

The Upside-Down Trees

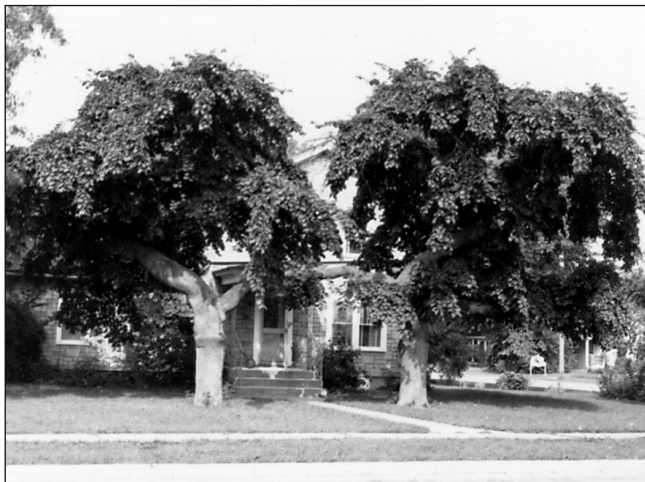
Wilmot

People used to believe that the two weeping elms in a front yard in Wilmot in Kenosha County, and others like them, had been planted upside down. These camperdown elms (*Ulmus glabra camperdownii*) have peculiarly drooping, vine-like branches and flattish tops. They do indeed look as if the roots, sticking up in the air, had put out leaves. This popular misconception was widespread. As is true of many folk beliefs, the myth is probably more interesting than the reality.

The camperdown elm, a mutant, sometimes called the European mountain elm, was first developed from an original plant which grew at Camperdown House near Dundee, Scotland. A vine-like elm was grafted on top of an upright elm in order to produce the tree. In the Wilmot elms, as well as others of the type, the graft is still visible as a swollen ring about halfway up the trunk of the tree.

The “upside-down trees” were popular ornaments around the turn of the century and still grace the lawns of old mansions and public buildings. Actually, of course it is botanically impossible for roots to bear leaves.

Sources: Pamela Fullerton, Madison
Phil Sander, Kenosha
Gen Turk, Kenosha



Wilmot Camperdown Elms

Phil Sander (1963)