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The Trees of Pioneer Cemetery

By Whitey Lueck

One of the aspects of Eugene Pioneer Cemetery that appeals most to the casual visitor is its landscape dominated by large conifers. Few visitors, however, are aware of the site's landscape history, and how dramatically it has changed since the cemetery's inception in 1872.

At that time, not a single tree stood on the present site. And it's not because all of the trees that had once grown there were cut down by early settlers. Rather, this site—like most of present-day Eugene—had been treeless for millennia due to the cultural practices of the area's aborigines who set fire to the valley floor on a nearly annual basis, thus preventing trees from getting established.

Although the cemetery site itself was originally treeless, a visitor could have seen trees in the distance, as the banks of the Willamette River were heavily wooded with maple, cottonwood, alder, and Douglas-fir. And on the nearby hillsides, widely spaced oaks—both Oregon white and California black— could be seen, as well as scattered conifers including valley ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir.

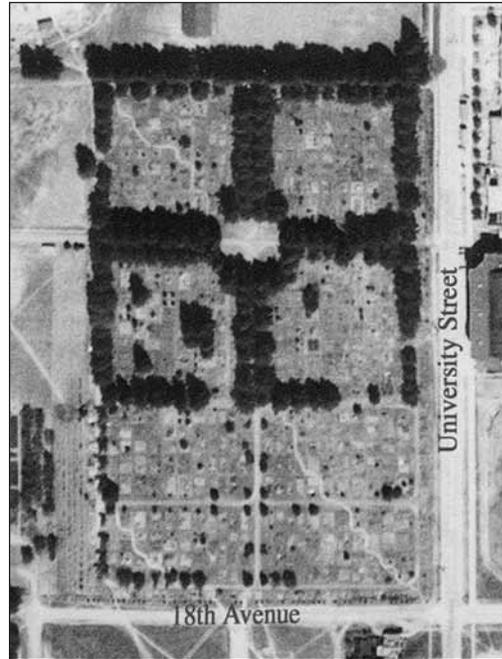
It's hard to imagine these days, but the view from the early cemetery must have been magnificent, since there



Whitey Lueck

Douglas-firs (left and right sides of photo) and incense-cedars (center) line a cemetery path.

were no trees to impede it! From the grass- and wildflower-covered mound, one could see from what we now call the South Hills, all the way to the Coast Range in the west. Skinner Butte lay just a mile or so away. And less than ten



Pioneer Cemetery, circa 1936

miles to the northeast, rising abruptly from the valley floor, were the relatively lofty summits of the Coburg Hills.

One of the first tasks that cemetery caretakers had was getting trees established. Most of the trees that local nurseries at that time raised were fruit- and nut-bearing trees

that provided food. And more exotic trees, even if they were available, required a degree of care and summer watering that likely was unavailable. So all of the trees in the initial plantings were local conifers which were adapted, of course, to our area's summer drought, and were readily available and easy to transplant. Perhaps, too, conifers were chosen because of their more stately or formal form or silhouette.

Broad-leaved trees such as oaks and maples were apparently not part of the early plantings or, if they were, they failed to get established. The native oaks are relatively difficult to transplant, and our lovely native bigleaf maples, although easy to transplant, would have had difficulty getting established on the more droughty "hill soils" such as those at the cemetery, unlike the deep, fertile river loam of downtown Eugene, where the maples thrived and were very popular.

The first aerial photograph of the cemetery site was taken in 1936 and shows clearly the formal design of the early plantings. Rows of conifers—mostly Douglas-firs, but also quite a few incense-cedars—in the shape of a perfect square outlined the northern part of the current cemetery. And double rows of conifers marched toward the center of the square from the midpoint of each of the square's sides.

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Trees of Pioneer Cemetery

These double rows or *allées* of trees terminated just before reaching the open area in the square's center.

Later plantings began to fill in other parts of the initial square and extended somewhat toward the southwest portion of the site. Interestingly, the southeast part of the cemetery remained largely treeless until fairly recently.

