

DONALD F. BLAIR

ASCA Registered Consulting Arborist #245

19414-D Leitersburg Pike
Hagerstown, MD 21742
301 582-1303 home
301 791-3994 office 301 791-5446 fax
301 991-4341 cell
quercusman@aol.com

Reflections upon the History of Arboriculture in ISA's 90th Anniversary Year
by Donald F. Blair

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be able to address you all here in Milwaukee, at this, the 90th Annual Meeting of the International Society of Arboriculture. I owe all of my interests in arboriculture to my father, Millard F. Blair, a pioneer from the first generation of 20th Century arborists. Because Millard began his career in arboriculture in 1911, I used to kid him that he didn't need to study the history of tree care; all he had to do was to remember it. Since my earliest recollections of working with the trees dates back into the 1950's, I find myself now being the one who needs to remember. I love history of all kinds and trees of all species, so being able to combine the two into a love for the History of Arboriculture has been one of the great joys of my life.

The value of the study of our history is learning to appreciate what it took to get us to where we are today, who those who did the heavy lifting were, and perhaps, why they did it.

In the time I have with you today, I can barely scratch the surface of our long and complex history, so I'm going to concentrate on the 50 years between 1900 and 1950 which is the era that covers roughly the 25 years before the founding of this association and the 25 years that followed.

As I hope to illustrate today, some of the knowledge and attitudes about trees that we may think are unique to our generation aren't. After all, 90 years ago a group of dedicated arborists recognized the need for an association to help further research and education in all disciplines related to the care of trees, a profession we proudly recognize as Arboriculture.

The response to that need resulted in the establishment of the "National Shade Tree Conference" (NSTC) an organization which has evolved over the past 90 years into the "International Shade Tree Conference" (ISTC) and finally, in 1975 the "International Society of Arboriculture" (ISA). Perhaps someday, events may necessitate a change in name to the "Intergalactic Society of Arboriculture". At least the initials would remain the same, but I don't foresee the need anytime soon.

In order to place the 1924 establishment of the NSTC in a proper historical context, it will be helpful to better understand what had gone on before and what has happened since in our world of tree care. Beginning at the beginning of the ISA we have to go back to 1924.

The Roaring Twenties. The Great War (World War One, which incidentally began 100 years ago in August, 1914) had been over for 5 years and the Great Depression was still five years in the future. Prohibition was in its fourth unsuccessful year. The average life expectancy was 54.1 years, unless you were a bootlegger competing against Al Capone (Chicago) whereby your life expectancy was considerably less than that. Macy's held its first Thanksgiving Day Parade. Ellis Island closed as the Port of Entry for immigrants arriving from Europe. IBM was founded. Clarence Birdseye invented frozen food about 25 years before television created the demand for his TV dinners. Two U.S. Army airplanes complete the first "round the world" flight in only 175 days! The Dow Jones was booming at 100, gold traded at \$20.67/ounce and the average income was \$2,196.00 per year. Out of that princely sum, a man providing for his family would pay 11 cents per gallon of gas, 9 cents for a loaf of bread, and 54 cents for a gallon of milk. A new motor car could be had for as little as \$265.00, but the 1924 Car Of The Year was a 7-passenger Chandler which cost \$2,095.00 (\$28,219.65 in 2014 dollars) which was just about the same price as a bungalow in Oakland California. Here, in Milwaukee, a 7-room home with electric lighting, running water and natural gas on a large lot cost \$4,000.00.

The beginnings of our lineage of arboriculture can probably be traced back to the prosperity that emerged from the Civil War. Known as the Gilded Age, industrialists like Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Vanderbilt built huge estates with the enormous wealth they had amassed in the decades before the United States began to impose an income tax. These huge estates boasted gardens designed to challenge the best growing in Europe and England. These grounds needed gardeners and as the trees began to be seen as an aesthetic asset and not just standing board feet, the gardeners had to elevate their craft into the canopies.

