-proportioned wooden dome.” The report further noted that the Water Tower was a subject “worthy of careful study by an architect of the best artistic judgment.”

The report was submitted, studied, and tossed onto a shelf where it was in time forgotten. A few of the suggestions came to be, but not because of the Olmsted Brother’s report.

Program
Teresa Gillotti
Ypsilanti City Planner
“Urban Forestry plan and Ypsilanti tree nursery – a community-wide effort”
[See details on page 3]

7:30 p.m. Wednesday, 21 March 2012
Ladies’ Literary Club
218 N. Washington St. Ypsilanti
The public is invited

Other Projects of Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, Brookline, MA
The grounds of the United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. • Grounds for William Vanderbilt’s Biltmore Estate
Scott Fountain on Detroit’s Belle Isle • New York City’s Central Park
Trees, all by themselves, are just relative to other trees. In photographs or drawings, the size of a tree is better communicated when a recognizable reference is included.

Victorian drawings of prize-winning trees of the time were made more graphic by the addition of people, cows, and horses to give a sense of scale to the magnificent specimens towering alongside.

**BIG TREES in Our History**

- American Forests: Protecting & Restoring Forests for Life

The call to search for America’s biggest trees first came in the September 1940 issue of *American Forests* magazine, where concerned forester Joseph Sterns published his article “Let’s Find and Save the Biggest Trees.” Sterns wasn’t referring to the famous and historic trees that were already protected, but the giants left standing in virgin forests. Since that call to locate and measure the largest trees of each species, American Forests has maintained the National Register of Big Trees, a list of the biggest trees in America. The Big Tree Program is active in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and is used as a model for several Big Tree programs around the world. With sponsorship from The Davey Tree Expert Company since 1989, the National Big Tree Program has been able to reach a wider audience and promote the same message for over 70 years: regardless of size, all trees are champions of the environment.

**2011 National Register of Really Big Trees**

American Forests’ 2011 National Register of Big Trees represents more than 660 species – 30 more than last year – with trees in 45 states and the District of Columbia. The registry lists a total of 751 grand champion trees. Newcomers include the co-champion Osage-orange trees in Virginia and Delaware, the Rocky Mountain Douglas fir in Texas, the Virginia pine in West Virginia, and the eastern white oak in Indiana.

There are still 210 eligible species that have no champions, so if you want to become a big tree hunter with an instant champion to your credit, look for one of these trees. While the nation’s most avid big tree hunters are equipped with hypsometers, relascopes, and lasers, amateur tree hunters can get started in their own backyards with sticks and tape measures.

**Michigan TREE CHAMPIONS by county:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berrien:</th>
<th>Weeping WILLOW, Sandbar WILLOW, Gray DOGWOOD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cass:</td>
<td>Common HACKBERRY, Green ASH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlevoix:</td>
<td>White POPLAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinton:</td>
<td>White WILLOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalamazoo:</td>
<td>Pin CHERRY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kent:</td>
<td>Black MAPLE, Common HOPTREE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goesbic:</td>
<td>Red PINE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Traverse:</td>
<td>Black WILLOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leelanau:</td>
<td>Mountain paper BIRCH, White ASH, Roundleaf DOGWOOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newberry:</td>
<td>Silver MAPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manistee:</td>
<td>Black ASH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washtenaw:</td>
<td>American HAZELNUT, Downy HAWTHORN, American PLUM, Allegheny SERVICEBERRY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tree Champions you can spot within a good bike ride from home:**

- **European Buckthorn**
  Ann Arbor, North of Huron River Drive, opposite Nichols Arboretum

- **Common Juniper**
  5 miles North of Chelsea

- **Box Elder**
  NW of Milan, Saline & Mooreville Roads

**Other notable GIANT TREES (but not Champions) in Washtenaw County**

- Chinese Lacebark Elm
- English Elm
- European Buckthorn
- Chinkapin Oak
- Douglas Fir
- Lacebark Pine
- Saucer Magnolia
- Common Juniper
- Michigan Holly
- Fringe Tree
- Yellow-wood
- Cedar of Lebanon
- River Birch
- Box Elder
- Amur Maple
- Paperbark Maple
When many of the trees left town

Other than the Olmsted Brothers, not many of us go around town taking pictures of our trees. Oh, Mom used to say, “Stand over there by the rose bush so I can take your picture,” but other than that, we mostly took pictures of our trees when they were broken down by storms. Until that happened, we just took them for granted.

In 1893, everyone in Ypsilanti probably recognized the folks in the photos on a residential corner looking at the damage to the DeNike house, but today, it is difficult to identify the people, the house, and the exact location of the location of the damage. What seemed such a disaster at the time fades into history.

