

Baird's Trees Spared the Axe in WWI

What I don't know about trees could fill several really big books, but I do know this: many of the large black walnut trees in the United States, and in Perinton, are just short of one hundred years old. In April of 1918, President Woodrow Wilson requested the help of the Boy Scouts of America, and this resulted in the harvesting of almost 110,000 black walnut trees in the United States, all east of the Rocky Mountains. And for every tree that was harvested, several more were planted, well over three hundred thousand in total.

President Wilson's request of 1918 was spelled out in a letter to the Boy Scouts: *"In order to carry out the programs of the War Department it is of the utmost importance that large quantities of black walnut lumber should be secured for its uses. Black walnut is used by the Ordnance Department for the manufacture of gun stocks and by the Signal Corps for the manufacture of propellers for battle and bombing airplanes"*.



The tree to the right still provides shade for the old Bendent Baird house, just as it did in this photo from about 1940 when Max and Ruth Humphrey owned the property.

The Boy Scouts were instructed to identify the location and size of each tree, and to estimate the board feet of lumber that each would yield. Perinton's first Boy Scout troop was formed about 1912, and participated in the black walnut tree survey of 1918, as requested by President

Wilson. As a result of the survey, a large number of trees were harvested in Perinton, and many more planted by the scouts.

The black walnut trees on the property of Doctor Nathan M. Humphrey (1865-1948) were not harvested in 1918. Humphrey purchased his Baird Road farm from the family of Bendent Baird (1790-1868). I recently had the pleasure of meeting Ruth Humphrey Jensen, granddaughter of Doctor Humphrey. She recalled that her father, Max Humphrey, told her long ago that the trees were spared the axe due to the pacifism resulting from religious convictions in the family.

The home still stands proudly across the street from Midvale County Club, and is shaded by some of the largest black walnut trees you will ever see. The earliest wing of the house dates from the 1830s, and may have been built to replace a log cabin. In all those years, the home has been in the care of two families, the Bairds and the Humphreys. Those enormous black walnut trees have provided shade for both, while witnessing quite a bit of local history.

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