

SCOTTISH NOBITREE

(Narrative: Sue Schuit)

"A man doesn't plant a tree for himself. He plants it for posterity." — *Alexander Smith*

What a tree I am! Have you heard of me? Everyone has a favorite tree, everyone loves a tree, (what's not to love...) but me, well, I'm like that, but different. Different? A lot different. No native am I, but a rare, a beautiful Scottish Nobilitree. I am a Camperdownii Elm, do you know of me yet? I'm not surprised, for you have not seen my clan much – if at all. We spring from one heir, my father the one and only original Camperdown Elm.

Father, the Wych Elm cultivar, *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii', known as the **Camperdown Elm**, was discovered about 1835–1840 as a young contorted elm (a sport growing in the forest) at Camperdown House, in Dundee, Scotland, by the Earl of Camperdown's head forester, David Taylor. When it matters, it's often the little things that people notice, and Mr. Taylor was captivated. My father was lifted and replanted within the gardens of Camperdown House where he remains to this day. Father grows on his own roots, is less than 10 feet tall, with a weeping habit and contorted branch structure. After a bit of a fuss, Mr. Taylor is said to have produced the first of what are recognized as Camperdown Elms by grafting a cutting to the trunk of a Wych Elm (*U. glabra*). The test was successful and the outcome is a revelation.

The result and the burden of explanation are mine, because, of course, you still don't know what to make of me. I understand, clearly, I am charming, elegant and regal. Unique, curious and somewhat of a wonder, add to it a bit of romance. Let me tell you more.

I am the nearest and dearest to my current stewards, Dr. Ann-Mari and Nicholas Baldukas. I share my grounds with many of worth, but I am their choice tree to love. Top of the heap, apple of their eye, the jewel in their crown.

MY GROUNDS, MY STEWARDS

"My grounds, my life, my roots, my stewards, and my domain." – *John Burnside*

But first...

Thomas Bones was a native of Pennsylvania, of Scotch-Irish descent. He was a farmer and carrier of dispatches when General Washington was at Valley Forge. He married there and died in New York when advanced in years.

Philip Frey was a soldier of the Revolution and later agent for John Jacob Astor in the fur business. His wife was Mary Louise St. Martin, a French lady, and daughter of a French exile, Count Jacques St. Martin.

Mr. Bones and Mr. Frey were the maternal and paternal grandfathers of Thomas Bones, father of Benjamin R. Bones. Thomas went to Kentucky in 1839 but, being an anti-slavery man, the agitation on that question caused him to remove from there to Wisconsin. Thomas and his wife, Katherine, came in the spring of 1842 and purchased 160 acres of land in Mt. Pleasant Township from Alston Felch and

Jacob Jackson. President Van Buren had signed the original deed to Felch and Jackson for the homestead in 1840. Thomas and Katherine had 6 children, 3 of whom are now living.

Benjamin Bones (born 1840), one of two surviving sons of Thomas and Katherine Bones attended the district schools and Racine High School and since coming of age has always followed farming. - 1906 *Commemorative Biographical Record of Racine and Kenosha Counties, WI*

RUMOR HAS IT

And here's where I come in. What's so good about me is what I am not. I am not native, I'm not common, I'm not essential, I'm not expected.

Camperdown Elms are most often seen in and around special places, honoring special events, memories or celebrations. It is on record that my clan can be found in parks, cemeteries, and university grounds.

Rumor has it I am no exception. It is believed that I was planted as a tribute to someone or something by my original steward, Benjamin Bones. In memory of what, in honor of whom? Perhaps Benjamin planted me in memory of a lost loved one or ones, possibly in celebration or tribute to the launching or conclusion of a big event? My beginning is thought to be 1865. Yes, there were momentous events occurring at that time, indeed. May 9, 1865, the official ending of the American Civil War; The Freedom War; The War Between the States; Mr. Lincoln's War; is a very big deal to be sure. Could it be that someone did not return could it be that someone did?

Imagine what you will, speculation and conjecture abound, but my mystery is still intact.

FAVORITE THINGS

There is pleasure in the pathless woods, there is rapture in the lonely shore, there is society where none intrudes, by the deep sea, and music in its roar; I love not man the less, but nature more. – **George Byron**

Benjamin Bones married, had two children and farmed my land in partnership with his brother. By 1885 he is the sole owner and his brother had become a WI state senator.

Benjamin appears to have had a love of nature and reading. He was an avid birder and for twenty-five years made annual reports to the federal government (many of which were published) as he was a recognized authority on the habits and nature of birds. He was reported to own the largest private library of any farmer in the county.

"B.R. Bones, who has been confined to his Mt. Pleasant home by illness, but now improving, submits the following to the Journal for publication, it being appropriate at the time because of the weather experienced. I enclose clipping from the Marshall, Mich. News, sent me some years since, when the author was about 80, Arbor Shoop, father of our Dr. Shoop, and a very lovable old man. The lines represent a sweet old age." – Racine Daily Journal, 9/28/1908

Benjamin had sold 80 acres of his farm in 1888 and in 1925 Mr. Bone's widow, Sarah, sold the remaining 50 acres along with the home to Frank Halter. Frank referred to the house as the Bones house and the

property became a base for businesses, while the home was used for farm foremen to live in, eventually becoming a flat. Frank and his wife moved into the house in 1964; living there until Frank's death. Nicholas and Dr. Ann-Marie Baldukas purchased the home in 1982 from Frank's estate. – Preservation Racine's Tour of Historic Places, 2011

The Balduka's are my current stewards, they suit me well. I am their Tree to Love; no surprise to me.

