

The Walking Staff Tree

Sauk County

Back in 1848, it might take a settler, lured by promises of cheap, fertile land, two years to travel from the East via covered wagon. The Jacob Tinkham family from Vermont is one that made the arduous trek. Along the way Tinkham cut a walking staff from a cottonwood tree to ease the miles of foot travel. When he got to his destination—land in Sauk County between Lake Delton and Reedsburg along what is now Highway 23—he drove the staff into the ground. It grew into a superb tree, some 23 feet in circumference.

A subsequent owner of the land donated the acre on which the tree stood for a roadside park, named in honor of the cottonwood. But the tree attracted lightning as well as visitors, and eventually road officials felt the hollow tree should come down for

safety's sake. A resident of the area, the late Hilbert Kleeber, and the Reedsburg Boy Scouts planted a replacement cottonwood. Unfortunately, the state has since closed the park, and the land reverted back to the owner.

Mr. Vernon Harrison, the town clerk who had negotiated the park plan with the state in the 1950s, saved a portion of the old cottonwood. He presented it to the Reedsburg Historical Society, along with a letter from Jacob Tinkham's grandson describing the origin of the tree. A shoot from the roots of that original tree is now planted in Mr. Harrison's front yard, a still living symbol of one pioneer family's covered-wagon journey to Wisconsin.

Source: Vernon Harrison, Reedsburg