



Every Root an Anchor

by Logan Nelson

“When a man plants a tree he plants himself. Every root is an anchor, over which he rests with grateful interest, and becomes sufficiently calm to feel the joy of living. He necessarily makes the acquaintance of the sun and the sky. Favorite trees fill his mind, and, while tending them like children, and accepting the benefits they bring, he becomes himself a benefactor.”

Surely, this John Muir passage from the San Gabriel Valley, Chapter Ten of Muir’s book entitled *STEEP TRAILS* must have influenced and motivated R. Bruce Allison to document the histories of favorite famous and significant trees of Wisconsin.

In his book entitled *EVERY ROOT AN ANCHOR* Allison helps to fill the reader’s mind with favorite trees of Wisconsin, and delivers personal accounts of how people nurtured and tended to the trees; not only accepted, but appreciated their benefits throughout the state.

This second edition of famous and historic trees of Wisconsin gives us meaningful testimonials of the essential, spiritual, historical, and emotional relationships between people and trees. From the Native American tribes who used them as trail markers to the early pioneers who referred to them as surveyor trees. From the early war heroes and politicians who had trees named after them to the early university professors who helped to create famous arboretums; all kinds of trees that would not be famous, historic, ancient, huge or unusual if it weren’t for their relationship with people.

Take John Muir for instance, recognized as perhaps this country’s most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist, who spent part of his boyhood in Portage, Wisconsin, and attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

According to Allison, an account of Muir’s first botany lesson from a fellow student in 1863 was held under a locust tree on campus. Until 1953, when the university found it necessary to cut down the tree, it was known as the Muir Locust. Today, a red granite boulder marks the site of Muir Knoll, across Observatory Drive from the site of where the famed tree stood.

Perhaps one of the more ironic, historical relationships between man and tree is the story of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Tea Circle Oak at his home near Spring Green, Wisconsin.

One of the world’s great architects, who believed buildings should be integrated with their natural surroundings, built a stone patio under a favorite and magnificent white oak to offer a summer respite under a shaded canopy for afternoon tea. “There on warm summer afternoons while tea was served, Wright would converse with students who had come to Taliesin to live, work and learn from the master.”

“Wright died at 90 in April 1959 at his Arizona winter home and headquarters. Back in Wisconsin, soon afterwards, a bolt of lightning shattered the Tea Circle Oak beyond saving.”

Allison does not promote visitations to these living monuments. In fact, many of the trees are no longer standing. And of greater concern, according to this updated version of famous and historical trees in Wisconsin, there have been no new trees inducted into the hall of fame in over twenty years. Why is this? Have we stopped recording data or have we ceased to care?

One thing is for certain, the Wisconsin roots discussed in this book promote a clear message that education, promotion, management and preservation of trees in Wisconsin probably wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for the bonds that people have established with the trees.

And as the struggle between humans and nature continues to escalate, the need for this necessary historical document to resurface is critical for maintaining a balance between development, preservation, decreasing budgets and urban forest management.

Certainly, Wisconsin natives and tourists will applaud the efforts of Allison and his colleagues to record the stories involving the towns they travel through or reside in.

Historians will appreciate this book for the unique presentation of Wisconsin history through the eyes of the trees.

Arborists and other green industry educators and professionals will want to read *EVERY ROOT AN ANCHOR* as a reminder of how our industry is anchored in a history of generations who have understood the meaningful relationship between people and trees.

But the true benefactors of Allison’s book are the trees. May they continue to be researched, preserved, maintained, recognized and idolized not only in Wisconsin, but throughout the world.