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REECHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

Collect. Preserve. Share.

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IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR OUR VALUED MEMBERS: IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, PLEASE DO SO SOON. WE RELY ON MEMBERS' DUES TO PRODUCE THE REECHO FOUR TIMES A YEAR.

THE PARK'S MOST SENIOR CITIZENS

Psalm 90:10 - The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

A couple of summers ago, a big wind swept through our Minikahda Vista neighborhood and blew part of our neighbors' mighty, multi-stalk Elm tree onto their roof. The cleanup took several days and required lots of heavy equipment.

I took some photos of the demolition process, and when the tree had been cut down, cut up, and hauled away, I snapped one of the stump with a 48" "yardstick." The thing measured about seven feet in one direction. Our neighbor kept a slice of the trunk, which she said suggested an age of 140 years, counting the rings. Fourscore and ten times two. Making it about as old as our city, incorporated as a village in 1886, 138 years ago.



The Park is home to many senior citizens, some living in senior housing or assisted living arrangements as they approach or pass their biblical allocations, some still living at home. Our town's centenarians were born 38 years after the founding of our village in 1886 and 66 years after the founding of the State of Minnesota.

But the oldest living creatures in town are some of our trees – in particular, our Bur Oaks. (The fungal networks connecting tree roots of the forest are thousands of years older, but nowhere near as photogenic.)



The Minnesota DNR tells us that the Bur Oak, (*Quercus macrocarpa*), is by far the state's most widespread tree, occurring in every county. It is also one of the most adaptable, surviving easily in the driest, poorest soils where it will grow slowly but persist for centuries.

Bur Oaks have been documented as ancient as 400 years old. The Morton Arboretum outside Chicago has developed a handy chart to estimate tree age, using diameter at breast height (dbh) as a yardstick.

So, we visited a few of our arbor elders around town and measured their dbh. Based on the Morton chart for Bur Oaks, four we found were a hundred years old before Minnesota became a state:

- Texas/Walker – 134" circumference = 42.65" dbh – 272 years old, est.
- Peter Hobart – 134" circumference = 42.65" dbh – 272 years old, est.
- Oak Hill Park 1 – 123" circumference = 39.15" dbh – 254 years old, est.
- Oak Hill Park No. 2 – 128" circumference = 40.75" dbh – 260 years old, est.

The National Registry of Big Trees recognizes champion trees nearly 900 species. Minnesota's program uses much of the same criteria as the national program. The Minnesota Champion Bur Oak has a circumference of 277.5 inches, [dbh = 88.3 inches], a height of 68 feet, a crown spread of 155 feet, and is located on private property in Olmsted County near Rochester.

At approximately 272 years old, the big boy Bur Oak at the corner of Texas Avenue and Walker Street overlooking Knollwood's Cub Foods could have sprouted from an acorn as early as the year 1752.



Peter Hobart Oak



Oak Hill Park Oak No. 1



Texas-Walker Oak

That year of 1752, a quarter of a century before the American Revolution, the British Empire adopted the Gregorian Calendar, 170 years after Pope Gregory's decree, knocking 11 days off the year.

Ben Franklin flew his famous kite, and the Virginia Assembly passed a law making maiming a felony, in response to the practice of gouging. The Treaty of Logstown was signed by representatives of the Iroquois, Lenape, and Shawnee, and commissioners from Virginia granted control over lands south and east of the Ohio River to the English.

The Spanish Governor of Santa Fe de Nuevo began the first peace negotiations with the indigenous Comanches after inviting tribal representatives to his home in Taos.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As our dedicated members know, since covid restrictions began, our programming has been very limited and it has taken a while to regain some momentum to begin anew. But thanks to the work of Trustee Bill Beyer, we recently partnered with Hennepin History Museum on a walking tour of the former industrial center of St Louis Park commonly referred to as Skunk Hollow.

I was able to attend the first of the series in this tour and appreciated re-hearing some of the stories while standing in the figurative shadows of the former buildings and streets. I gained a new perspective and appreciation for the scale of operations and the impact on our city's land.

This has stirred some interest to refresh our past tours and add some new tours and make this a more regular part of our programming. Walking tours aren't for everyone, and much of the material could be repurposed into a lecture format, but these tours bring out new people to our events which fulfills our mission to share the history of our city with a broader audience. If you have an idea for a walking tour, please let us know!

You hopefully have noticed our advertisements for the Open Houses throughout the year. We have one more scheduled for July, but I hope to continue these occasionally to encourage people to come into the office to get to know us. We have found a few new volunteers and several people visiting for the first time who would likely not have connected with us without this outreach.

I encourage you, our members, to consider getting more involved. Reach out to see if there is a unique way you can contribute. Or reach out to see if there is a unique way we can help you, or a group you are involved with, learn more about the history of St. Louis Park. And look through your old photos – we would love to fill out our albums with pictures from the past 40 years that highlight events, people, businesses, houses, streetscapes, and other places of interest!

