

Song of the Larch

(Narrative: Sue Schuit)

The Larch tree, or Tamarack, is the only conifer (and one of just a few conifers world-wide) in Wisconsin which sheds its needles in the autumn. The Larch produces individual male and female flowers (Larch roses) on the same tree and, after wind-induced pollination, the flowers transform into cones. Larch have extremely strong and dense heartwood and the piles which hold Venice, Italy above the water, are built almost exclusively of the wood of the Larch. Items were made from Larch to protect from evil spirits, and women from parts of Asia believe they will increase their chance of pregnancy if a night is spent under a Larch crown. A Larch is considered the World Tree (replacing the Ash tree) in Siberian shamanism. Larch wood is used to rim the shaman's ceremonial drums.

ARIA

“There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.” - Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark

Visit me and you will see a pretty tree, a graceful tree a (seemingly) delicate tree. In the cold solitude of winter's tempo my bare branches toss with the harsh winds; moaning and trembling, I am certainly no shelter for the creatures which share my plight. In the spring light I waken from my cold, hard rest; take a deep, long slow breath, exhale up and outward; and begin my lilting waltz with the season of growth. Soft, bright green needles emerge from my branches, creating a gentle but sturdy bower for the busy, vital tasks of nesting wildlife. My pink and white larch roses bud out and are borne by the crisp, clear-noted winds of my choice season. Summer's sun and glare is mellowed by the shade of my elegant long-fingered branches and needles which provide perches, roosts and rests for the neighborhood squirrels, resident birds and passing fly-way warblers. The season is thrumming with the chorus of life and the fluid rhythms of water music. My cones are now set and I am willing to share any uncast seeds with creatures caring to join in the feast and, with a nod and a thanks, pass my lineage on to new ground.

Autumn begins with a lively, bright allegro keeping time with the swift alterations of light and color. My soft green needles cast off chlorophyll and mimic the preferred hue of the season, golden yellow, until, losing voice, the crescendo sinks to a grave, slow march, a whisper and finally, soft silence, before striking up a brief intermezzo in anticipation of the first notes of the encore performance.

The Larch and the Pine

A dark, sturdy pine and a fair graceful larch
Grew on the banks of a clear mountain stream.
Over the water their boughs made an arch:
There they remained in a comradely dream

Nothing came near but the fox and the deer,
Sometimes a fisherman casting his line.
Always the murmur of water would cheer
The fair, graceful larch and the dark, sturdy pine.

When the wind lifted the larch would be gay
Tossing her delicate sprays in the sun.
Sighing, the motionless pine tree would say
“Soon, pretty larch, will your dancing be done.”

Then came the winter; the larch tree was bare,
Trembling and cold in the pitiless blast.
Shouting defiance the pine would declare
“Courage, dear sister, it soon will be past.”

So, through the seasons their destinies twine.
Often I see them when hillwards I roam.
Long may they flourish, the larch and the pine,
Long, ages long, after I have gone home. – Peter Stubbs

BEGIN THE BEGUINE

“A voice out of the past, not very loud, that went on saying a few simple things to the solitude eternally.” – Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark*

Solo singer I’m not, rather, I am but one beautiful voice in the heart of a vast, harmonious choir.

My modern, local rendition of the ageless composition begins:

“Immediately north of the City of Racine and bordering on the shores of Lake Michigan lies an area that many years ago attracted the attention of Racine citizens. Lying high above the lake shore and bounded by farms and fields to the west and north, the area possessed many advantages making it ideal for the establishment of home sites.

Some 30 years ago, under the stimulus of a few enterprising Racine men, extensive development of the area was undertaken; the land was surveyed into lots, streets were developed; underground wires were laid for electricity; water facilities were provided; and a sanitation system was installed. About this time, too, the first few homes were built and the community became known as North Bay.” – North Bay History, 1953.

“The Charles and Helen Reilly House (c. 1931), 216 N. Vincennes Circle: This is a well-maintained example of the American Colonial Revival style home executed in brick. One of the first homes of the community of North Bay, it was originally built on spec by the W.H. Miller Co. and deeded to Victor E. Johnson, Miller’s corporate secretary. Johnson eventually bought a mortgage for the house and then sold it to Reilly in 1936. Current owners are Thomas and Lynne Fiser.” – 2008, Preservation Racine’s Tour of Historic Places.

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME

“Hear my song, yeah people don’t you listen now? Sing along, oh you don’t know what you’re missing now, any little song that you know, everything that’s small has to grow” – *The Song Remains the Same, Led Zeppelin*

“With the gradual increase in building in Racine and vicinity, a number of homes were built in North Bay and the area grew into a relatively compact and well-defined community. As this growth continued and population became more concentrated, it became increasingly evident that the community’s interest and problems differed from those of Caledonia Township to which it belonged.

Unlike the farm home, the village home does not have the mechanical power, the manpower, or the degree of self-sufficiency enjoyed by the farmer. During the day the men are in their offices and only women and children are in the homes. Every season of the year presents new or recurring problems. There are vacant areas to be mowed and kept clean in summer, streets and roads to be kept up, street signs and lighting to be maintained, snow to be removed in winter. There are sanitation and various other problems.” – North Bay History, 1953.

Faces may change, times carry on, but the song of the larch still remains unchanged.

So strike up the band
The first beats of the drum
Our own unique dance
With the music of time
Has begun.

But remember when
That lively dance becomes
A slow steady march
A fading melody
A lingering tune
To the once-memorized symphony,

The song of the Larch
And my graceful dance divine
Yours is the same homage,
The same tribute as mine.

To that one ancient song
Those ageless rhythms and rhymes,
The never-ending seasons dance
Played to the music of Father Time.

Trees We Love, 2017 Awardee
Hoy Audubon Society
Larch (*Larix Laricina*)
19” DBH, 70’ Height, 40’ Spread
Approx. Age 87 Years
Proud stewards: Thomas and Lynne Fiser