

The La Follette Hickory

Madison

Everyone calls it the La Follette Hickory, but no one knows why. It is not a large tree, but then it grew for many years in the shade of the graceful elms that made such a compatible setting for the impressive state capitol in Madison.

Richard Smith, a former groundskeeper at the Capitol Park, remembers hearing about the La Follette Hickory from his boss. "It was a little thing when I first came to work there in 1949," he says, "and it must have been planted sometime in the '30s but it wasn't growing. But then we trimmed it up and gave it some fertilizer and finally it started to grow." Smith didn't remember why it was called the La Follette Hickory.

The capitol tour guides still call it the La Follette Hickory, quickly adding that they don't know why. It may be rumor or folklore, but the tree could have been planted during the tenure of Philip La Follette, Fighting Bob's younger son, who won the governorship from Walter J. Kohler in 1930 when he was only 33 years old and served six turbulent years attempting to make the state a national model for solving the problems of the Depression.

In the words of Robert C. Nesbit, author of *Wisconsin, A History*, "Phil was the son who had inherited Old Bob's political sense, oratorical ability, and zest for the campaign." But inevitably, Wisconsin leadership could not resolve national crises and the focus shifted to the policies of Roosevelt and the federal government. Philip F. La Follette dominated Wisconsin politics throughout the 1930s, but his "ambitions and frustrations carried him out of the mainstream to political oblivion," as the Progressive Party enjoyed its last decade of real influence.

The La Follette Hickory, on the other hand, has thrived.

Sources: Stan Cravens, Madison
Leon Hendrikson, Madison
Jack Holzhueter, Madison
Robert Shaw, Madison
John Short, Madison
Richard Smith, Madison
Mike Stark, Madison



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