Gawkers strolled along Congress (Michigan Avenue) Street to examine the roofless buildings and wonder if the businesses housed there would ever reopen, but the trees—we were sure—could always grow back and our neighborhood would fit the same old stage set that we had become accustomed to.

On the occasion of such natural disasters, we tend to stand back and view the carnage and say, “Oh, the trees! It’s just not the same place without the trees...”

Today, everybody seems to be carrying a camera. Now, if they will just label and date the product, there will be an identifiable record for our following generations.

Ypsilanti Tree Survey

-Teresa Gillotti, Planner II/Community & Economic Development

The City of Ypsilanti has applied for and received a grant to complete a tree inventory of street and parks trees in the City and to develop an urban forestry plan. This plan will then be used to inform what trees to plant in a city-owned Tree Nursery to be located on the SE corner of the Water Street Redevelopment Area.

Once developed, the City hopes to create a program whereby neighbors, businesses, and others interested in replanting street and parks trees can do so by request and use material from the tree nursery for the benefit of all. There’s much to do in coordinating this effort, but the nursery setup and planting are scheduled for this spring and fall.
In addition to Detroit’s Elmwood Cemetery, other places in Michigan to see the landscaping works of Frederick Law Olmsted include Belle Isle Park, Bay City’s Carroll Park, and Marquette’s Presque Isle Park.

And there’s always the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, New York City’s Central Park, and the gardens at Biltmore Estate.
Woodman, read the rules!
Ypsilanti has ordinances for that:
The City of Ypsilanti does not take trees for granted. We have a whole section of ordinances having to do with trees and shrubs in the city. Although we have not yet had rules protecting historic trees as we do for historic buildings, we have vital rules for protecting trees and shrubs generally:

Sec. 110-49. - Protection of trees and shrubs generally.
No person shall break, injure, mutilate, kill or destroy any tree or shrub on public property, or set any fire or permit any fire or the heat therefrom to injure any portion of any tree.
No toxic chemicals or other injurious materials shall be allowed to seep, drain or be emptied on, near or about any tree; provided, that this shall not prohibit the use of city approved chemical control of tree and brush growth.
No electric wires or installation or any other lines or wires shall be attached to any tree in any manner that shall cause damage thereto.
All persons having under their care, custody or control facilities which may interfere with the trimming or removal of any tree covered by this article shall, after notice thereof by the public works director, promptly abate such interference in such a manner as may permit the trimming or removal of any tree by the public works director.

There's even an ordinance on trees we don't especially like:
Sec. 110-52. - Undesirable species of trees.
The city manager is hereby authorized to direct the public works director to remove any undesirable species of poplar, willow, box elder, soft maple, tree of heaven, ash, wild chestnut and cottonwood trees growing on any right-of-way, park or public place in the city.

Headings from the City Ordinance re trees:
- Definitions
- Applicability
- Power and control of city manager
- Blight violation
- Permit to prune, spray, etc.
- Planting; permission required
- Planting prohibited where roots may injure sewers, walks, etc.
- Planting near street intersections
- Orders to plant or remove
- Assessment of costs of planting and remova.
- Spacing of trees planted in rights-of-way
- Planting near sidewalks
- Use of trees as anchors.
- Excavations and driveways near trees
- Trimming of trees obstructing streets
- Trimming by city
- Interference with growth of trees
- Damage from leaking gas
- Removal of dead and diseased trees
- Removal of living trees
- Trees and shrubs interfering with fire hydrants, sewers, etc.
- Chemical control and trimming by public utilities

Woodman, Spare That Tree!
By George Pope Morris

WOODMAN, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now.
'Twas my forefather's hand
That placed it near his cot;
There, woodman, let it stand,
Thy axe shall harm it not.

That old familiar tree,
Whose glory and renown
Are spread o'er land and sea—
And wouldst thou hew it down?
Woodman, forbear thy stroke!
Cut not its earth-bound ties;
Oh, spare that aged oak
Now towering to the skies!

When but an idle boy,
I sought its grateful shade;
In all their gushing joy
Here, too, my sisters played.
My mother kissed me here;
My father pressed my hand—
Forgive this foolish tear,
But let that old oak stand.

My heart-strings round thee cling,
Close as thy bark, old friend!
Here shall the wild-bird sing,
And still thy branches bend.
Old tree! the storm still brave!
And, woodman, leave the spot;
While I've a hand to save,
Thy axe shall harm it not.

Trees not seen since Olmsted's 1913 study:
American Elm
American Chestnut
Red Oak
Eastern Hemlock
Black Cottonwood
Murray Birch
Douglas Hawthorn
Black Crownbery

Trees not seen since Olmsted's 1913 study:
Trees in our history

Black Hawk Tree, a cottonwood in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Debunked local lore held that Sauk Chief Black Hawk once hid amongst its branches to escape his pursuers. The tree was destroyed by a storm during the 1920s.


