

Walter Ware Pines

Waushara County

A living monument of century-old pines still does honor to one of Wisconsin's first conservationists, Walter Macon Ware, who planted them near Hancock in Waushara County between 1867 and 1876 to commemorate the 1876 Centennial. They are located at Second Avenue and County Trunk 0, one-half mile west of the junction with KK, about four miles northwest of Hancock.

Today they remind us of what the state might have been like if more of Wisconsin's pioneers had been as interested in conservation and reforestation as they were in lumbering and exploitation.

Ware, who came from Hancock, New Hampshire, to Hancock, Wisconsin, in 1856 at the age of 21, took seven years to transplant the 1,876 pine seedlings to celebrate the nation's 100th birthday.

The pines themselves came from the nearby Leola Marsh. There, nourished through dry spells by the boggy terrain, grew giant white and Norway pines. Seedlings from these huge trees sprouted on whatever high ground was available, and it was these seedlings that Ware carefully dug up, preserving their root ball of moist, peaty soil, and transplanted by hand to the marginally fertile sands of central Wisconsin. Oxen, pulling a heavy stone boat, provided the transportation for the seedlings as Ware and his family provided the labor.

Some of the seedlings were set close together as a shelter belt against the winds, while the others were planted about eight feet apart. In spite of the change from marsh to sand, under Ware's care, virtually every transplanted seedling survived. Soon the plantation began to stand out like a green oasis, the only one of its kind in the state. Ware did not limit his forestation activities to pines. He also set out what became a fine stand of butternut trees destined to produce bountiful crops for generations.

When Ware's pine plantation was 12 years old he moved to Arkansas, but, as the years went on, he was recognized as having bestowed a fruitful legacy on Wisconsin, in contrast to many early settlers who left behind them slag heaps, abandoned mines and cut-over land. The Leola Marsh, drained, turned



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(c. 2003)

tinder-dry, and fire destroyed the giant ancestral pine trees as well as the younger siblings of the Ware pines.

The drought of the early 1930s proved the efficacy of tree shelter belts, by then advocated by the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture experiment station at Hancock, which was studying ways of successfully farming the sandy soil. In the '40s Walter Ware was recognized by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. Their state bulletin proclaimed: "Would that more of the pioneers of this state had been as far-sighted and interested in planting trees as well as cutting them down. If there had been more of his type, our saw mills would still be humming today and ghost towns of the old logging days would be unknown."

Nevertheless, over the years, the pine plantation was mainly ignored by a succession of owners until, in April 1961, Floyd Foster sought the assistance of the district forester, Alex Katovich, in making a long-delayed harvest. Over 25,000 board feet of sawlogs were taken from the seven-acre plot, leaving 80,000 feet to grow and thrive.

Now in at least their 125th year, the pines in Ware's plantation have witnessed the flights of the once-multitudinous passenger pigeons, who nested in the great pines on the border of the Leola Marsh. They've seen the marsh drained and the fires come and the great pines die. They've seen the dust storms of the early '30s prove the effectiveness of pine plantings as shelter belts in the sand country. Planted laboriously and lovingly by hand, on days

too rainy for farm work but ideally suited to the uprooting and transplanting of tender seedlings, they've seen the introduction of completely mechanized tree planting equipment that can handle 15,000 seedlings a day.

The Ware plantation trees, set out to commemorate the nation's Centennial, were still standing for the Bicentennial. They are a tribute to the energy and foresightedness of one of the state's pioneer settlers.

Sources: Alex Katovich, Waushara County
Barbara Vroman, Hancock
Tracy Salisbury, Green Bay