

The Most Painted Tree in Wisconsin

Milwaukee County

During the time when loggers were cutting trees in Wisconsin by the thousands, one tree was becoming famous as the most painted tree in the state. It was a willow on the farm near Milwaukee of German-born artist Henry Vianden.

A man who loved nature, Vianden farmed to cut expenses, while making most of his income from painting. He had revealed his artistic talent as a young child, had apprenticed to a goldsmith, and later worked as an engraver and a painter on porcelain.

In America, Vianden instructed students in art, holding classes outdoors near his cottage. By one account he once offered this criticism to a budding

talent: "That? That should be a tree? A tree, that is the most wonderful thing in the world. When we paint a tree we must realize that we have sitting for us, a king!"

In his own painting of trees, Vianden's technique was to render every leaf and every branch with precise exactitude. He wanted his subjects to be admired in all their detail. An excellent example of his work, "The Old Oak," was once owned by the *Milwaukee Journal*. Today its whereabouts are unknown.

Vianden died in 1899. He not only immortalized the much-painted willow tree, but gave countless students an appreciation of art and of the masterpiece that is a tree.

Source: Steve Stroud, Milwaukee