

# Selected TREE Journals

from Science, Society, & Environment, Spring 2011

Taught by:

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The eight journals in this document were part of an assignment by Matt Mariola in conjunction with the exhibition **Trees: an interdisciplinary dialogue**, organized by The College of Wooster Art Museum, January 18-March 6, 2011. Below is Matt's assignment.

## Assignment:

Choose any tree on campus whose species name you can identify. This map of campus will help:

[http://www3.wooster.edu/grounds/tree\\_map/default.php](http://www3.wooster.edu/grounds/tree_map/default.php)

You are to visit your tree and spend a little time with it on three different occasions: once in the dead of winter (before the end of Feb.); once in early spring (when it is starting to bud out, but has not yet leafed out); and once when leaves have started to form.

Each time, take one or more photos of the tree, particularly its branches with the sky as background.

Each time, write a minimum of 150 words as a reflection on the tree: any particular observations you may have about it at that time of year, thoughts, appreciation, criticism, creative writing, even poetry.

Finally, you must include at least 200 words of general background -- scientific name, a little history, geographic range, and historical uses of that particular species.

Package this all together (which tree; where it's located; background; three reflections from three different visits; and at least three photos from three different visits) and turn it in electronically as a Word document or PDF.

## “Dead of Winter”

It is actually about 65 degrees fahrenheit on this “wintry” February afternoon. This unseasonable weather is much appreciated all over campus. Fridays are usually good days, understandably since one can pretend he or she is finished with all obligations for at least one of the following two days. This Friday in particular seems to have much more enjoy (read: celebrate) than a normal one. I have finished the first round of midterms for the semester and look forward to a visit from a friend from home—all the way from Boston. I could hardly contain myself after my last clas(a) -20 On -20 (w)0 (l) -2 -20

## “Real Spring”

How is the weather? More in line with what I would expect, given the time of year. I have come to realize the weather has been my immediate and instinctual observation. It tends to be the first thing my father asks me about whenever I talk to him while I am away at school, or away from home for any period of time. Some sort bonding mechanism? I like to think so. As I was alluding to earlier, it was quite a pleasant and sunny day, so do not let those clouds fool you...even though they eventually fooled me, since it rained three hours later, but that fact is probably

Visit One:

### Visit Three:

It's supposedly springtime, but the weather is a little chilly. We had a couple days of incredibly warm weather last week, but obviously spring was just teasing us. Although it's not as warm as I would like, the sun is shining today, providing a perfect photo opt; with all the rain we've had, everything around campus has exploded into a green frenzy. Two weeks ago these trees weren't sure if it was time, yet now there's no denying spring is here, albeit the absence of warm weather. Compared to the two previous visits, the colors of the tree are truly vibrant, bolstered by the welcomed presence of the sun. After doing research on the White Birch, I now know that these brown objects, looking like skinny, elongated pinecones, dangling from the tree are staminate flowers. I can hear the traffic speeding by on the road nearby, yet feel a sense of quietness when looking at the tree, as if outside factors aren't as important at this moment. I am glad I picked this tree, and will surely remember it for the rest of my tenure at Wooster. We could all use an extra friend in life, right?



### Entry 3

It is the end of the year and I am severely disappointed. I was waiting for my tree to bloom and it never did. Right now there are buds on there that suggest it may bloom over the next few weeks, but I was hoping to see it in its greenery before the year came to a close. The weather has improved greatly and the ground is a carpet of green. I pass the weeping beech hoping for a change, and I am rewarded with buds. I suppose the most disappointing thing about the tree is not that it is still bare, but that the nearby trees are flowering in abundance. I see its neighbors producing bright petals and large leaves while the weeping beech is still a skeleton. It is probably just biding its time. When the other trees are done with their "pretty" stage of growth and start preparing to produce seeds, this one will bulk up with its beech leaves and become the mysterious tee-pee tree that looks out of place on the Wooster campus.

Upon close inspection, the tree is actually looking more alive as of late. The ends of the branches are producing a little color (the sign of a tree ready to bloom). The weeping beech reminds me how much fun tree climbing can be. The branches are smooth and low to the ground, making it perfect for the initial thrust up the tree. The branches are also very wavy and surprisingly comfortable when you want to sit and look out the branches.

