

# Five Miles of Beauty

## Three Walking Tours of the City of Urbandale, Iowa

### Featuring Common Trees & Shrubs

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#### *Trees - By Joyce Kilmer (1914)*

*I think that I shall never see*

*A poem lovely as a tree.*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;*

*A tree that looks at God all day,*

*And lifts her leafy arms to pray;*

*A tree that may in Summer wear*

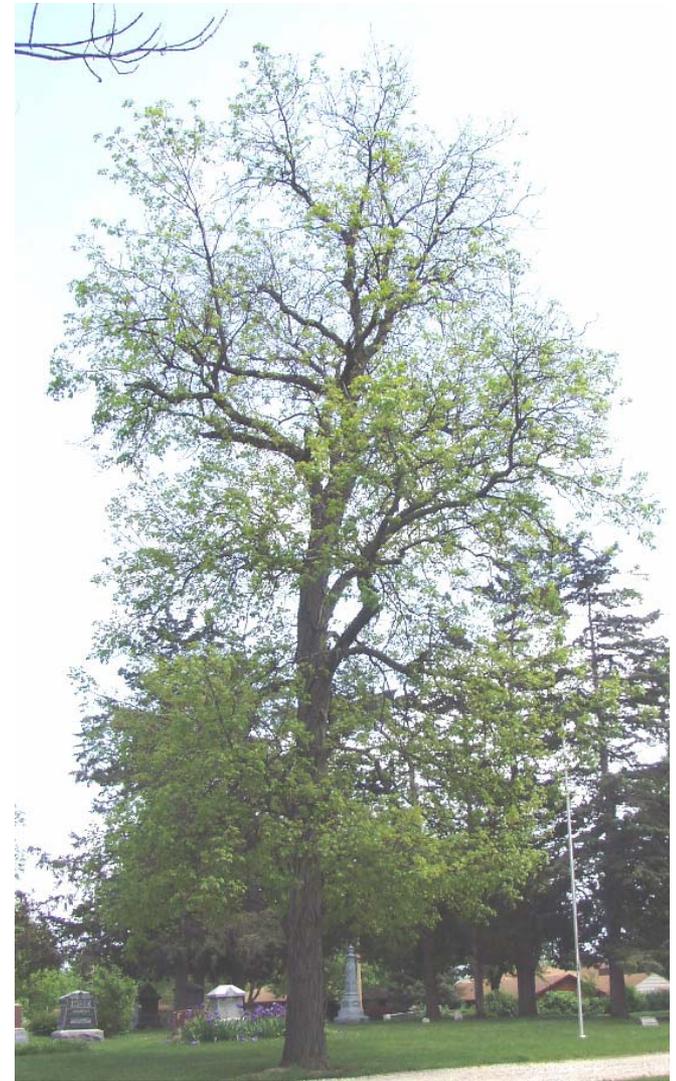
*A nest of robins in her hair;*

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain;*

*Who intimately lives with rain*

*Poems are made by fools like me,*

*But only God can make a tree*



Shagbark Hickory-McDivitt Cemetery

# Introduction

My teenage years were spent on a farm located in the Tygart River Valley of central West Virginia. East of the river lay the Monongahela National Forest, west of the river a 10,000 acre state forest, in between were a few small farms and millions upon millions of trees. I have been fascinated by trees ever since.

The purpose of this effort is twofold, first to share my love of trees and some of the knowledge about trees that has been shared with me by other tree lovers; and, second, to foster the care and cultivation of a diversified collection of trees in our community.

The trees and groups of trees that are pointed out in this work are the ones that caught my fancy as either especially beautiful, or in some way noteworthy because of their location, size, age, or some other quality. I encourage the reader, or, walker; if you are of a mind, to gain the benefits of exercise while you look at trees, and use your own imagination to discover the trees and shrubs that are especially appealing to you. After all, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

When my family and I decided to move to Urbandale in November of 1977, one of the factors that helped us choose Urbandale was the number of parks and green spaces that were available for us to walk in and enjoy. These parks and green spaces were the homes for trees of many descriptions, but not necessarily many species; still we were fortunate to be able to enjoy them from the first day of our arrival.



