



Taliesin Elm

B-Wolfgang Hoffmann (1981)

Remembered Elms

The black plague of Dutch elm disease found its way into Wisconsin in the early 1950s. The epidemic spread rapidly from street to street and from forest to forest. The full death count will never be known. In one year alone, the City of Milwaukee lost more than 16,000 trees. Nothing has done more to raise the tree consciousness of the public. “You don’t know what you’ve got ’til it’s gone!” And with the passing of the elms we lost a lot. Streets that had inviting canopies of green reverted to barren roadways. Urban parks lost the cooling shade of wide-crowned trees. Home yards no longer had the added architectural punctuation of the elm’s graceful arch. Elms, both past and remaining, are a particularly important part of the state’s tree history.

A Sawyer County elm, only 15 feet 6 inches in circumference, which blew down in the Flambeau River State Forest in 1952, was 352 years old. It had started growing in 1600, before the first European explorers came to Wisconsin.

There were, and still are, many elms in Wisconsin over 100 years old; some started growing before Wisconsin became a state in 1848. One of the largest American elms was a tree near Gotham in Richland County. It had a circumference of 20 feet 7 inches.

One of the most beautiful elms in Wisconsin stood in a farmyard near Ripon in Fond du Lac County. Its perfectly shaped and symmetrical branches made it a magnificent sight to those passing by.

Elms planted in the 1870s on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison do not have especially large dimensions, but those trees, as well as elms planted on the state capitol grounds, have been there almost as long as Wisconsin has been a state.

Excerpted from *Every Root an Anchor: Wisconsin's Famous and Historic Trees* by R. Bruce Allison
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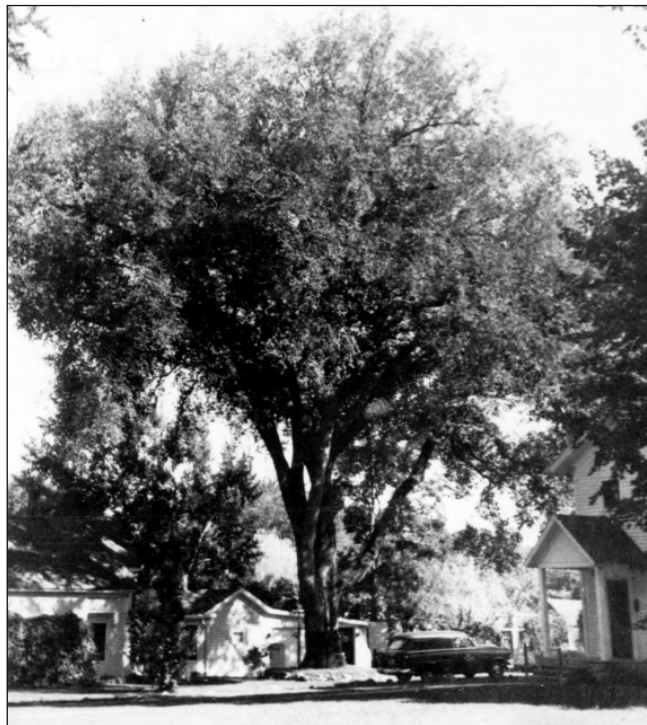
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At Lake Mills, in Jefferson County, was a very large elm (now taken down) that probably started to grow in 1821. This tree preceded the first settlers and was doubtless self-planted from a seed which blew there. The first settlers in the Lake Mills area arrived in 1836 when the tree was about 15.

Almost 100 years ago, near Neillsville in Clark County, Celia Reed and Julius Benedict were married. In honor of the occasion, The Rev. William Hendren, who performed the ceremony, twisted together two elm saplings, each smaller in diameter than a pencil, and planted them. In a living symbol of unity, over time they merged together as one tree, eventually towering over 80 feet high. The marriage was also a success, producing five sons and a daughter.

People care about elms. Mount Mary College in Milwaukee had two enormous elms. They were given excellent care, including bracing to protect them from high winds and ice storms. Sister May Seraphia



Wellers Elm, Whitewater

DNR



General Grant Giant Elm

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI(X3)38161 (1939)



Last elm on State Street, Madison, 1974

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI(X3)38162

said that “We have no policy regarding the care of old, historic trees except a love of nature, because God gave it to us in his loving providence.”

At Whitewater in Walworth County an elm so huge it shaded three lawns stood beside the home of C. H. Wellers. This tree, in 1952, was 96 feet tall and had a crown spread of more than 113 feet. Its circumference was 17 feet 6 inches. Wellers, who estimated that the tree was between 300 and 400 years old, spent a great deal of money in caring for the monarch and protecting it against Dutch elm disease. When he died and the house was sold, such care was no longer possible, and the tree died in the late 1970s. Its loss was noticed and mourned by the entire town.

In Spring Green, in a farm field below Taliesin stood a regal, open-grown elm. It was a landmark

leading the way to the home of world-famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Regular fungicide injections had protected it against Dutch elm disease. Sadly, the same 1998 windstorm that toppled the Frank Lloyd Wright Tea Circle Oak also caused irreparable damage to the Taliesin elm. It was taken down the next year.

Another huge elm, the General Grant Giant Elm, was located southeast of the intersection of Green Bay and Good Hope Roads, at the site of the Post Village Stage Relay Station, part of the Green Bay–Milwaukee–Chicago Post Mail route.

Sources: Evelyn Cobb, Lake Mills
Mrs. Alfred Kolmos, Whitewater