## I. Background

The tree I have chosen is a Serviceberry tree (*amelanchier canadensis*). According to The College of Wooster tree map, it was planted in 2006 in memory of Dr. Ted Williams, who was a chemistry professor.<sup>1</sup> Often also known as Juneberry, Saskatoon Berry, Shadblow, or Shadbush, this tree is often classified as a large shrub because of its varying sizes. It occupies the same family of plants as roses. A deciduous shrub, they “grow in the understory of temperate forests.”<sup>2</sup> The Serviceberry can grow to be over twenty feet tall with a dense bushy mass of branches underneath that can spread over ten feet. It also has leaves that are about two inches long and have a fuzzy white coating when young but become a shiny green as they grow older.<sup>3</sup> In the spring, the flowers are white while unfolding, and only last about a week. After they fall off, the berries begin to ripen. At first they are green, but then change to red and mature into a “purple-black color” when ripe.<sup>4</sup> The berries taste much like a blueberry and are popular among makes of jam and fruit cocktails. The Native Americans grew the Serviceberry tree when white settlers arrived, but there is not a large market for Serviceberries today.<sup>5</sup> Native to the United States, the most common areas of growth of the Serviceberry tree are the pacific coastal U.S. regions from Alaska to California and the Rocky Mountains.

## II. First Entry (February 11, 2011)



### III. Second Entry (April 28, 2011)

With the exception of the absence of ice and snow, the Serviceberry tree does not look much different than it did in the dead of winter (February 11). There is still that hint of the reddish brown bark that almost silhouettes the tree against the background. However, there are hints of buds that are starting to come out. It almost seems as if the tree is prepping for something bigger; just staying on the sideline until it can bloom and become the center of attention. The green grass provides a nice contrast between the brown of the bark and the blue of the sunny sky. Spring is already here, although the weather has been a bit cold. But the

## Saucer Magnolia

For this project I choose the Saucer Magnolia tree outside of Severance. If you were to face the front of Severance, this tree could be found on the far left along the corner of the building. The scientific name for this tree is *Magnolia X Soulangeana*. In 1820, the Saucer Magnolia became the first Magnolia hybrid. Magnolias' have populated the Earth for over 100 million years. They are considered the most primitive types of flowering plants with true seeds. There are more than 80 species of magnolias; several of which are native to North America. The Saucer Magnolia is a low-branched tree with large, saucer-shaped flowers. It can grow to be 20-30 feet in height, and approximately 25 feet wide. The Saucer Magnolia can grow in acidic, loamy, moist, rich, sandy, well drained, and clay soils. They are able to tolerate poor soil, and air pollution. It tends to blossom in the early spring, and flowers are pinkish-purple on the outside and white on the inside. These trees can be found all across the United States; in fact they are one of the most popular flowering trees. This tree is often found in Europe as well. Saucer Magnolia's are often used for decorative purposes; they are historically used for landscaping.

### February

When I went to photograph this tree for the first time, I thought it looked really beautiful next to the building. The rigidness of the building with the juxtaposition of the tree is breath taking. When I was looking at the tree, with the building as the backdrop, I was consumed by the thought that nature will prevail. This seems like an odd concept on a campus where

### Early April

When I went to observe my tree today, I was very excited to find that it was beginning to bloom. Since it has remained so cold since spring began I would imagine that blooming is occurring late this year. I found it interesting how the flowers are blooming out of the seeds that were frozen last time I took photographs. The budding flowers are a very pretty shade of pink; I am excited to see what the tree looks like when it's fully bloomed. It's starting to become clear why the Saucer Magnolia tree is used for landscaping. I am starting to see that despite the season, this tree is always beautiful. Through this project I have a new appreciation for the trees found around Severance. I have found that I observe this tree on a daily basis now, when previously I hadn't given it much thought. I am developing a deeper appreciation for the trees around campus that we tend to pass by without a thought.

### Late April

After several weeks of waiting, I went to my tree today and it had finally bloomed! Recently, I had become frustrated with the fact that my tree had not yet bloomed; I had started to lose hope that it would bloom before the assignment was due. When I saw the flowers on my tree today, I was completely surprised and it took my breath away. When I began this assignment I went online and looked at hundreds of pictures of my tree while attempting to learn more about it; these pictures, however, paled in comparison with actually seeing my tree fully bloomed. I think what surprised me the most was that I walked past this tree everyday last year, and I never gave it a thought. Due to this assignment, I began to notice my tree, and other trees, on a daily basis. I was able to see the little changes that occurred over the course of several weeks before it was ready to bloom. Until now, I did not realize how beautiful these transformations are. What I liked the most about my tree today was the color of the flowers. The flowers were a pretty shade of pink on the outside, but a clean shade of white on the inside. I was surprised to find this, and thought it made the flowers even alluring. Overall, I really loved this assignment, and I am very grateful that I was able to see my tree reach full bloom.

