HUBLER'S INDIAN LANGUAGE TRES
Newspaper clippings about Laura Hubler or Indian trail trees

1.AMERICAN FORESTS (magazine) July 1934 INDIAN TRAIL TREES: byline Raymond E. Janssen

Ever since the beginning of human existence trees have played an important role in the growing culture of man. Primitive man used them in various ways as means of providing him not only with food, but also with shelter, protection and wanmth. As man grew in intelligence, he found that trees could further be used as reliable landmarks, and as such they provided him with another useful instrument. He learned that by using them as guideposts he could travel from place to place without fear of becoming lost. He could also use them as means of indicating to other fellow men the locations of desirable routes of travel. This led to the development of a system whereby certain trees could be identified as definite trail markers. Primitive man noticed that trees do not heighten en masse, but that they grow from their tips. He also observed that they do not turn on an axis while growing, but that once established they maintain a fixed position. Experiment showed him that if a young tree were bent in some unnatural position without being broken, and were fastened securly, it would continue to grow, forever after maintaining the bent position. With this as a means, it was possible to deform the trees deliberately so that they could easily be distinguished from the other trees of the forest.

There developed a custom of marking trails through the forests by bending saplings and securing them in such positions that their directions of bend indicated the directions of the routes to be followed. A line of similarly bent trees thus established a continuous uninterrupted route of travel which could readily be followed. After being bent, the young trees were fastened by one of several methods. SOmetimes the trees were weighted down with a rock, sometimes a pile of dirt was used, and often the tree was tied in position with a length of rawhide, a strip of bark, or a tough vine. The various methods used in each case were dependent largely upon the custom and engenuity of the individual performing the word and the materials at hand.

When America was introduced to the rest of the civilized world, this method of marking trails was in use by tribes of Indians inhabiting the forested regions of the eastern part of what was later to become the United States. Only a hundred years ago the last of this territory east of the Mississippi River was formally deeded by them to the United States. (Treaty of Chicago, September 26, 1833.) This precipitated the removal of Indians to reservations, leaving the territiory to the exclusive control of the white man. In passing, the Red Man left behind him his forest trails marked by numerous curiously bent trail trees.

In marking a trail, after bending and fastening the young trees, the Indian would usuall~~l~~y carve upon them his individual or clan insignia. Not every tree along the route of travel was bent, it
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being advisable to do so only at intervals. Natives were thus able to follow a pre-established trail by continuing in the direction indicated from one bent tree to the next. If the trail crossed a non-wooded area, some other system of marking had to be resorted to, such as the placing of stone piles, planting of poles, or the appropriate use of other materials. The use of living trees was, of course, the most permanent, and therefore the most desirable method. Because of their longevity, many of these old Indian trail trees, now gnarled with age, may have been standing in various parts of the country, still marking the sites of former trails. Such a tree, which was standing in Evanston, Illinois, a few years ago had to be removed to make way for a real estate improvement. It was relocated a short distance away and converted into a sort of monument (see figure 1). Sheridan Road, where this tree now stands, was laid out along the route of a former Indian trail paralleling Lake Michigan. A network of several intersecting trails was recently worked out from trail trees still standing in alignment and extending through the towns of Highland park, Highland, and Lake Forest in Illinois, a few miles north of Chicago. In a combined distance of approximately ten miles there are fourteen of these trees still growing. Some of them are a close together as five hundred to a thousand feet, while others are more than a mile apart. Modern civic development takes its toll of these trees from time to time, and the gaps between them are becoming wider and wider. One of these trees, bent q uite high from the ground, marks the intersection of two trails (see figure 2). Evidence indicates that these particular trails extended between Indian villages which formerly occupied sites situated near~~y~~ lake Michigan and along the banks of the Skokie River, a few miles to the west.

The bending and the fastening of trees as trail markers had a definite effect upon the subsequent development of the trees. They were severely stunted, but nevertheless continued to grow. The original trunk of a tree having been bent down to the ground necessitated the estavlishment of one of more secondary trunks to take the place of the original one. These secondary trunks branched and bore leaves in the normal manner. They may have originated from former branches or may have issued forth as entirely new systems. In most cases the extremities of the original bent over trunks later decayed away (see figure 3). Sometimes, however, the trunk tip would take root at its point of contact with the ground, and the tree would continue its development with two sets of roots (see figure 4). Except that they have increased in diameter, the bent portions of these trees are still pointing in the same manner and directions as when first bent more than a hundred years ago. Occasionally it was necessary for an Indian to place a trail sign at a place where no small tree was growing which he could conveniently bend. In such a case, the bending of the losermost branch of a large tree was occasionally resorted to (see figure 5). The lowermost part of the branch has decayed with the passing of the years, but tree surgery has saved a great portion of it.

Most of the detailed study of Indian trail trees has been carried on in the Chicago area where oak trees constitute the dominant forest growth. Hence most of the trail trees there are varieties of oak, although many other kinds were also used, principally elms, hickories, and hard maples. (see figure 6). The question has often been asked as to whether the Indians used selection in their choice of trees-using only one kind throughout a single trail. While this may have been so in limited cases, it could not always hold true . Trees of the same species ordinarily grow in groves, and a trail extending for a long distance would pass throough areas containing different types of trees. In such a case the Indian would ctually be prevented from exercising selection. He would necessarily have to use whatever kind of trees happened to be growing along the same route at the time.

Difficulty in differentiating between Indian trail trees and ordinary crooked or deformed trees often confronts persons untrained in the observation of them. In viewing such trees, one must be able to ascertain whether their shapes are the results of accidental, intentional, or natural causes. Wind, sleet, lightning, heavy snows, or depredations by animals may cause accidental deformities in a tree. A careful examination of the tree will disclose such a fact inasmuch as serious injuries always leave their scars. Another common cause of accidental deformities is the falling of a larger tree upon a smaller and pinning it down. When such is the case, the angle of bend is relatively long and gentle, quite unlike the abrupt angle used by the Indians. Natural causes are frequently unaccountable and result in deviating directionss taken by the tree trunk while it is growing. SOme kinds of trees have greater tendencies to develop crooked stems than others, and such deviations present a different appearance than the methodical bend used by the Indians.

Indian trail trees still exist in many states throughout the Mississippi Valley and eastward. They seem to be most numerous in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Missouri. Nowhere, however, are they known to be so numerous as in the area immediately north of Chicago. This is probably due to the fact thqat early speculation in real estate there preserved much of the original timber. Also many landowners havd taken pride in preserving such trees existing on their property excpet where it was necessary to remove them in order to make way for improvements. About seventy-five of these old trail trees are still standing within the suburban area of Chicago, many of which may be seen in the lawns and gardens of beautiful North Shore residences.

It is unfortunate that these old Indian landmarks are fast disappearing. The ages of many of them antedate that of our government. Only a short time longer, and the last of them will have disappeared forever from our midst, as did the Indians who bent them.

CAPTIONS UNDER Figures: 1. An Indian trail tree monument placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution, at Evanston, Ill., is inscribed: "This Red Oak Was a Pottawatomie Trail Tree Which Grew on Green Bay Trail Immediately West of Calvary Station Where It Pointed to a Large Indian Village Located on the East Site Of Bowmanvillel"