



Peck Bar Oak, c. 1837
Wisconsin Historical Society WHI(C)706556

When a man plants a tree he plants himself. Every root is an anchor, over which he rests with grateful interest, and becomes sufficiently calm to feel the joy of living. He necessarily makes the acquaintance of the sun and sky. Favorite trees fill his mind, and, while tending them like children, and accepting the benefits they bring, he becomes himself a benefactor.

—John Muir, *Steep Trails*

Every Root an Anchor

Wisconsin's Famous and Historic Trees

Second Edition

R. Bruce Allison

Foreword by Paul DeLong, Wisconsin Chief State Forester

Wisconsin Historical Society Press

Published by the
Wisconsin Historical Society Press

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Front cover image: Taliesin Elm by B-Wolfgang Hoffmann

Support for text design and assistance with editing was provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry. An electronic version is available on dnr.wi.gov under forestry.

Back cover images: Kohler Boxelder and Mrs. Walter Kohler, Sr. (courtesy Julilly Kohler Hausman); Muir Locust (UW-Extension); Twin Lakes Trail Marker Tree

Printed in the United States of America

Text design by Jeanne Gomoll, Union Street Design, LLC

Cover design by Lisa Wilber

09 08 07 06 05 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

*Dedicated to the memory of Walter E. Scott and Robert E. Gard,
two Wisconsin men-of-letters with the character of oak
who chose to spend their lives planting good deeds for the benefit of those to follow.*

The Oak

*Live thy Life,
Young and old,
Like yon oak,
Bright in spring,
Living gold;*

*Summer-rich
Then; and then
Autumn-changed,
Soberer-hued
Gold again.*

*All his leaves
Fall'n at length,
Look, he stands,
Trunk and bough,
Naked strength.*

—Alfred Tennyson

He who plants an oak looks forward to future ages, and plants for posterity. Nothing can be less selfish than this. He cannot expect to sit in its shade, or enjoy its shelter; but he exults in the idea that the acorn which he has buried in the earth shall grow up into a lofty pile, and shall keep on flourishing, and increasing, and benefiting mankind, long after he shall have ceased to tread his paternal fields.

— Washington Irving, *Forest Trees*

Preface

*I am the warmth of the hearth
on cold winter nights.
I am the shade screening you from
the summer sun.
My fruits and restoring drinks
quench your thirst as you
journey onward.
I am the beam that holds your house;
the door of your homestead;
the bed on which you lie,
and the timber that builds your boat.
I am the handle of your hoe,
the wood of your cradle,
and the shell of your coffin.*

— Old European poem

*Desolate indeed would be our dwellings were
their environs entirely treeless. They are
associated with our early recollections and
become in a great degree companions of our lives
and we unconsciously form strong attachments for
such as grow near our homes, thus increasing our
love of home and improving our hearts.*

— Increase A. Lapham
Wisconsin Oaks, 1856

Trees humanize people. The shade, the warmth, the shelter and the nourishment they provide alleviate our discomforts and allow us to rise to higher, more human planes of thought and action. As a species, our evolutionary roots are in the trees. Our human development was profoundly influenced by tree environments and nurtured by forest resources. Each of us from birth to death is intimately connected with trees. On their beauty and longevity we hang our memories and beliefs, trusting trees to be symbols of our achievements and the things we hold dear.

This book is about both trees and people. Just as the ancients venerated and mythologized trees, from the Norsemen's great world tree, Yggdrasil, to the Greek's oracular oak of Zeus, Wisconsinites, too, have incorporated trees into history and folklore. These tree stories are part of the social history of the state and the personal and emotional history of the

people. Affection for trees has influenced our behavior. Trees have served as anchors for time-honored family and community customs, as manifestations of ideals and as reminders of significant events.

People can exhibit great sympathy for trees as was demonstrated by the Brodhead woman who in 1952 offered to pay any price to save a tree from the ax of an uncaring owner. Her efforts rebuked, she immortalized the tree and her cause with a poem. Such loyalty to trees is not uncommon in our state. A farmer in Boscobel, fearing that future owners of his favored oak might not care for it as he did, bequeathed to the tree the land on which it grew. These people saw in their trees more than wood and chlorophyll. Trees to them were companions and friends.

Zona Gale, one of Wisconsin's great writers, explained it this way: "Trees have intelligence. Spirit is combined with them in some degree, in their life and their intelligence. See how they seek out their food, find water, turn to the sun ... there's a better explanation to this than the books make."

