

[History of MPRB](#)[Mission & Vision](#)[Organizational Structure](#)[Commissioners](#)[Meeting Schedules](#)[Park Board Budget](#)[Code of Ordinances](#)[Comprehensive Plan](#)[Sustainability 2013](#)[News & Events](#)[Quick Facts](#)[MPRB FAQ](#)[Community Partners](#)[Commitment to Diversity](#)[Tobacco Use Policy](#)[Website Policy](#)[Contact Us](#)[Home](#) < [About MPRB](#)[Back to What's New Listing](#)

Thursday, July 08, 2010

Ancient oak tree succumbs to time; but the memories live on

300-year-old tree to be honored July 11

The ancient oak tree has stood sentinel over the Mississippi River Gorge in the Seward neighborhood for over 300 years. Generations of children have scaled its branches and families have picnicked in its shade. It has weathered Minnesota's unpredictable and sometimes harsh seasons and the urbanization of Minneapolis.

But, alas, the centuries have taken their inevitable toll. The tree, the oldest known Bur Oak in Minneapolis, has died after being in decline for years.

Seward neighbors will gather at Riverside Park on Sunday, July 11, to pay tribute to the tree. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. A ceremony at 7 p.m. will commemorate the tree through poetry, music and stories about the tree. The public is encouraged to bring personal reflections, photos or artwork, as well as refreshments to share. The tree is located along West River Parkway, about two blocks north of the Franklin Avenue Bridge along Franklin Terrace.

"To honor this living thing that towered above us in age and stature gives us a chance to touch and reflect on hundreds of years of our own history," said Scott Vreeland, District 3 Commissioner with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). "It also helps us look forward and plant trees that may be the cause of reflection hundreds of years from now."

The event is co-sponsored by the MPRB, City of Minneapolis, and a number of local community members. It will proceed rain or shine. Parking is limited, so the public is encouraged to walk, bike, use Met Transit or carpool.

"This extraordinary tree has been a natural treasure appreciated by generations of people who have lived and visited this part of the river of what is now Minneapolis," said Cam Gordon, Ward Two Minneapolis City Council Member. "I am very glad that we,

as a city and a community, are taking the time and effort to honor its death.”

“For me, honoring this ancient tree allows us to honor our connection the earth, right in the middle of our urban environment,” said Seward resident Rosemary Frazell. “I hope in celebrating the tree and all the many gifts it has given all of us, we will be planting seeds of gratitude that will blossom into continued work to respect this earth and its resources for the next hundreds of years.” According to Ralph Sievert, director of MPRB’s Forestry Division, the tree’s estimated year of germination is 1677, making it approximately 333 years old. Just think, the tree was around in 1680 when Father Louis Hennepin found what he named St. Anthony Falls.

Theodore Wirth, Park Board superintendent (1906-35), wrote in his 1941 book, Minneapolis Park System, that the tree was “estimated by various botanists to be all the way from 150 to 700 years old....”

Today, the tree stands 44 feet. It was recorded at 58 feet in 1941, but has lost branches due to weather damage, age, etc. Its diameter is 51.25 inches and circumference is 161 inches. Its average canopy spread is 36.5 feet; it was recorded at 66 feet in 1941.

There’s still time for the public to pay homage to the tree as it won’t be removed by the Park Board until the fall, at which time a new Bur Oak will be planted. The Park Board is looking into opportunities available to utilize portions of the tree for art or other purposes. Wood chips from the tree will be placed around the new tree and in Riverside Park to benefit the next generation of trees.

Trees are a highly prized natural amenity in Minneapolis. Aside from the obvious aesthetic benefits, the city’s exceptional tree canopy contributes significant benefits, such as improving air quality, protecting water, saving energy, and improving economic sustainability.

Minneapolis has been recognized as a Tree City USA by The Arbor Day Foundation since 1979. Each spring the MPRB recognizes National Arbor Day with a citywide tree planting celebration. The MPRB has also received many awards for its Forestry program, including the National Arbor Day Foundation Arbor Day Award of Excellence and Award of Merit from the Minnesota Society of Arboriculture.

This year MPRB Forestry will plant over 4,000 trees citywide to replace trees that have been lost due to storms, Dutch elm disease, Emerald Ash Borer, and other causes. Since 1974, the MPRB has planted over 211,000 trees in Minneapolis. The

Forestry Division cares for nearly 200,000 boulevard trees on 1,078 miles of streets.

For more information about the ancient oak tree visit:
<http://sites.google.com/site/theancientoaktree/>.

Related File: [Ancient Oak Tree MPRB, City Resolutions](#)

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