With Park Pride,
Ted



CONNECT WITH US

Visit: 3546 Dakota Ave. So., Suite C
St. Louis Park
Saturdays, 1-4 pm,
Or, by appointment

Phone: 612.465.9288
Email: slphistory@gmail.com
Online: <https://slphistory.org>

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Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park historical Society collects, preserves, and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho: Park History Today*, is an official publication of the Society.

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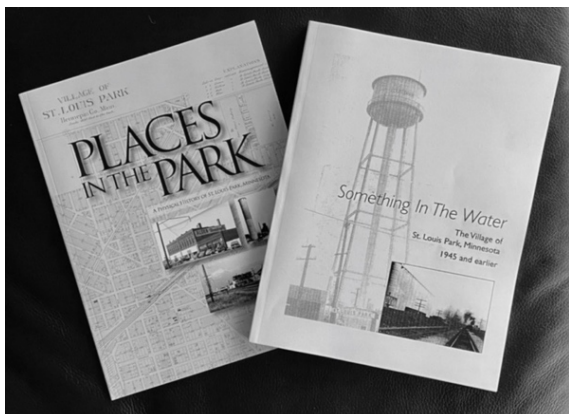
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But in 1752, future St. Louis Park lands were still part of New France, ceded to the British in 1763 after the French and Indian War. Napoleon I traded it away for Tuscany, getting it back in 1800 just in time to sell to Thomas Jefferson in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. He needed the cash due to his failure to suppress the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, a bloody revolution that has continued, off and on, until today.

MIDWESTERN OAK SAVANNAS

In his 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold described the Bur Oak as:

...the shock troops of the forest...the only tree that can stand up to a prairie fire and live...Botanists can read the story of that war for twenty thousand years...The record shows that the forest front at times retreated almost to Lake Superior; at times it advanced far to the south. At one period it advanced so far southward that spruce and other 'rear guard' species grew to and beyond the southern border of Wisconsin...But the average battle line between prairie and forest was about where it is now, and the net outcome of the battle was a draw.

The Dakota people had occupied the lands of southern Minnesota and had managed the prairie landscapes with fire for a millennium by the time our Texas-Walker oak had been born in 1752. Acorns were a native food staple and also attracted whitetail deer, another major food source.

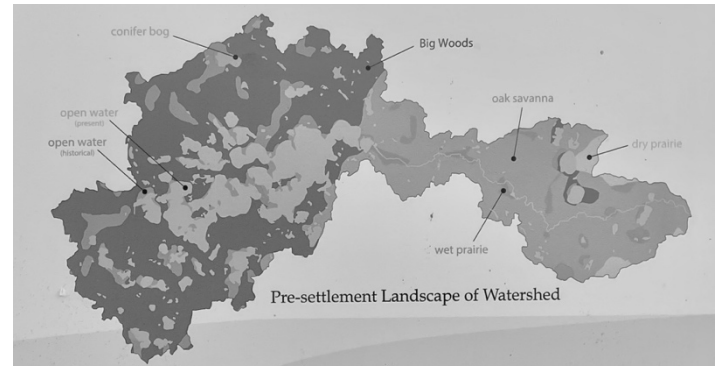
Explorer and map-maker Jonathan Carver spent the winter of 1766-67 on behalf of the British with a band of Dakota on the Minnesota River. In the end, Carver ended up giving his name to a Minnesota creek, city, and county. Leopold quoted from a Carver diary entry of 10 October 1763, near Blue Mounds in the southwest corner of future Wisconsin's future Dane County, working his way to future Minnesota:

I ascended one of the highest of these, and had an extensive view of the country. For many miles nothing was to be seen but lesser mountains, which appeared at a distance like haycocks, they being free from trees. Only a few groves of hickory, and stunted oaks, covered some of the vallies."



Carver was looking across a Wisconsin oak savanna landscape back then. St. Louis Park lies in a band of them flanking the Mississippi River. According to Wikipedia:

*The oak savannas of the Midwestern United States form a transition zone between the arid Great Plains to the west and the moist broadleaf and mixed forests to the east. Oak savannas are found in a wide belt from northern Minnesota and southern Wisconsin, down through Iowa, Illinois, northern and central Missouri, eastern Kansas, and central Oklahoma to north-central Texas...The Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) is the dominant species in northern oak savannas.*



An exhibit at Creekside Park developed by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District shows the pre-settlement landscape of the District with the Park noted as Oak Savanna north of the Creek and as Wet Prairie south of it.