CURIOUS CURIO

***How a Poem Saved One of the World's Rarest and Most Majestic Trees* by Maria Popova, as obtained at www.brainpickings.com**

That a tree can save a writer's life is already miraculous enough, but that a writer can save a tree's life is nothing short of magical.

In 1867, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, once an American Revolution battlefield, opened its gates to a community hungry for a peaceful respite of wilderness amid the urban bustle. So intense was public enthusiasm that local residents began donating a variety of wildlife to fill the 585-acre green expanse, from ducks to deer. But the most unusual and enduring gift turned out to be a tree, donated by a man named A.G. Burgess and planted in 1872.

This was no ordinary tree. *Ulmus glabra* "Camperdownii," better-known as Camperdown Elm, is a species unlike regular trees in that it cannot reproduce from a seed. The rare elm carries its irregularity on the outside — its majestic, knobby branches grow almost parallel to the ground, "weeping" down. To ameliorate its reproductive helplessness, the Camperdown Elm requires outside help — a sort of assisted grafting, be it by accident of nature or intentional human hand. The result, to which every single Camperdown Elm in the world today can be traced, was an unusual-looking tree — a sort of giant bonsai with "weeping" branches. But this ugly duckling turned out to have a secret superpower — it was immune to the disease that killed all of its cousins, the Dutch Elms, across North America.

Unlike the world's oldest living trees which predate our civilization by millennia, the Camperdown Elm is a curious conduit between nature and humanity: both human-made and gloriously wild, with its barbaric-looking bark and defiant branches, it stands as a poignant metaphor for the interdependence of all beings — nowhere more so than in the story of the Brooklyn tree.

As excitement over the novelty of Prospect Park began dying down, the Camperdown Elm came to suffer years of neglect. Suddenly, it became more than a metaphor for impermanence_mortality — its heavy branches were weeping into the precipice of death, the public deaf to its tears.

But then, in the 1960s, it was saved by a force even more miraculous than that by which its Scottish great-great-grandfather had been born — not by a botanist or a park commissioner or a policymaker, but by a poet fifteen years the tree's junior.

The poet was **Marianne Moore** (November 15, 1887–February 5, 1972), who had been elected president of New York's Greensward Foundation — an advocacy group for public parks — in 1965. This brilliant and eccentric woman, who never married and by all accounts never fell in love, found herself enamored with the old odd-looking tree. Under the auspices of the foundation, she created a citizen

group called Friends of Prospect Park, aimed at protecting the Camperdown Elm and other endangered trees in the park.

In 1967, eighty at the time and with a Pulitzer Prize under her belt, Moore penned “The Camperdown Elm” — a beautiful ode to this unusual, dignified, yet surprisingly fragile life-form of which humans are the only bastions. The poem, animated by the same impulse undergirding Hermann Hesse’s sublime meditation on what trees teach us about belonging was included in Moore’s *Complete Poems* (*public library*).

THE CAMPERDOWN ELM

I think, in connection with this weeping elm,
of “Kindred Spirits” at the edge of a rockledge
 overlooking a stream:
Thanatopsis-invoking tree-loving Bryant
conversing with Thomas Cole
in Asher Durand’s painting of them
under the filigree of an elm overhead.

No doubt they had seen other trees — lindens,
maples and sycamores, oaks and the Paris
street-tree, the horse-chestnut; but imagine
their rapture, had they come on the Camperdown elm’s
massiveness and “the intricate pattern of its branches,”
arching high, curving low, in its mist of fine twigs.
The Bartlett tree-cavity specialist saw it
and thrust his arm the whole length of the hollowness
of its torso and there were six small cavities also.

Props are needed and tree-food. It is still leafing;
still there. *Mortal* though. We must save it. It is
 our crowning curio.

Moore’s poem mobilized the Friends of Prospect Park to envelop the Camperdown Elm in attentive and nurturing care, which ultimately saved it. The group went on to identify and salvage other vulnerable, neglected trees throughout the park. In her will, Moore established a fund to protect Brooklyn’s beloved “crowning curio.” She died exactly one hundred years after the Camperdown Elm was planted.

Today, halfway into its second century, the Camperdown Elm’s majestic canopy is buoyed by the air of poetry and human grace.

“Our response to the world is essentially one of wonder, of confronting the mysterious with a sense, not of being small, or insignificant, but of being part of a rich and complex narrative. - From 'Strong Words', John Burnside

So what did you think?
Did you enjoy the read?
Did I pique your curiosity?

The history of me,
my origins,
my stewards, my clan,
my kith and my kin?

I am certainly unique
really quite impressive,
defiantly mortal
words are not expressive.

Neither pictures nor prose
can aptly describe
the style and panache
I display with such pride.

So my advice to you is to come out to see
The regal Scottish Nobilitree.
My stewards, I'm certain, will agree,
they're always quite eager to share
my history.

They are happy to welcome
you to my realm,
for they know it's best to visit
in person
a Camperdownii Elm.

- Sue Schuit

Trees We Love, 2017 awardee
Hoy Audubon Society
Camperdownii Elm
Approx. age 152 years
26" DBH, 25' Height, 40' Spread
Proud stewards: Nicholas and Ann-Marie Baldukas