

## THE STRONG, SILENT TYPE

(Narrative: Sue Schuit)

A notable and easily identifiable tree in our woodlands, a Shagbark Hickory stands tall and strong. In the spring the leaf-buds are big and as the season unfolds, so do the buds, resembling flowers as the scales fold back like lovely petals. The most distinctive feature of the shagbark hickory, however, is best seen in winter. Large plates of exfoliating bark curl up and give the tree a tousled appearance. It's the tree with the perennial bad hair day. No other tree in the woods looks quite as messy.

The shagbark was at one time a dominant tree in the great forests of the new world, growing alongside oaks and chestnuts. The woods at that time were full of "presidential timber" and President Andrew Jackson's nickname was "Old Hickory" for his strength on the battlefield and a tough political stance. The younger, but no less tough, statesman, James Polk, became known as "Young Hickory".

The hickory is of the genus, *Carya Ovata*, the namesake of which is the Greek goddess, *Carya*, goddess of the nut tree. *Carya*, of course, required a festival in her honor named naturally, the *Caryateia*.

Hickories grow slowly and can attain a height of 60-80 feet and a diameter from 12-24 inches at maturity. Some hickories have reached the ripe, old age of 300 years, however, being useful and therefore harvestable, few reach that age today.

American Indians knew of the hickory's usefulness and fashioned bows and baskets from its wood. Perhaps more valuable, however, were the hickory nuts.

R. Kelly Coffey of the Appalachian Voices website wrote, "Native Americans had a curious practice of pounding the nuts and tossing them into boiling water. The result became a pasty material the Indians called 'pawcohiccora' in the Algonquin tongue. Indians used pawcohiccora in ways similar to butter; i.e. as a spread and an ingredient in corn cakes and other dishes. English-speaking settlers soon shortened the Indian word to 'hickory,' broadened its meaning to the name for the tree itself, and referred to the creamy nut extract as 'hickory milk.'

The shagbark hickory's most popular value today goes up in smoke, in more ways than one. It is prized for fuelwood and hickory logs crank out tremendous heat and combust slowly.

But wait, there's another use for the shagbark hickory; what would barbecue sauce be without hickory smoke flavoring?

A lesser known culinary use of this versatile tree is hickory syrup. Sources are vague about the production of this syrup, making it somewhat of a trade secret. The earthy-tasting liquid is in high demand from chefs and connoisseurs throughout the world. "I like to mix it with bourbon as a marinade for ribs," the late Julia Child said.

Hickory tea had an altogether different meaning in old Appalachia. Parents used this "hickory tea" in the fine art of disciplining children. Kids were warned that they'd get "a dose of hickory tea" - a euphemism for a "switching" with a branch of a hickory tree.

Hickory trees are however, most importantly components of ecological communities. Under the large peeling plates of bark many creatures of the forest find refuge. Bats roost and mourning cloak butterflies wait out the winter in the shelter of the strips of bark. Woodpeckers and other insect-eating birds scour the tree trunk for meals and caterpillars of the regal moth and the walnut sphinx moth feed on hickory leaves. And squirrels, of course, love the moveable feast the nuts provide in autumn.

•Hickory facts obtained: Valerie Blaine, nature programs manager for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County.

### **THE ART OF SLOWING DOWN**

If you would know strength and patience, welcome the company of trees. ~ Hal Borland

Certain words and phrases (most) sound better in another language. Strong, silent type, fine in English, but the Italian translation *for to tipo silenzio*, elevates. Strong silent type (verb, noun), used to describe something usually quiet and quite tough; hard times have been experienced; keeps to oneself.

A quiet day today; the lightest breeze is flirting with the highest leaves which are little inclined to dance in the heat, but rather twitch in annoyance at the audacity. Little noise down below, the heat of midday casts a drowsy torpor over my woods. No hurry, old yeller's heat is best at a slow pace, activities and tasks completed mid-morning, taken up again when his authority has given sway to the forest shadows and the long, refreshing dusk.

There was a time, a brief time, when I was young and my world was as it was meant to be. My woodland history was a slow, pastoral flow. But a 12,000- year-old Indian era was in its death throes at the time of my birth.

