

Tree Walk

This tree walk starts in Robb Park where the entrance road intersects the circle road around the former campground. Proceed around the circle drive in a counter-clockwise direction. You will see:

- Two large aspen stumps close to the river on your right. For years, beaver had chewed at the base of these trees but it wasn't until 2019 that they chewed all the way around the base of the trees girdling them. Girdling prevents nutrients and water from the soil from moving up toward the leaves and it prevents sugars manufactured in the leaves from moving down to the roots.
- On your left is a small swamp white oak tree. Its trunk is scarred on the upstream side. After beaver cut down some small trees in the park, we decided to protect the remaining trees by putting heavy screening around the young trees. Unfortunately, that screening rubbed against this tree's trunk during a major flood and left it scarred. If no further damage occurs, this tree could still grow into adulthood. Despite its name, swamp white oak will grow well on very dry sites as well as on wet sites. It has been the most successful oak variety that we have planted in Gays Mills.
- On the right you can see silver maple trees at the edge of the river. Look closely and you can see where beavers have recently chewed at the base of the trees.
- On the left is a small hackberry tree. Hackberry trees are native to Wisconsin and one of the trees that will tolerate occasional flooding. When mature they have an interesting bark with corky ridges. Many birds eat the small fruit it produces.
- Back on your right is a mid-sized tree with scaly bark. It is a catalpa. It will produce bell-shaped flowers, white with orange stripes and purple spots inside. The bean-like seed pods that you see on the tree and the ground hold seeds with papery wings. The tree is called "cigar tree" or "Indian bean" by many people.
- There is another small swamp white oak tree on your left.
- And a cluster of willow trees on your right near the river. Willow trees provide habitat for a very large number of insects which are then eaten by birds.
- As you approach the dam building, there are two small silver maple trees on your right. We have done lots of pruning over the years to develop a tree form that will be structurally stable. Silver maple trees are very fast growing and, like many fast-growing trees, they tend to break easily. Because they are well-suited to areas that periodically flood, (and these were free!) we will try to keep them.
- Right in front of the dam building are two small 'Firebird' crabapple trees. They replaced two larger crabapple trees that beaver chewed down and hauled away on two successive nights a few years ago. Come back and see these when they bloom....they are lovely.
- During blossom time, compare the 'Firebirds' with the 'Royal Raindrops' crabapple on your left. Crabapples were not the best choice for a site that currently is flooded so frequently. As the climate changes, we will have to change the trees we select for different areas.
- The tall, skinny tree on your left is a Greenspire littleleaf linden. It has struggled as floods have nearly up-rooted it several times. Fortunately it is still alive. It will be pretty until the arrival of Japanese beetles who find its leaves a delectable meal. We have discovered that the

linden's close relative American basswood recovers more quickly after being defoliated by Japanese beetles.

- **As you exit the campground but before you can get to the restroom, you will pass northern white cedar trees on your right. These evergreens can live to be 400 years old. Native Americans used the wood to make canoe frames. This particular group of white cedar trees has been challenged by a combination of insects and fungal pests that damage the trees' scale-like leaves.**
- **Most of the trees on your left as you exit Robb Park are black walnut trees. Black walnut lumber can be one of the most valuable commercial woods but many walnut trees don't produce high quality lumber. The color, and thus desirability, of the wood varies by the soil in which the tree grows. Walnut lumber with knots (areas where branches used to grow) is less valuable than lumber without knots. Like any tree harvested from an urban area, urban black walnut is likely to have had nails pounded into it over the years; that makes it risky for mills to process the wood. Further to your left and closer to the swamp are some younger walnut trees that have the potential to become valuable timber trees—if the beaver don't cut them down and they don't die because of frequent and long-lasting flooding. Did you know that, whenever possible, the Village sells the logs from public trees that must be removed?**
- **On your right between the parking lot and the river are some large aspen stumps. Aspen trees have a relatively short lifespan. These trees were over-mature and the tops broke out of them during storms. Their root systems are still alive and that is why you see sprouts growing from the main stems. The resulting trees will not be structurally sound and we hope to have the stumps cut down to the ground. That is why we planted the small London planetrees in between the aspen stumps. Planetrees look very similar to our native sycamore trees. Unfortunately, during the long-lasting flood of 2018, beaver took advantage of elevated water levels and chewed down several of our planetrees. Then, the severe cold in January 2019 damaged some of the remaining planetrees.**
- **Walk across Main Street to the Stump Dodger Trail. Do you recognize the two small trees on either side of the trail but at a distance? They are Greenspire little leaf lindens, just like the one you saw in the camping area.**
- **Further along is a small tree on your left. It is a Kentucky coffeetree. This tree leafs out late in the spring and loses its leaves early in the fall. The seeds it produces are poisonous when raw but roasted seeds were once used as a coffee substitute. Kentucky coffeetrees seldom make up a high proportion of forests in its native range. People have spread it further through the county by using it as a landscaping tree.**
- **On the right is a very large diameter silver maple tree that is mostly dead. Why is it still standing there? Because the Tree Board has had heated discussions regarding the tree's future. Some think it is an eye sore. Some like that way it looks. Some think it is dangerous. Some think it provides habitat for birds that users of the Stump Dodger Trail will enjoy watching. What do you think?**
- **A little further along you will pass a circle of five tamarack trees. We planted a similar cluster of tamarack trees several years ago and people really enjoyed their soft appearance. Then we had a flood. The discoloration on the needles didn't wash off like I thought it would. And slowly the trees began to die. Samples of twigs and roots were set to the UW-Wisconsin Plant**

Disease Diagnostic Clinic to see if the cause of the problem could be identified. No insects, diseases or rots were found. Knowing that tamarack is susceptible to herbicides, agricultural herbicide runoff from fields might have been the problem. We are trying again and hope these trees will grow strong and tall.