These days, conifers still dominate the site—with most of them, of course, well over a century old—but a few broad-leafed trees have moved in on their own, as well. They include bigleaf maples, English oaks (probably brought in by scrub jays from the oaks in Memorial Quad north of Knight Library), madrones, a lovely eastern black walnut in the cemetery's southwest sector, and even a single Oregon white oak near the intersection of 18th and Potter.

Across the U.S., many cemeteries halted tree plantings years ago, because trees, beautiful as they were, had come to be seen as liabilities. There were always leaves to rake—in cemeteries where broad-leafed trees dominated—and fallen branches to remove. In addition, there was occasional storm cleanup and removal of trees that had died. With increasingly limited budgets, trees were one of the first amenities to be axed, so to speak. These days, it's all some cemeteries can do just to mow the grass.

But because a single powerful storm could fell dozens of the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery's older trees, it is essential that the next generation of trees be already in the ground and growing, to help ensure that the cemetery will always provide a canopy which can provide both shade for visitors, and habitat for the many birds, beneficial insects, and other



Whitey Lueck

Planting the next generation of trees is essential for maintaining the cemetery's tree canopy in the coming decades.

wildlife that call the cemetery home.

So it's heartening to see that a dozen or so Douglas-firs have been planted within the past decade in the southeastern part of the site, so Oregon's state tree is likely to continue to grace the cemetery grounds for many decades to come. In planning for the future, the cemetery might consider putting together a management plan for its tree canopy, which would outline the on-going care of existing trees, as well as how new trees will be incorporated during the coming decades.

Whitey Lueck is a horticulturist and naturalist, and an instructor with the University of Oregon's Department of Landscape Architecture.

Become a Neighborhood Coordinator

We all know that urban street and yard trees augment air and water quality, improve neighborhood livability, help mitigate stormwater, boost property values, and help beautify neighborhoods. But we can't plant them without our Neighborhood Coordinators (NCs)—our most vital connection to the neighborhoods where we plant trees.

NCs are volunteers who are absolutely critical to the mission and success of Friends of Trees and work closely with staff members to help answer questions from tree purchasers, create outreach strategies, and organize planting day logistics. NCs organize plantings in their neighborhoods, form tree committees, go door to door to sign up neighbors for trees, and help organize the staging area, refreshments, and potluck for the planting. The most important piece of the equation is the willingness to communicate with your neighbors, get excited about having more trees in your neighborhoods—and, of course, have fun doing it!

A short training is required for this role. Our training will be held in early fall in Eugene. If you are unable to make this training, please let us know and we can schedule an alternate training with you.

We need Neighborhood Coordinators in every neighborhood of Eugene and Springfield. Without them, it is much more difficult for us to plant trees here.

If you're interested in this role, please fill out our NC Training Registration Form at <http://bit.ly/13sm98i> and we'll be in touch with more information soon!



Friends of Trees

Blue Oak

Quercus douglasii

By Aaron Lesan

In our previous newsletter, we began a series that spotlights trees we think might thrive in warming climates in Eugene-Springfield. Last issue featured the splendid canyon live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), a tree whose range extends into the warmer parts of Southern Oregon but is more common in the California Coast Ranges. This time around, we'll introduce the blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*), species with many appealing characteristics that dominates the foothills surrounding the Central Valley of California.

The blue oak (also called the California blue oak, or mountain oak) is the Douglas-fir of hardwoods in California. Blue oak woodlands cover 3 million acres in California. To put this in perspective, that's 50 percent of all oak-covered lands in the state. It is the most abundant hardwood forest type in the state, occurring in nearly pure stands in dense woodland or savanna, and is the dominant tree in mixed stands. Its native range extends from the Central Valley foothills into the interior valleys of southern California.

