



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article January 12, 2016

If Trees Could Talk

by Lydia Holley

How interesting the world would be if trees could talk! Imagine all the stories that a tree over 1,100 years old could tell us. There is a tree estimated to be that old at Goose Island State Park near Rockport, Texas.

That particular majestic Southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) measures over 35 feet in diameter. Legend states that this tree marks the spot where cannibal Indian tribes feasted on their enemies. If that legend is true, this tree might be shivering from its memories instead of from the breezes that blow through its branches.



Another tree with a grisly tale to tell would be the Hangman's Oak in Bandera county. The mighty limbs of this Texas live oak (*Quercus fusiformis*) held seven men while they were hung. Another man was shot beside the tree. No one knows exactly why these men were killed. The tree has kept that secret for over 150 years.

Tears might fall instead of leaves if this tree could tell us its secret. Unfortunately, the only words to be found near this tree are the ones carved into the tombstone that marks the common grave of these men. In addition to the inscription of the men's names, the tombstone reads, "Remember, friends, as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon will be; prepare for death and follow me."

Not all trees would have unpleasant stories to report if they could talk. The pecan tree (*Carya illinoensis*), for instance, might sing a merry tune for being named the official state tree of Texas in 1919. The choice of the pecan tree by the legislature has always been credited to Gov. James Hogg, even though he died in 1906. Many believe his final request of having a pecan tree planted as his headstone gave rise to the pecan tree's popularity.

Although the pecan tree that was planted at the head of Gov. Hogg's gravesite died, it was replaced in 1969. This particular pecan tree might tell you that it not only reaches for the sun, it holds its head up high for having such an honor bestowed upon it.

If trees could speak, one of the most interesting might be the ginkgo. Known as living fossils, the ginkgo is thought to be unchanged from the time of the dinosaur. Ginkgoes are also unique as they are a species with no known living relative.

Travel to 212 N Bonner Street in Tyler to see one of these magnificent trees. Located on the Southeast corner of Tyler City Hall near W Ferguson Street, this ginkgo is approximately 80 feet tall and is designated as one of the "Famous Trees of Texas".

If you decide to visit this tree, listen closely. Planted in 1889, it may be trying to tell you stories of its journey to the United States from Japan and the development of East Texas, tales of heartache and heartbreak (or at least why it has a hole in the heart of its trunk), or some fascinating fables passed down from its ancestors about a time long, long ago.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.