

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 9 | Number 3

Article 6

3-20-1983

Preservation Branches Out

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Recommended Citation

Allen, Ralph (1983) "Preservation Branches Out," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 9: No. 3, Article 6.
Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol9/iss3/6>

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PRESERVATION BRANCHES OUT

The Siberian Elm



When the Alabama lands were opened to settlement, the hills and valleys were covered with vast forests of magnificent trees. They had grown for centuries and had attained a size and character that would bring tears to Smokey the Bear's eyes.

Unfortunately, from the beginning Americans have had a love affair with wood, not trees. We began by building wood forts, log houses, and wood rail fences, went on to railroad ties and telephone poles, and today, one Sunday

edition of a major city newspaper levels a sizeable grove.

What do trees have to do with preservation? Isn't our aim to try to preserve our "built environment"? Don't trees just clog up our gutters with leaves and drop sap on our newly washed cars? Well, actually, just like historic structures where George Washington may have slept, many trees are historically significant such as the Stuyvesant pear tree planted by Peter Stuyvesant in 1647 in New York or, closer to home, the Council Oak at Valley Head,

by Ralph Allen



The Shumard Oak

where the Cherokees met when that area was still Indian territory. Just like structures that we judge worthy of preservation because of their age and character, trees that have attained these same qualities should be protected and recognized.

We have all seen photographs of Huntsville when the streets were lined with beautiful overhanging trees. And we can remember the old country homes with the two "husband and wife trees" out front planted when the house was built. These scenes are rapidly disappearing. However, while we have been concentrating on preserving structures, the State of

Alabama has been compiling its own "National Register of Trees" called the Champion Tree Program. This program tries to locate and recognize the largest tree of each species in the state. There are currently 128 trees on the list of Alabama's largest, ranging from a fourteen foot tall American crabapple in Mentone to an American sycamore in Myrtlewood that has a circumference of 28.7 feet.

One surprising fact is that Madison County, with eighteen champion trees, has by far more trees on this prestigious list than any other county and has the distinction of having two champion trees

at one location. Those two trees, one a hackberry and the other an American smoketree, are on the the grounds of Echols Hill.

Several of the trees are located in Huntsville's two historic districts, Old Town and Twickenham. And one, the largest Shumard oak in the state, is located on the grounds of one of Huntsville's early outlying houses Oak Place, the home of Huntsville's antebellum ar-

chitect George Steele on Maysville Road. Steele was known to have brought in specimen plants for the landscaping of his home, and it is possible that this tree is one.

Just as old structures can give us a glimpse of life in our towns and on our farms in an earlier time, trees too were a vital part of the life and landscape of those times just as they are today. ★

The Champion Trees of Madison County

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Yellow buckeye | 1608 Drake Avenue |
| 2. Shagbark hickory | New Hope |
| 3. Hackberry | Echols Hill |
| 4. American smoketree | Echols Hill |
| 5. White mulberry | 125 Walker Avenue |
| 6. Norway spruce | 528 Adams Street |
| 7. Shortleaf pine | 191 Darwin Road |
| 8. Carolina cherrylaurel | Maple Hill Cemetery |
| 9. Chinkapin oak | New Market |
| 10. Shumard oak | 808 Maysville Road |
| 11. Black locust | 416 Eustis Avenue |
| 12. Sassafras | 206 S. Plymouth Road |
| 13. White basswood | Monte Sano Mountain |
| 14. Chinese elm | Butler Terrace |
| 15. Siberian elm | 2345 Whitesburg Drive |
| 16. Japanese maple | North Memorial Parkway |
| 17. Saucer magnolia | Randolph Avenue |
| 18. Atlas cedar | North Memorial Parkway |

The Hackberry



The Chinese Elm