The earliest writing directly related to modern arboriculture that I will begin with came from a Treatise on Tree Pruning, authored by A. Des Cars and translated from the French in 1881.

"Except in very exceptional cases, or where very large trees are to be operated on, the climbing spurs sometimes used by professional pruners should not be allowed. These men, paid according to the number of trees operated on or the quantity of wood cut have no idea in pruning beyond cutting the largest amount of wood in the shortest time. Climbing spurs should never be used by good workmen even, in pruning young trees whose bark is not sufficiently thick to resist the wounds made by the sharp iron teeth of this tool. Wounds made in this way encourage the growth of injurious side shoots on the trunk and leave defects in the wood which never disappear and diminish its value.

The future value of a tree depends upon the manner in which the operation of pruning has been performed; and the persons to whom this work is entrusted should fully understand its importance. Unskillful or injudicious pruning may completely ruin a tree, and the difficulty of

obtaining labor capable of doing such work intelligently, causes, no doubt, many arboriculturalists to completely neglect pruning of every kind."

Even 133 years ago, Des Cars recognized the damage that spurs were causing and warned about their use. Spurs were first invented for use by linemen installing telegraph lines on poles. However, in all too many cases, since wires go where trees grow, the first institutional need for line clearance tree work probably began with the invention of the telegraph in 1837. By 1861, a telegraph system linked the east coast to the west coast, putting the Pony Express out of business after only 18 months of operation. By the time Des Car wrote Tree Pruning, spurs would have been in use for almost 50 years, giving him plenty of opportunity to observe the damage he so clearly condemned.

By 1907 the Davey Tree Expert Company and F.A. Bartlett Tree Experts were both established. John Davey, founder of Davey, authored a book in that year entitled, "The Tree Doctor". Quoted from his book, *"Nature does not form those health-giving tops of trees to be cut to pieces to furnish "beer money" for a bunch of "TREE FOOLS". Few if any greater misfortunes have befallen America in the last quarter of a century, than the coming of what are known as professional "TREE MEN" in every city and in many towns. Sometimes his knowledge of tree life is displayed by a few dozen Latin names of trees he has found in some nursery catalog, or it may be in his ability to swing an axe, run a saw, bore holes in trees and fill them with cement and sulfur (this is one of the "secrets") and make believe that the sap will take up this "preparation" and carry it all over the tree and kill every scale and bug; plastering also the trunks with other "preparations" and often killing the trees thereby.*

But in all their nefarious frauds, nothing equals their (what ought to be) "criminal" work of cutting away the tops of trees. Tens of thousands of what might have been good trees have been ruined in Philadelphia by these tree vandals, resulting in a lessening of real-estate values to the extent of millions of dollars. A lady once related her experience of asking a "TREE FOOL" why he topped trees. Well, said he, "When the spring opens, our men feel that they ought to be doing something." So, in order to get "something" for the men to do, he called on the good people and contracted for what looks like a small sum to "treat the trees". In other words, kill them; and collect a bill for the ignorant and wicked work. It is easy to victimize the people because there are so many other blunders that have preceded the "Tree Man" or have been committed by him".

So, by 1907, we had been warned about the use of spurs and the evils of topping trees. What frustrates me is the fact that after more than 100 years of understanding, too many are still wearing spurs to top trees. Why? I cannot answer that. We learned that bleeding a sick patient was harmful, so we stopped doing it. We learned after the Civil War that unsterilized instruments and filthy operating conditions could kill just as effectively as shot and shell on the battlefield, so we changed our methods.

Arborists since before Des Cars have been warning us and trying to get us to change, and here we are today, just as concerned, even more understanding of tree biology and just as frustrated with how slow change comes.

The founders of the NSTC in 1924 had these concerns and many others in mind when they founded this society.

In the years that have followed the founding, the world has undergone changes that were unimaginable and inconceivable 90 years ago, and the trees never stopped growing.

