

The Glengarry News

Heritage Trees to be honoured at annual Manor House Summer Social

July 17 2019 BY TARA MACDONALD News Staff

The Sir John Johnson Manor House is celebrating the addition of a commemorative plaque being awarded to two trees – a Burr Oak and a Black Walnut tree - which were honoured as ‘Heritage Trees’ by Ontario Forests’ Heritage Tree Program.

In the summer of 2016, it was suggested the Manor House committee have the rather large Burr Oak and Black Walnut trees dated if possible. The initiative was sparked by Manor House board member Mac Edwards who asked co-member Gregory Gooch about the age of the trees. “Mac said we should get those trees looked at and see how old they are,” said Mr. Gooch who thought it was a ‘great idea!’

Mr. Gooch’s first stop was the Raisin Region Conservation Authority (RRCA) where he met with Forestry Specialist Normand Génier who came to do a site inspection shortly afterwards.

In his original assessment, Mr. Génier “decided to estimate the age of both trees using a formula developed and used by the International Society of Arboriculture as opposed to taking core samples.” While taking core samples or counting rings from a fallen tree are the most accurate way to evaluate a tree’s age, it’s often avoided for more mature trees which frequently suffer from rot in the center which can cause the increment borer to get stuck. The International Society of Arboriculture formula looks at diameter, average growth factors, site conditions, recent growth rate as well as anecdotal information.

The burr oak – estimated to be almost 270 years old – is located alongside the main entrance of the Manor House. Standing roughly 90 feet tall with a trunk 13 feet 11 inches in circumference, the tree has an exceptional 75 to 80 foot canopy. According to Mr. Génier, while oak trees are common in this area, this particular oak is more than 50 years older than most and slightly larger than average. “Throughout all the years working in Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, I’ve come across a lot of significant trees but I’ve never seen such a large burr oak in all my years,” said the forester.

While also a native species, the black walnut is not common to Glengarry being at the northern edge of walnut habitat in North America. The walnut tree is located far end of the property along the back tree line. It stands approximately 95 feet tall. Its sturdy trunk has a circumference of 13 feet 4 inches in circumference which supports a 95 to 100 foot canopy. At least 50 years older than other black walnut trees in the area, Mr. Génier was impressed at the good condition of the tree.

While trees of this age often suffer from internal rot and other issues, both trees appeared to be in excellent condition. “The health of the trees are amazing,” said Mr. Génier. “Many start to rot in the centre and decline after 100 years or so but these have very little decay.”

With more than a decade of experience working as a Forestry Specialist, Mr. Génier has recently expanded his company Dendrotek Forestry Consultants which provides sound forestry advice and services in the Eastern Ontario area such as site assessments and tree identification, tree pruning and removal, tree plantation management, land stewardship planning as well as Heritage Tree Evaluation along with forestry training and wildlife surveys.

“I think it’s as important to recognize these heritage trees just as much as the old buildings,” said Mr. Gooch who went on to say that the decision to apply for heritage status was the forester’s idea. “We seem to be eager to protect buildings,” Mr. Génier agreed, “but we don’t always think about the trees.”

“When I come across trees like this I often touch them and think, if a tree could talk what would it say?” Mr. Génier said. “It would have seen the whole transformation of the area,” he explained. “The transformation from mature pine forests that covered most of the area, the establishment of a saw mill, the development of agriculture and open fields to the construction of hamlets and villages such as Williamstown.”

The Heritage Tree Program collects and tells the stories of Ontario’s unique trees. Launched in 2009, in partnership with the Ontario Urban Forest Council, the program brings awareness to the social, cultural, historical and ecological value of trees.

The plagues are expected to arrive this week, just in time for the Manor House’s annual Summer Social on Wednesday June 17th from 6:30 to 8:00 pm. The event will include a presentation by Mr. Gooch talking about the two heritage trees along with performances by local musicians and dancers, a book sale, and raffle baskets to be won. Refreshments will be available, including a BBQ, pies, and ice cream.

CAPTIONS:

Greg Gooch and Normand Génier are eagerly awaiting the arrival of a plaque commemorating two new Heritage Trees at the historic Sir John Johnson Manor House in Williamstown, Ontario. Here they stand in front of a towering burr oak tree that is estimated to be almost 270 years old. – TARA MACDONALD

This majestic black walnut tree is approximately 95 feet tall with a trunk that is 13 feet 4 inches in circumference with a 95 to 100 foot canopy. “This tree is larger and older (by 50+ years) than normal and is at the northern edge of walnut habitat in North America,” said Normand Génier. The tree is estimated to be almost 220 years old. – TARA MACDONALD