Before we begin our walk in Old Urbandale, it would be good to recognize some of the terms that **dendrologists** use in describing trees. In order to allow the text to read easily, descriptive terms and phrases will be in bold type. A glossary of all of these emboldened terms is on the next page. This walking tour isn't intended to be a technical paper, but an easy guide to locate some of the trees that you might consider for your own yard or acreage. Hopefully we can keep the technical terms to a minimum.



# **GLOSSARY**

Acidic soil Soils that contain compounds that will react with a base, forming salts

Alkaline soil Soils having properties that are capable of neutralizing acids

Cultivars A naturally occurring variation in a species

Cambium The inner growing part of the bark

Deciduous A tree that sheds its leaves annually

Dendrologist A scientist who studies trees

Diameter Breast High Diameter of a tree at 5 ½ feet above the ground

Dormant The wintertime period when trees are not actively growing

Germ The central part of a seed that grows into a new plant

Hybrid The offspring of two plants of differing varieties

Iowa State University Extension Service A cooperative public educational program of the United States Dept. of Agriculture and Iowa State University

Knot A hard part on a tree where a branch has grown out

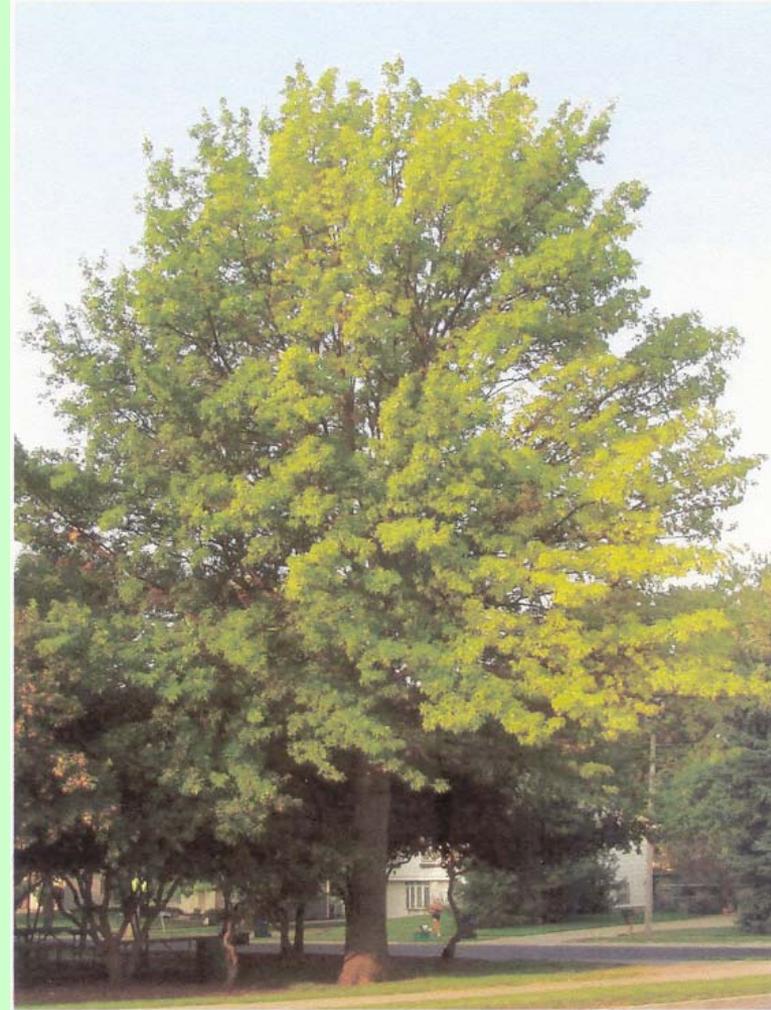
<u>Naturalized</u>	<u>A tree or shrub that has adapted to a new area and reproduces itself</u>
<u>Open Grown</u>	<u>A tree that grows in the open without other trees or structures nearby</u>
<u>Red Oak Group</u>	<u>Oak tree with lobes that have pointed ends. The red oak group includes the red oak, pin oak, black oak and shingle oak</u>
<u>Snag</u>	<u>A dead tree that is still standing</u>
<u>Species</u>	<u>A single distinct kind of plant constituting a category of biological classification</u>
<u>Stem</u>	<u>The trunk of a tree that supports its crown</u>
<u>Under Story</u>	<u>The shorter vegetation that grows under the crown of trees</u>
<u>White Oak Group</u>	<u>Oak trees that has lobes that are rounded on the ends. The white oak group includes the white oak, burr oak, and the swamp white oak</u>
<u>Whorls</u>	<u>A ring of growing branches, scars or stumps where annual growth of branches occurred</u>