BEARING TREES

The first public land surveys of St. Louis Park were certified in 1855, before any roads crisscrossed the land. Surveying teams dragged their equipment and 66-foot steel chains across woods, prairies, swamps, and brush, marking out square-mile township sections. They buried wood posts at the section corners and at the halfway points along section perimeters to define quarter-sections of about 160 acres. Lacking any man-made features for reference, the surveyors marked mature trees near each post, measuring distance and compass bearing. According to the Minnesota DNR:

Bearing trees are a special kind of witness tree which the surveyors notched, blazed, and scribed in a standard way to facilitate the relocation of the survey corner should the wooden corner post or corner stone be lost or moved. The surveyor was required to note for each bearing tree: 1) its type (~species), 2) its diameter, 3) its distance to the corner, and 4) its azimuth or "bearing" from the corner and hence its applied name.

The DNR estimates that 30,283 of the 352,896 bearing trees reported during the surveying of the entire state of Minnesota were Bur Oaks, one of every twelve. A hundred-seventy years of urban development has erased almost all of them.

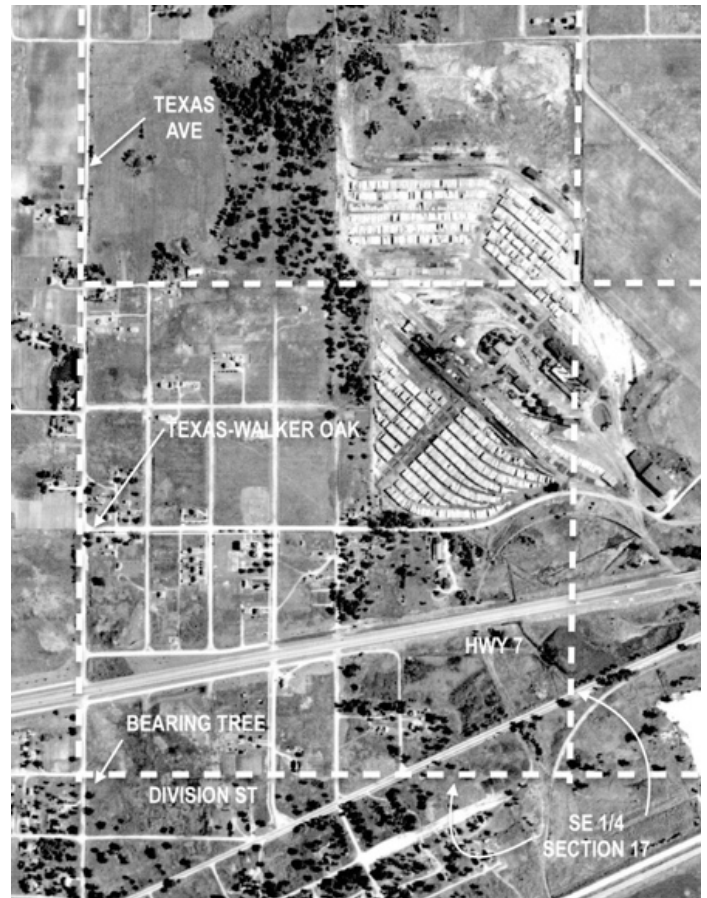
Our Texas-Walker Oak lies along the west edge of Section 17, Township 117N, Range 25W, a north/south line. Surveying crews probably dragged their chains through its hundred-year-old shade but the nearest quarter-section line was two blocks north, located at what is now 34th Street and Texas. Alas, no large oaks survive near there. However, we looked two blocks south, the furthest southwest corner of Section 17, which is hard up against the City of Hopkins at Texas Avenue and Division Street. And we thought we had found one!

Met of 5th Principal Meridian

Chain North between Sections
19 and 20

Variation 10° 40' East,

23.00 Cntr field beam E & W line
30.00 Scan field beam East & West line
30.25 To a road beam East & West line
40.00 Set quarter Section post line
Burr Oak 9 S 70 E 410 links
Burr Oak 8 N 54 W 109 links
52.60 To a creek 75 links wide from line
S. E.; High Banks rapid curv.
60.00 A house; Met 14.00 chain line
80.00 Set post for corner to Sections
17-18-19 and 20 line
Burr Oak 8 N 29 W 313 links
Burr Oak 9 S 23 E 200 links
Burr Oak 8 S 5 W 400 links
Surface polling; Soil 1st rats
Limbs, Oak opening;
Undergrowth Hays, Oak,



ARBOR DAY IN THE PARK WITH MAKE BAHE

National Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday in April; in Minnesota, it was officially April 26 this year. Managing for better weather, the Park celebrated on May 11th at Birchwood Park with music, games, an obstacle course, tree seedling giveaways, and an arborist-led tree walk, partnering with Tree Trust to plant 50 new trees there.