Ok, so I have a confession to make. I never left my house to take this picture. I just leaned out the back door of YOST house at the south end of campus and snapped this picture of the middle aged oak tree which is only about twenty feet from my house. The oak which, after reading a little about oaks online I estimated to be a Burr Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) between 50 and 75 years old. The Burr Oak is common throughout the East and the Midwest including being one of the main staple trees in the Appalachian Mountains and its long straight and thick trunk has been used for centuries as an important timber source. The Burr typically grows to be around 120 feet with a trunk nearly three feet thick. An ascetically pleasing tree and intensely hearty tree, they have been planted from Alberta Canada to Houston Texas. This type of flexibility made the Burr oak an attractive tree for cities as well as it has a relatively shallow root base and small water usage.

Given the fact that the houses at the southern end of campus, including the one I live in, are from around the 1950's it would make sense that this tree would have been planted at that time. Home in Maryland my neighborhood is full of a large oak trees like this one, including one which is only about ten feet out my back door literally in the middle of my deck. It's really nice being around the familiar trees, the same kind of bark and leaves and acorns give a sense of being back home. When I was looking at Wooster for school, what seems like ages ago now it was the oaks throughout campus that I think really sold my

This has been a frustrating spring to say the least. Lots of rain and cold and gray and rain and rain. I heard one person say that Ohio doesn't have a spring but instead an endless war between winter and summer. For the majority of the spring it seemed like winter was winning. However, last week summer began its counter attack. With the warmer weather the tree finally decided to start budding and cast off the seemingly endless cloak of winter. I waited till nearly the end of the year to take this picture and even still there is not a real sign of major change just a slight glimmer of things to come. Perhaps the hearty nature of the tree makes it more reserved less likely to risk budding.

I got to thinking about this today, if tree could talk what would they say? There are of course famous old trees in Boston and Washington which I'm sure have seen their fair share. A tree by the book depository in Dallas I'm sure could clear up a bit of a mystery. But I'm sure that any tree on a college campus would have a lot of stories to tell. Not only would there be the obligatory stories about stupid frat kids urinating on, or trying to hug you in the middle of the night, there would be stories of how the whole campus and spirit of the school has changed. My tree would have a good stories about the construction of the new admissions building and how life on south campus has changed. Some of the oldest trees on this campus could tell us about fires and rebuilding, renovations and new buildings, the trees have seen this campus grow and change and the school transform and student after student cross beneath their limbs.

## Background:

I thought I'd picked an unusual tree — it was shorter and branchy, and looked nothing like the huge oaks and flowered trees that dominate the college's campus. Besides that, the tree wasn't identifiable on the "tree map" that labels most of the trees on campus. Surely that meant it was extremely rare and unidentifiable, I thought. Evidently, I was wrong. After going through several "tree identifier" programs, I determined that my specimen was actually one of the most common deciduous trees of eastern North America — *Acer Rubrum*, the red maple. So much for being unique.

The Red Maple is aptly named. Most seasons it is actually red — in the summer, it is characterized by maroon leaf stems. When autumn comes around, the leaves turn a deep crimson. Buds cling to the limbs like droplets of blood in winter. And in springtime, little red flowers sprout from the leaves. The red maple occupies one of the largest eastern north-south ranges in North America - from Canada to the tip of Florida. The tree is very resilient and can grow in nearly any conditions. One might find it in a swamp, a meadow, in dry, nutrient-lacking soil, and anywhere in between. Though it's used most often in landscaping, the red maple produces good syrup and quality lumber. It also has a long history, especially in the United States, with furniture production.

## First Observation:

It's that point of the year when winter seems like it will never end. When I was growing up (and living farther south), February signaled the end of winter. Now it's just a continuation of the same cold that's been plaguing us since late October. An ice storm just hit the Midwest, and is sweeping east and north of us — good thing the year is so young, otherwise this tree would be knocked out (figuratively. As in, the leaves probably would have frozen). Every tiny split on every tiny branch is covered in a layer of sheer, gleaming ice. The whole tree is heavy, tired — weighed down with who knows how many pounds of frozen water. Classes were canceled today. Most humans got to stay inside, basking in our semi-climate controlled rooms and lazing around. This sucker has to stand outside forever, hibernating and dreaming of better, warmer days, when it can soak up sunlight in its leaves and bring up water through the trunk and do whatever else it is that trees enjoy doing with their lives. Hopefully the ice won't break off any limbs on this baby. I've already seen a lot of fallen branches around campus.