"The culture evolved, peaked, declined, moved on and was replaced. Politically impotent, culturally impoverished, economically dependent, Indians agreed to give up 12,000 years of heritage and do the practical thing by agreeing to surrender their homeland for white settlement." – 1984, Journal Times, Howard Hossmaster.

The Woodland Indians, along with much of my woodland, disappeared. "Once gone, the Indians of Racine County largely were forgotten. The earliest white settlers occasionally recalled their passing, and sometimes whites called tobacco "the Indian weed." For the most part, however, few gave thought to the County's earlier race of people. Whites were aware of the American Indian in general, of course, but usually as an exotic object of curiosity or contempt." – Racine: Growth and Change in a WI County.

## **PROGRESS**

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in their way. ~ William Blake

The light is different now; there is more of it. My view is different, my land is different, time is different.

Abel and Eliza Cooper and son, Joseph, came to America from England in 1845. The Coopers were attracted by the stories of fabulous wealth and a life of ease in America and upon landing, travelled directly to Racine. When Joseph was 10 the family decided to make their home in the country and moved to a point a short distance from the Rapids, where the government built the first post office. There 140 acres were purchased and a home was built in what was now known as the Township of Caledonia.

"When the Civil War began, Joe Cooper, like other younger boys of the neighborhood, desired to follow the men who had volunteered their services. At the age of 17 years he wished to enroll, but his father insisted that he remain at home. In January, 1864, he gained his father's consent to enroll and enlisted and went to the front. He served for 21 months and was active in the campaign which was waged along the Mississippi River against the rebels and aimed at seizure of their supplies. He was mustered out of service in 1865 by reason of the close of war. Joe married Mary Gifford in 1870 and purchased a farm in Yorkville, in which they lived for six years, at which time he moved back to the family farmstead.

As a Christian, Mr. Cooper came to the defense of dumb animals and those who were oppressed or who suffered through poverty as a result of the lives led by the heads of families. He relieved much suffering and was known as one of the most conscientious humane agents in the state.

When the time came for the city to erect a memorial to the soldiers of the World war, Mr. Cooper was named a member of the Memorial Commission. His valued advice had much to do with the success of the movement and resulted in the excellent structure which was erected.

Mr. Cooper died at age 87, September 28, 1931. The members of the Memorial commission announced that Memorial Hall would close during the hours of the funeral and the flag of the city hall will be lowered to half-mast out of respect to the deceased veteran." - Racine Review, 1931.

## **Beginning or End**

There is always Music amongst the trees in the Garden, but our hearts must be very quiet to hear it. ~ Minnie Aumonier

Sometimes the story begins with the end. The way of memory or dreams about the ones that are gone, cannot be changed. One cannot stop the endings from jumping ahead of the story, the chronology of events of memory cannot be chosen. The chain of events, the links in our story, what leads us to where we are going, what we don't see coming and what we do; it can all be mysterious, unseen, or even obvious.

The story of me, the strong, silent Hickory tree is and will be, unknown to you, just as the story of you, to me, will be too. But that does not mean that my tale is not as important to me, as your tale is to you.

Take a walk through the woods  
Just a small sliver of time,  
Slow down the pace, quiet your mind,  
Breathe deep of the air  
Take in what you see,  
The countless hues, textures and colors  
The make-up of one single tree.

Stand still for a bit, look up, down and around  
Listen, hear, see, all the sights and the sounds.  
Smell the woody perfumes  
Get away from the streets  
Hear the crunch of the leaves that are under your feet.

A walk through the woods,  
The fine art of slowing down  
Relish the silence  
Traipse through the leaves.  
Turn off the phones  
Tune in to the peace.

Get out of the weeds  
Shallow roots in the soil.  
Get in to the trees  
Growing up towards the light.

Sue Schuit

Trees We Love 2017 Awardee  
Hoy Audubon Society  
Shagbark Hickory (Carya Ovata)  
26" DBH, 70' Height, 50' Spread  
Approx. Age 182 years  
Proud Stewards: Phil and Mary Hines, 5015 Crystal Spring