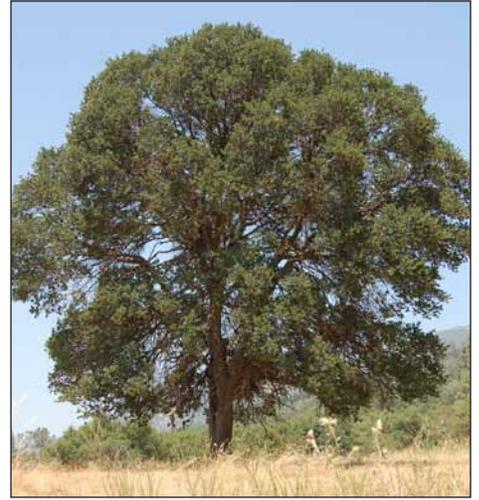
This ubiquitous oak is deciduous, with an average height of 20-60', and some trees reaching 90' or more. Its crown is rounded, and the branches tend to be short and fairly stout,

at times reaching the ground. The bark is light gray, like many trees in the Fagaceae family (oaks and beeches), and is shallowly checkered. Its leaves are 2-4" long, with 5-7 shallow, irregular lobes. The tree gets its name from the unique color of its leaves, which are a dull bluish-green above and a paler version of the same below. In the fall, the leaves change to shades of light pink, orange and yellow.

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of the blue oak is its fruit, the acorn. This desirable nut is brown when ripe and about one inch in length, with a sharp point at its tip. Native cultures rely on the acorns as a food source, making flour from them that is used in soups and bread. Today they continue to use the prized fruit in ceremonies and other important gatherings. The acorns are also a major source of food for many species of animals, including bear, rodents (such as mice and squirrels), deer, and numerous types of birds. As a tree that supports a variety of wildlife, the blue oak is an important link in the food web where it is native.

Native cultures value the wood and bark of the blue oak, as well. They use the wood for basketry and utensils, and the bark can be processed to create dyes and medicines. One native culture boils the inner bark and drink the resulting brew as a way to relieve arthritis. The oak also makes excellent firewood.

While the blue oak is not considered to be a large tree compared to many other oaks, it can grow to considerable size and age given the right conditions. A look at the California Registry of Big Trees shows the National Champion grows southeast of Fresno in the town of Three Rivers. This tree is a respectable 112 feet in height (tall for an oak), and its diameter at 4.5 feet off the ground is well over 7 feet.



But the true value of these trees lies not in their size, but their importance to the landscapes they inhabit. The blue oak is not just hardy and prolific, but it also provides resources for the natural world around it. It is a genuine "giving tree."

Aaron is an Oregon native who volunteers his time to help preserve our natural environment. He lives in Corvallis with his wife and two children.

FREE City Chip Piles

Mulch your trees and your garden with excellent wood chips from the City of Eugene's tree crews. Find free chips at the following locations:

- Peterson Community Center off Royal Ave.
- Civic Stadium parking lot.
- North end of Washington St.
- Jefferson Park, one block west of 16th and Jefferson.
- Alton Baker Park just west of community gardens.





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Upcoming Events

For details and other events, go to <http://www.friendsoftrees.org/plant/calendars/eugene-springfield>

Greenspace Tree Care

- 8/3, Sat, 9am-Noon
Amazon Creek, Blue Heron Bridge

Tree Walks at Sunday Streets

- 9/8, 1-2pm, Bethel, Gilbert Park
- 9/8, 3-4pm, Bethel, Peterson Park

2013-2014 Neighborhood Tree Plantings

If you would like to sign up for a tree for your home during one of our upcoming season plantings, the deadline for ordering your tree is about four weeks before the planting. Go to this link and sign up: <https://friendsoftrees.org/plant-it-programs>

- South Eugene, 12/7/2013
- North Eugene, 1/18/2014
- MLK Day of Service Planting and Ivy Pull, 1/20/2014
- West Eugene, 3/1/2014
- Springfield, 3/8/2014
- All Eugene-Springfield, 4/5/2014
- Arbor Day, UO Day of Service, West University Neighborhood, 4/12/2014

Thank you, FOT Donors!

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