**Second Observation:**

The branch I photographed for the close-up last time is broken, jagged edges marking the wound at the scene of the incident. The remainder of the branch still dangles there, though it doesn't look like it will last long. I keep thinking of Nearly Headless Nick, one of the ghosts in the Harry Potter series. Though Nick's head was there to stay — this branch is clinging uselessly. One winter, when I was younger, the cold ended early, even for Tennessee. Everyone naïvely rejoiced, believing that the mild weather of spring was there to stay. And it did, for a month or so. This gave many of the trees in the area plenty of time to send out feelers and decide that it was a safe time to bloom in earnest. The trees (and we) were all wrong. A sudden, hard frost occurred late in the season, killing the fresh, bright buds the trees had blithely thrown out. True springtime in Tennessee was subdued that year — my dad used to always say that the trees had been hurt, and tricked, and would wait until the next year to try again. I don't know that is true or not, but there was a lot less green that year. And when autumn came and tourists drove through to see the colors, they were inevitably disappointed. At the time, my sisters and I (the unwilling rakers), were okay with this, since it meant less work for our aching arms and blistered hands. We had a large yard, with enormous oaks and dogwoods and maples. But when the next spring came and the new leaves were still shy, it dawned upon us that perhaps it wasn't a very good thing after all.

**Third Observation:**

It's about time, tree. I thought you were never going to bloom, and that I'd end up writing extra long entries on the dead winter-type maple, rather than the leafy, bright maple. This is much better. Really. It's encouraging to see you out for other reasons as well. We've had a few warmer days these past few weeks, but for the most part it is still far too cold in this state. If I had known how bad Ohio winters were before I came to school here, there's no way I would have enrolled. As it stands, I have one winter left to endure here. After that, I'm headed straight down south, where the trees don't have to stand there naked for half of the year. I'm only seeing the faintest of a red tinge on some of your leaves. The all-knowing Internet tells me that, in spring, little red flower buds sprout from your leaves. Evidently, you aren't there yet. Maybe that's your way of preserving yourself and waiting out the cold weather. Probably a good idea — we don't want any freak snowstorms wiping out all of your hard work. Yeah, it's May, and yeah, it's unlikely, but I don't want to rule it out. Better safe than sorry. I'm interested to see what you'll look like in a month. It's too bad I'm never in the area during the warmer seasons of Ohio. I feel like I'm missing out on all the good stuff.

## Introduction and Brief Summary of Oak Trees

I was determined that whatever tree I chose would have to be an oak tree. I had just read "Oak: The Structure of Civilization" and decided that I needed, and wanted, to know more about this species. The article helped me re-imagine the infrastructure of our society,







When I got home, I continued to think about the notion of flora fighting fauna, and I started to think about examples of such a phenomenon in movies.

These are a couple I could think of off the top of my head:

- Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (movie came out in 2002). The Ents, "shepherds of the forest", turned the tide of the war for Middle Earth when they joined the Free Peoples side and physically fought back. This battle, as described in the book, still remains in my memory and was therefore one of the first things I thought of when I

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It should be getting warm...but the air is still cold and everything is wet. Flowers and leaves have begun to bud, the grass is green, and the sun is [kind of] out.

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In April, I went to D.C. in order to get myself somewhat acquainted with my summer home. On that Saturday, I was walking around the monuments when I suddenly found myself in the middle of the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival. I thought it was necessary that I at least take a look and find out why the whole city was spending their Saturday walking/running/sitting in traffic around a bunch of trees. As I walked past the Lincoln Memorial towards the spectacle, I wondered if the crowds around me even cared about the trees. Were they all just tourists like me? Did all of these families and couples actually find the trees beautiful like me? Among hundreds of people, under the shade of the cherry blossoms, I felt both overjoyed and annoyed. I was happy that so many people took time out of their day to admire trees, but I also wished they would all go away. At times, the experience turned into a zoo and the whole area seemed to pulse with the surging crowd. I was not only upset that I couldn't enjoy the site in silence, but I became increasingly concerned with the human impact on the trees. For example, the sign on this tree states says,

*Please do not climb or sit on this tree.*

*Cork Tree*

*(phellodendron amurense)*

*Approximately 80 years old*