Wisconsin architect Frank Lloyd Wright simply stated, "I have mourned the loss of a tree more than a man." Mr. Wright designed his Spring Green home, Taliesin, around a majestic white oak called the Tea Circle Oak. Dignitaries and students from around the world gathered in the shade of this tree to listen and learn from the master. Shortly after Mr. Wright's death, the tree was struck by lightning. Another oak, which had been stunted under the canopy of the original, grew rapidly, rising like a Phoenix to become the new Tea Circle Oak.

Reading through these histories will reveal that trees have served useful purposes in the state, such as witness trees for the early land surveyors. And not so useful purposes, such as hanging trees on which justice was circumvented or, at least, unduly expedited. An example is the Janesville hanging tree on which a mob of incensed citizens strung up an accused murderer. The authorities had the tree cut down to discourage future lynchings.

Other trees marked less infamous historical events, such as the Fort Howard Elm, which was a landmark at the state's first permanent settlement in Green Bay; or the John Muir Locust on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison under which Muir received his first botany lesson in 1863. A certain

historical perspective and cultural humility is gained from trail marker trees. They are living reminders that other cultures have passed this way.

Some trees were turned into green monuments to honor special people, such as the General Douglas MacArthur Pine in Forest County. Other trees, such as the Grant County Sycamore, are growing as memorials to departed loved ones. It was planted by a bereaved father who brought the tree back from Ohio as he was traveling home to Wisconsin with the body of his son, killed in the Civil War. Less tragic expressions of love can also be found in famous trees still growing in the state. The Rhodes Bald Cypress near Kenosha is an unusual species planted over one hundred years ago by a father to celebrate a reconciliation with his daughter, from whom he had become estranged after she married without his consent and moved to a southern state. Just as the Taj Mahal can represent a Shah's boundless expression of love, so can a tree represent the love and devotion of a simple but sincere Wisconsin farmer.

These Wisconsin tree histories are human stories. As Lapham said, they increase our love of home and improve our hearts. They deserve to be told and remembered.

The first edition of *Wisconsin's Famous and Historic Trees* was published in 1982. It was a book idea I had in mind for years. I discovered that others shared the idea. First and foremost was Walter E. Scott, Wisconsin conservationist, author and editor, who for over 40 years gathered information on our state's significant trees. Data from Walter's files gave me a running start on the project. A great deal of information still had to be collected. I naturally turned to our state's great chronicler of historical information, Robert E. Gard. Prof. Gard, who had already invested time on the topic of historic trees, encouraged me and generously assisted by sending a letter to historical societies, the Department of Natural Resources and University Extension personnel, state arborists, newspaper editors and others soliciting relevant tree stories. Dr. Edward Hasselkus, then professor of horticulture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, also opened his files to me and, as he has done for many others, provided inspiration and direction. I invited Elizabeth Durbin, former editor of the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, to assist with the

first edition. She made innumerable phone calls, sent follow-up letters, and made personal visits, bringing the manuscript to completion.

Over two decades have passed since that first edition. Professor Hasselkus and Elizabeth Durbin have retired. My other valued friends and colleagues Walter E. Scott and Robert E. Gard are no longer alive. Likewise, many of the trees alive in 1982 are now gone. These passings make this updated edition even more important to me.

With the encouragement of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, I revisited each tree history to update it, based on the information currently available. Though I pulled it together, much of the credit belongs to those who shared their stories and information. Some were ambitious collectors of tree data. Others shared specific information about a tree of personal interest. To everyone I extend a sincere thank you for their participation. Names of individuals who were particularly instrumental in the investigation or revision of a tree history are included in the list of sources.

For research and editing assistance with this new edition, I gratefully acknowledge the help of Kathleen McCormick of McCormick Communications and Katherine Esposito of the Division of Forestry, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. I especially wish to recognize the skillful editorial assistance and guidance of Kathryn Thompson of the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

As a professional arborist, my goal is always to preserve trees. Likewise, as a writer, my goal has been to preserve our state's tree-related history. I have received tremendous satisfaction from gathering these histories and saving many faded photographs for posterity.

In setting my goals for the production of this book, I have adopted the trees' time scale, thinking not just of tomorrow or next year, but of 100 years from today when someone will read these stories and gather the fruits of the seed that has been planted. And I hope that, like a tree, the breadth of this project will expand from year to year with new histories told and old ones updated. This is an ongoing project, one in which I hope many people will participate.

R. Bruce Allison
January 1, 2005