

WHAT'S MY POINT?

Narrative, Sue Schuit

1829

I am a White Oak sapling sheltered in my parent's shadow, deep in the forest in the midst of my elder oaks and hickories. Last year's discarded leaves and unobstructed sun have warmed my ground. My mother's protective canopy, high above me, where harsh winds and freezing nights have kept heavy, late frosts from reaching me, has delayed her budding and allowed for a free month of unhindered growth. It has been a busy spring but now, ah, it is June, the absolute best month of the season. My parents are now in full leaf and I am protected from the warming sun. The winter's frigid winds and brittle grinding and cracking are but recollections. My forest is once again alive with soft rustlings, bird song, first flashes of fire flies, bee drones, frog medley's and wheeling bats. The falling rain coursing down my parent's trunks pools at my stem and sinks to my roots. Life is good.

I have witnessed several Junes and am now familiar with my seasons and my forest. While I may appear small and fragile above ground, I have set a deep tap root and am well established amongst my oak grove. I am supple, yet rigid enough to stand my ground; I am straight and proud and am now a member of my wood wide web. Life is good.

I have no warning of my Great Change.

There are no wild winds, battering forces or marauding pests; threats my community would have thwarted. Yet something is, with determination and force, pulling me forward and pinning me to the ground. This simply will not do, I am horizontal in a vertical world; I will fight to regain my balance.

THROUGH THE WOODS

And so it goes. Several seasons have passed and my determined efforts to right myself are successful and I am again reaching towards the light. In the time of my Great Change I was nourished and protected by my guardians; they believe trees to be sacred and I am now a chosen tree. Some say that my dramatic design is intentional and I am now a designated guide for my fellow natives, the indigenous Potawatomie. I point the way to the path through the woods.

We have no warning of The Great Change.

THE GREAT CHANGE

The Potawatomie Cession, 1833. This nation parted with the last of their lands in Wisconsin; about 5,000,000 acres in northern Illinois, southern Wisconsin and Michigan. Wisconsin was first opened for settlement in 1834. The treaty was approved in 1835 and intended to emigrate all of the Potawatomie west of the Mississippi; southern Wisconsin's and northern Illinois' Potawatomie Thunder and Eagle clans of the Thunderbird phratry, and the Fish and Great Sea clans of the Water phratry were removed. About 700 remained in Iowa but in 1846, an influx of settlers caused their removal to a reservation in Kansas.

"The treaty provided that the area remain in Indian possession until 1836 after which the red men would move. Entry to the territory was to be only by government parties for survey. Historians dryly record "terms of the treaty, like others made with the Indians, were not strictly observed by the whites."
– *Journal Times*, Sept 28, 1953

For shame! For shame! You dare to cry out 'Liberty' when you hold us in places against our will, driving us from place to place as if we were beasts." -- Sara Winnemucca – Paiute

My wild land is changing, there are no longer natives silently passing through my woods; there are new sounds, chopping; new smells, smoke; the edges of my woods and wild landscapes, my community, is dwindling. We take up too much space and are in the way of progress; settlements, pastures and farmlands.

1899

I have set my first acorns; I am now an adult Oak. My changing territory is now recognized by name, Bristol, and much of my ancient forest is gone; converted to farmland. My trail is now used by soldiers and infantry, farmers, and horses and wagons, as the settlers tended to stick to established trails. Many wagons carry loads of timber, felled and harvested in my woods. As always, I silently point the way.

Hear me, that the people may once again go back to the sacred hoop, find the good road, and the shielding tree...."

-- Hehaka Sapa (Black Elk) - Oglala Lakota

NAMESAKES

Robert and Fanny Pringle were brother and sister, and were born in Bridgewater, Dakota Territory (modern South Dakota) where their father (David O Pringle) had been a pioneer settler. At some point, they came to Wisconsin. In 1909, Robert moved back to South Dakota. Eventually he moved back to Kenosha County and is listed as a WWI soldier from Bristol, with the Machine Gun Company of the 340th Infantry, part of the 85th "Custer" Division.

The Pringle family farmed in my former woodlands and in 1973 Fanny Pringle donated \$40,000 in memory of her brother Robert, for a memorial trailside museum to be erected in Kenosha Counties newest park; a beautifully wooded tract of nearly 180 acres in the heart of Bristol. "The park, which is about 90% woods, much of it virgin oak and hickory stands, will remain as it is" - *Kenosha News*, May 18, 1973.

In 1981, what remains of my ancient woods, the venerable oaks and hickories, the old-growth forest, was dedicated with the name Bristol Woods Park. In 1998 The Robert Pringle, Sr. Nature Center building, located in Bristol Woods County Park was erected.

SO WHAT IS MY POINT?

Surely, I seem to be pointing the way; the way through, into, out of the woods? The portal to the past, a living link to another world not so very long ago, a reminder for our future?

Whatever my point to you may be,
A trail tree, a pointer tree,
a tree you love, a landmark tree.

Frankly though,
my point to me
quite simply put,
is,
to be.

"Potawatomi people lived off the land for over 9,000 years, but you'd need someone with a doctorate in Anthropology to find traces of them. If you did the same ... today, our traces would be obvious for millions of years." Johnny Flynn, Potawatomi

My natives are gone, my mystery unsolved, and it has been many moons, by your measure, in which my secrets may have been shared...if you had cared to hear.

"Settlers wrote of no "Indian trouble" in their diaries or letters and the last recorded event regarding Indians appears to have occurred around 1845.

In that incident, a small band, mounted on ponies, appeared in Racine with a herd of Bison. They camped on Hay Market Square (now Monument Square) for two or three days. The group was driving the herd of Bison overland to the east coast, where the Bison were to be shipped to England to decorate the gardens of Queen Victoria. At the time, Racine was a village of 300 people. – *Racine Journal Times, 1984.*

The hands were laid, the stakes secured,
to hold the sapling firm,
then father Time applied his will,
in process for a term.
To bind in cause, and stay in form,
but change in height and girth-
this wonderwork of nature,
set to point the way on earth.
A pathway guide - a journey's aid,
a symbol poised to show,
the way to destinations-
in the dark and in the snow.
By language known to some-
and yet to others a mystery,
the friend of Natives and to Downes,
The Trail Marker Tree.

Donald W. Hecox, JC

Trees We Love, 2017, Hoy Audubon Society
White Oak, approx. age 190 years, 38" DBH, 50' Height
Proud Stewards: Pringle Nature Center