Many of the following snapshots of our history came from our archives of Trees Magazine which has been an invaluable resource covering the 37 years it was published from 1937 through 1974.

In 1926, George Van Yahres evaluates a large Tulip Poplar at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and recommends extensive pruning, cavity repair, and cabling and bracing installation. Fortunately, the report survived in Monticello's archives and proved to be an invaluable asset to the author when he was retained to perform an evaluation on the same tree in 1997.

The Stock Market crashes in October, 1929 taking jobs, wealth and the American Dream along with it for the next decade. And the trees never stopped growing.

Ed Scanlon founds the Western Shade Tree Conference which gradually evolves into the Western Chapter of the ISA in 1934. In the same year, Millard Blair establishes the California Arborists Association in Palo Alto, California. The following year, Blair authors the Arborists Creed and Principals of Practice, which was adopted as the professional creed of the California Arborists Association.

1937 saw the publication of Millard F. Blair's book, Practical Tree Surgery. Founded in 1911 in Los Angeles, the George K. Freeman Company by 1937 had a research department and stressed consultation. Their smallest billable job that year was \$1.75 with their largest being \$16,000.00.

In the following year, Fred Roewekamp of Los Angeles Parks Dept. core-vented a grove of compaction damaged oaks with spectacular results. Peck and Wadsworth Tree Company produced a 1000 foot long motion picture film for public education on tree care. The National Arborist Association was founded in 1938, just over 75 years ago, which is the anniversary they observed in November, 2013 with a series of TCI Magazine articles and a unique Museum of Arboriculture exhibit at TCI Expo in Charlotte, North Carolina

A heavy February storm in 1939 blew trees down all over California. The City of Pasadena and host of the annual Rose Parade alone lost 10,000 trees. City arborist, Ted Holderness had to hire an additional 250 men to help with the clean-up! Using nothing more than axes and handsaws, it took a lot of manpower. Robert Phillips' grandfather, Roger Sohner, presented a paper at a Western Chapter conference on Safety in Tree Care. On September 1, of that year, Hitler's War Machine tore into Poland, marking the change from political conquest to World War Two.

Once the United States entered the war after 7, December, 1941, Mother Arboriculture enlisted "For The Duration", sending her best into uniform, and getting by with rationed food, gasoline, rubber, and anything made of steel or brass like handsaws, pruners, and cabling and bracing

supplies. And the trees kept on growing. U.C. California's Dr. "Woody" Metcalf put out a call in 1942 for 2000 pounds of cork oak acorns in an effort to establish a cork oak industry in California as an offset to the strategic loss of cork to the Axis Powers. More than just a stopper for a wine bottle, cork was an essential material for life preservers, gaskets, medicine bottles and scores of critical wartime products.

While the Allies fighting in Europe were hoping for a quiet Christmas, German combat engineers using Stihl chainsaws cleared trails through the supposedly impassable Ardennes Forest as columns of Panther and Tiger tanks spearhead what became known as the Battle of the Bulge on December, 16, 1944.

By 1945, however, the War Resources Board permits the Mall Tool Company of Chicago to offer chainsaws for the first time to the civilian market, a sure sign that the end of the war was finally in sight. Arborist Charles Irish published a learned article on root/oxygen relationships. He noted that horticulturists back as far as 370 BC had observed improved tree growth in well-drained and aerated soil. And the trees grew even better. The second day of September, 1945 witnessed the formal end of World War Two as General Douglas MacArthur presided over the signing of the instruments of surrender by representatives of the Imperial Japanese government on the deck of the Battleship Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay.

When Mother Arboriculture's sons and daughters returned, they came back changed forever and determined to build a country that would be better than the one they left behind. Exchanging their helmets for hardhats, as a direct result of World War Two, they'd be going back to work with chainsaws, DDT, and lots of war surplus trucks and equipment as Uncle Sam hammered his swords back into plowshares and pruning hooks.