- On your left are three large silver maples. They get big, don't they? Look carefully and you can see where the brittle branches have been broken by strong winds, ice, or snow.
- Across the road on your left between the Lions Park pavilion and the road are another small hackberry and then a small elm tree. We wanted as wide a variety of trees as possible that can tolerate periodic flooding. So, although many American elm trees have succumbed to Dutch elm disease, we continue planting cultivars that are resistant (but not immune) to that disease. Elms tend to be fast growing and they require regular pruning to develop a form not susceptible to storm damage.
- On the left as you approach the merry-go-round is a small river birch and a white pine. I mistakenly thought the white pine would tolerate the wet conditions of the area. The remaining white pine's twin didn't survive. No longer having faith that floods would come only every few years, I replaced the young dead tree with a river birch—a tree that should be okay on this site.
- Just before you get to the restrooms, you will see a catalpa tree on your left. Come during the summer and enjoy its huge leaves and blossoms.
- The tallest tree to your left on the far side of the skating rink is a cottonwood. It can grow 13 feet tall in its first year of life. Growing five feet a year is not unusual for cottonwoods in the Mississippi River valley. It gets its name from the many cottony seeds it produces. That's why it sometimes looks like we have snow drifts in the summer.
- A little further along is a dark tree stump. A walnut tree grew here until last year when it died. Why did it die? Walnut trees don't tolerate having water over their root zone for very long. So, with the floods of 2018, the tree basically drowned. We hope that the larger walnut trees in this part of the park will survive but it may take up to five years for us to know all the tree loss caused by that flood.
- For a while the Stump Dodger Trail runs through an area with silver maple, black walnut, and boxelder trees. Eventually you will see four small trees on your left in a row roughly perpendicular to the trail. The three closest ones are London planetrees. The one closest to the road is swamp white oak.
- Walk past the area of old, fractured cement paving. You'll pass a crabapple with a diameter over 6 inches at breast height. That is the way that foresters talk about tree size. Using either a Bitterlich stick or a diameter tape, they measure a tree's diameter at a height 4 ½ feet above ground level.
- A little closer to the road on your left is a buckeye tree. They have a very distinctive leaf and an inedible nut that looks like a dark brown buck's eye. As children we would pound holes in the nuts with a nail so we could string them on yarn. They make an interesting seasonal decoration.
- To your right are two large spruce trees. The one closest to the river just died. Fungal needle diseases have bothered both trees for years. But, I suspect this tree was killed by the flood.

Unlike its relative black spruce (not to be confused with Black Hills spruce), these spruce don't tolerate wet soil.

- Cross the road that goes to the sewer plant. As you walk past the sewer plant there will be two large cottonwood trees on your right. On your left is a small, flood-tilted crabapple tree. The small London planetree with the top of its main stem missing was damaged during the flood and then by the sudden cold winter temperatures. With regular pruning we may be able to make it an acceptable park tree.
- Soon you will come to another crabapple tree on your right. Look closely at the lower portion of its trunk. Do you see the horizontal rows of holes? Sapsuckers pecked the holes so that insects would get stuck on the sap and the sapsuckers could get a high-protein meal. Sapsuckers seem to prefer pecking on apple trees, maple trees, and white birch trees in town. Trees can tolerate some sapsucker damage but sometimes the holes are so numerous that trees weaken or die.
- Turn left onto the gravel trail before you reach the walking bridge into the Stump Dodger Campground and cross Railroad Street. The large trees on your left are white pines. Notice that the first white pine had a double stem at the top. The union between the two upper stems is V-shaped. This is a weak portion of the tree. When we prune trees that will grow large, we keep just one central stem. The top broke out of the second white pine tree and a branch has turned upward and "replaced" the broken top. Unfortunately, you will also see examples of poor pruning practices. The branch stubs should not protrude so far from the trunk. If you want to learn more about pruning, ask Cindy for guidance or request a copy of "Tree Owner's Manual".
- On the left as you approach the picnic table are three small yellow birch trees. These trees can grow to be 100 feet tall. Yellow birch generally produces the most valuable birch lumber. When crushed, the leaves produce a faint odor of wintergreen.
- On the right is the stump from a large ash tree (removed this year after it was killed by emerald ash borers) and a large weeping willow.
- The pine trees on your right are probably Austrian pine, an introduced pine commonly used by landscapers.
- When you reach the junction between the Stump Dodger Trail and Rebecca Street, look toward your right. The small tree there is an American beech tree. The slender twigs with their narrow buds and the smooth, grey bark of the beech tree give it visual appeal during the winter months. When it is old enough to produce nuts, we hope that some human Village residents will get to eat the beechnuts before they are all consumed by squirrels, raccoons, and birds.

Thanks for taking a walk among the Village trees. Come back and see how they change through the seasons! If you see something that you think our tree caretakers should know about, please notify the Village office (735-4341).