Mike Bahe is the Park's arborist. His main job these days is trying to preserve urban canopy and to replant trees in response to emerald ash borer damage. Twenty-five years ago, Mike had a summer job with a local tree company and fell in love with urban forestry. He's never looked back after getting Forestry and Natural Resources B.S. and M.S. degrees from the University of Minnesota.



Tree Trust representatives demonstrated the best practices for planting trees.

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But alas, Hennepin County Surveyor Chris Mavis checked notes from a resurvey of that section corner done in 1899, probably in response to T.B. Walker's total redo of Park land boundaries. The 1899 notes appear to tell us that the original Bur Oak bearing tree, marked in 1855, was no longer there. Still, the oak we found is in about the same location and large enough to have been present in 1855.

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On tree diseases, he offers advice to residents: “If you aren’t treating your [Ash] tree it will be dead in a year or two most likely. Oak wilt is not a large issue in St. Louis Park at this time. We inspect for it and do test trees, but I think I have only had one positive test and that tree was removed.”

Regarding the limbless oak in Oak Hill Park illustrating the poem opposite, Mike tells us, “We have currently left that tree as wildlife habitat and an interesting piece for people to enjoy. It was a large red oak that had continued to have failing branches and most of them had to be removed.”



Top, SLP Arborist Mike Bahe supervised some eager young volunteer planters. Above, a recently felled tree provided a temporary playground structure and a place for up-close examination, while one young lass tried on some “Dress Like an Arborist” garb.

OAK SLAM

Trustee Jim McDonough directed our attention to a recent Friends of the Arts poetry slam held at Wolfe Park for an apropos addition to this issue.

Mr. Tom Strong has long had family in the Park and slammed some oakey words for the audience:

The Tree Ring Record

By Tom Strong, March 25, 2024

The old oak tree was felled
because, she said,
it didn’t fit the yard
anymore.

It blocked the view from the window
and from the street.
Too much shade killed the grass
and all the falling
of acorns, leaves, twigs,
nothing but messy trash,
“It had to go”.

The trunk stump was left
cut cleanly, showing its rings
like the grooves of a vinyl record
So, I cut a slice as thin as I could
and placed it on the turntable
to see if it would
play its story for me
as only the needle understood.

The sounds,
sometimes like the discord of a cat
walking gently on piano keys,
others, like the concord
of a Beethoven symphony.
And story,
the joys of summers birthing leaves
of laughing branches in a tickling breeze
of aviary caroling in a sea of green
but so too the melodies of pain
of blizzards, tornadoes and lack of rain
storms, diseases and temperature extremes.

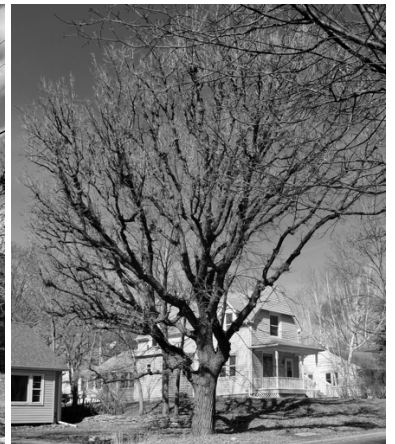
I listened intently till the very last ring
and the long roaring draw
of the mechanical saw
the crash
the silent note
the only note
that kept playing in my head
like a regretting dirge
now wondering why
“it had to go”.



OAKS AROUND THE TOWN



Above, A couple of lucky property owners have bountiful oak stands on their homesites, one west of Hwy 100 on Minnetonka Blvd and one on Edgewood Avenue bordering Hopkins. Below, there are also some nice clusters near the creek, entering town from the south on Brookside Avenue. Below right, one of the Park's few remaining 'Walker' houses on Pennsylvania Avenue, built around 1890, features an oak in the front yard that was there long before the house.



Above, a 1922 aerial view looking northwest from just above today's Hwy & and Louisiana interchange shows Oak Hill Park bordering the Republic/Reilly Creosote plant, and the Park's Oak Savanna landscape rolling away in the distance.



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DISPATCH LOOKBACK

In 1957, the *Dispatch* took note of a new house being built on Westwood Drive at Texas Avenue by Alcoa – Aluminum Company of America. The California-style home featured the use of aluminum everywhere possible and promised that the “Carefree House” would be maintenance-free. It was one of only 24 built in the U.S. and the only one in Minnesota; now a truly historic property.

It was run-down and largely unmaintained when Whitney and Robert McChane bought it in 2011, attracted by the rich wood paneling, extensive use of glass, and open floor plan. The McChanes lovingly restored the original finishes and artglass, and recently put on the market for about triple the median price of a home in the Park, about the same multiplier it had been priced at in 1958. The muddy, black and white interior sketch printed in the August 2, 1957, *Dispatch* did it no justice. It stands today as just another Park home featuring a venerable Bur Oak in the front yard.