Postwar prosperity in the late 1940's and all through the 1950's combined with the severe deprivations of the Great Depression and rationing during the War Years led to some welcome peacetime booms: Baby, Building and Consumer to name a few. Everybody wanted everything they had gone without for so long and they wanted it NOW! The Tree Care Industry boomed right along with the rest of them. With plenty of labor, money coming in to purchase new-fangled brush chippers, stump grinders and aerial lifts, the trees that had never stopped growing, finally got some much needed attention.

World Peace is a fragile vessel and just as the world was getting used to 5 years of relative calm, North Korea invaded South Korea in June, 1950 and we went off to war again on a smaller scale, perhaps, but just as heartbreaking for the Gold Star mothers who lost their loved ones at the Chosin Reservoir, Pork Chop Hill and hundreds of smaller unit actions long forgotten. Asplundh Manufacturing added a truck-mounted chipper to their expanding line of tree equipment.

I think this bit of history is of particular interest to the ISA. The First Annual Tree Climbing Championship was held Tuesday, August 28, 1951 at Burnett Woods in Cincinnati, Ohio as part of the 27th Annual NSTC Conference. Competitors came from the New England States and Minnesota. The contest involved climbing up 60 feet, tying in and going out to three work stations. Unfortunately, instead of working to overcome the criticism that speed had been

emphasized more than safety, after one more year, the Tree Climbing Competition was not held again for 25 years, until 1976. And we thought we had come up with something that had never been done before. I wonder where the ITCC would be now if it was in its 63rd year instead of its 38th? Or any of the programs that had been attempted 60, 70, 80, or 90 years ago? Fortunately, the attempt to form this society 90 years ago did succeed as this meeting will attest.

And this brings this presentation to a close. What the research that I have done into the history of arboriculture has taught me is that as much as the world surrounding arboriculture has changed, the trees have not. Our world of arboriculture has enjoyed boom and weathered bust cycles throughout history. Millard Blair established his tree service in 1922, just a couple of years before the National Shade Tree Conference. Both the M.F. Blair Tree Experts and this society were fortunate to have had a few years to get established firmly enough to survive 10 years of the Great Depression. A recession is when your neighbor is out of work, whereby a depression is when you are out of work. It is all a matter of perspective, attitude and resiliency. One thing my father taught me about those cycles is still applicable today. He wisely said, "No matter how bad things get, the trees never stop growing. What doesn't get done this year or the next, eventually, something is going to have to be done."

Our understanding of trees has expanded greatly since 1924, and yet there is still so much that we do not know about these marvelous beings that we are so privileged to care for.

In the decades that have preceded us, great efforts were made to bring tree research, certification, safety training, tree climbing competitions and other valuable programs to the profession. For whatever reason, many of these efforts did not succeed in the long term, ended up forgotten or dormant for 25 years until another group of arborists came up with the same idea (thinking it was new) and tried again. Fortunately, the ITCC, certification, safety training and hazard tree assessment programs are surviving the test of time and changes in leadership.

Keeping these programs and others healthy, vibrant and relevant are among the keys to keeping our profession healthy, vibrant and relevant. Let's keep moving forward into the future as we learn from and honor our history. I hope to see many of you in 10 years when the ISA celebrates their 100th Anniversary. Thank you so much for taking time to attend this presentation.

The author: Donald F. Blair is a 2nd Generation arborist with family roots dating back to 1911. An accomplished author and historian, he has written and lectured extensively about the history of arboriculture for over 30 years. Among his many awards for service to the profession, he is an ISA Honorary Life Member and recipient of the Author's Citation. He is proud to have been the inaugural recipient of The Excellence in Practical Arboriculture Award. Blair lives in Hagerstown, Maryland with his wife, Laurie and their dog, Duncan.

© 2014 Donald F. Blair

One time serial rights granted to ISA for publication under Proceedings, 90th Annual Meeting, Milwaukee, WI 2014 (or words to that effect. The intent and purpose of this permission is clear) All other rights reserved by Donald F. Blair