The Buttonwood tree which once stood at the foot of Wall Street in New York City. It was under this tree that stock traders once gathered and formed the Buttonwood Agreement which later evolved into the New York Stock Exchange.

The Charter Oak, in which the Connecticut charter was hidden from English governor-general Sir Edmund Andros.

The Genesee Big Tree at Geneseo, New York, a giant tree on the Genesee River, reported by some as an elm, by others as an oak. It was the site of the 1797 Treaty of Big Tree between Robert Morris and the Seneca tribe to sell most of western New York, also known as The Holland Purchase. It was washed away in a flood in the mid 19th century.

The Mercer Oak, the white oak on which a wounded General Hugh Mercer rested during the American Revolutionary War’s Battle of Princeton. Despite its fall in early 2000, it continues to be Princeton Township, New Jersey’s emblem.

The Mingo Oak, formerly the oldest and largest white oak in the United States until its fall on September 10, 1938. It was located in Mingo County, West Virginia.

Angel Oak, thought to be one of the oldest living organisms east of the Mississippi River, stands on Abraham Waight’s 1717 land grant, derives its name from the Angel estate. Local folklore tells of ghosts of former slaves appearing as angels around the tree.

Wawona Tree, a giant sequoia with a tunnel cut through it. Fell in 1969.

The Wye Oak, honorary state tree of Maryland, largest white oak tree in the U.S.
May’s marker awards will go to historic structures in industry

The Foundation has recognized houses and barns; the May 2012 awards of markers’ will emphasize commercial and industrial examples throughout the City.

Newberry appointed to Foundation Board

With his EMU Historic Preservation degree in hand, Michael Newberry has joined the YHF Board. He is owner of a historic home in Ypsilanti, former intern at Ypsilanti Historical Museum, and is employed at Materials Unlimited.

Festival works to restore “heritage” theme

James Mann is heading a committee of folks determined to put more emphasis on local history and heritage in this August’s annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

Ypsi history writer featured

Out-takes from MICHIGAN HISTORY magazine, March/April 2012, Conversations: With editor Patricia J. Mahjer and Ypsilanti’s Laura Bien

Mahjer: “Laura Bien didn’t intend to assume the mantle of “local historian.” After earning a literature degree, she first taught English as a Second Language both abroad and in the U.S. She followed that with an editing position at an Ann Arbor magazine. But, with the dawn of blogging in the early 2000s, she found a forum that allowed her the freedom to research and write about a myriad of interests, including the history of her adopted community of Ypsilanti.”

“... She continues to blog while also contributing to online newspapers. Her work has appeared in MICHIGAN HISTORY. And, late last year, the History Press published her second book on Ypsilanti history.”

Bien: “A historian … has sufficient imagination and depth of historical knowledge to be able to suggest connections when none remain in archival materials. I work as a history writer and, as such, am just an aspiring autodidact.”

And, in describing her work from Ypsilanti’s Fletcher-White Archives, Bien notes, “The archives contain photos, genealogies, old newspapers, diaries, maps, blueprints, postcards, letters, tax records, crime dockets, yearbooks, obituaries, and artifacts. It also has file collections for Ypsilanti families, cemeteries, businesses, organizations, and churches, and a subject file with assorted community subjects.”
Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation
Board Members
Hank Prebys, President
Joe Mattimore, Treasurer
Jan Arps-Prundeanu
Lani Chisnell
Tom Dodd
Pattie Harrington
Barry LaRue
Bill Nickels
Michael Newberry
Alex Pettit
Claudia Pettit
Don Randazzo
Jane Schmiedeke

Dedicated to the belief that one of Ypsilanti’s
 greatest resources is its wonderful historic architecture

See you at the General Meeting - Wednesday, 21 March 2012, at 7:30 p.m.

Heritage News is the newsletter of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. It is published five times a year: September, November, January, March, and May, and distributed, free of charge to the membership by mail, and made available to the public at City Hall, Farmers’ Market, and various business locations in the three business districts in the City.

2012 SCHEDULE
Meetings are held at the Ladies’ Literary Club, 218 N. Washington Street, Ypsilanti, at 7:30 p.m. The public is welcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 MARCH</td>
<td>Teresa Gillotti, Ypsilanti City Planner “Urban Forestry plan and Ypsilanti tree nursery – a community-wide effort”</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 MAY</td>
<td>Annual Marker Awards Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 AUGUST</td>
<td>35th Annual Heritage Festival Home Tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>NOVEMBER</td>
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“What artists so noble...as he who, with far-reaching conception of beauty, in designing power, sketches the outlines, writes the colors, and directs the shadows of a picture so great that Nature shall be employed upon it for generations, before the work he arranged for her shall realize his intentions.” -Frederick Law Olmsted