# The First Walking Tour - Approximately Two Miles

Lion's Park is near the center of what we know of as "Old Urbandale." The sounds of ball games, children playing, and Fourth of July celebrations came from this area and it is a park where our children played, and now our grandchildren romp. Lion's Park is a logical starting point for our first Walking Tour.

Parking is usually available along 72<sup>nd</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> Streets between Aurora and Prairie Avenues. My favorite tree in this park is the pin oak located on the Northwest corner across Aurora from Urbandale High School.

Pin Oaks are native to the South East quarter of Iowa and are commonly planted as lawn trees. They have a pleasing pyramidal shape, and grow to be as much as 80 feet or more in height. A healthy tree of a hundred or more years can reach two feet or more in diameter at five and one-half feet above the ground (**diameter breast high, or d.b.h.**) It is very difficult to assess the age of a **deciduous** tree without damaging it by boring into it or cutting it down. The only practical way to know the age, or even the approximate age, of a deciduous tree is to know about when it was planted.

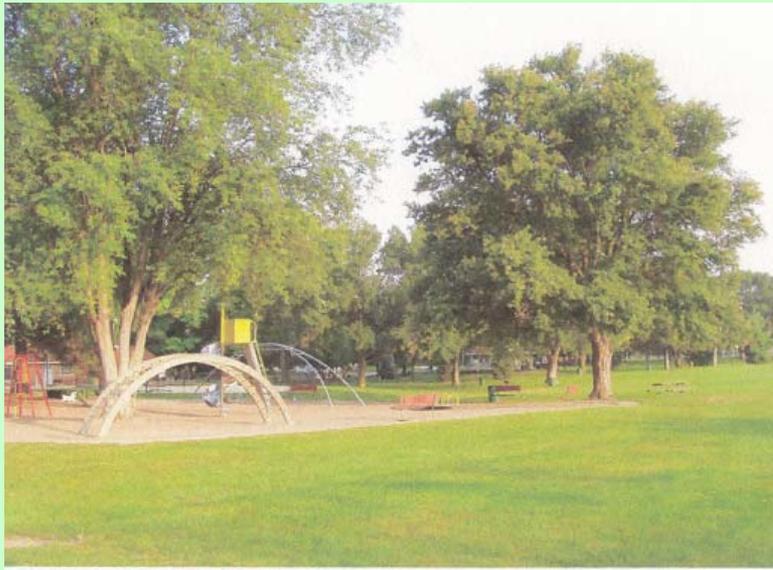


Lions Park has several pin oaks, a red oak, silver maples, Austrian pines, crabapples, sycamores, a white pine or two, and some very interesting oriental maples. The oriental maples are growing under my favorite pin oak. They have an interesting framework and great fall foliage. These maples do well in the part shade of the **under story**, helping to fill in space below the tree.

The pin oaks in Lions Park are well shaped, healthy, and good examples of the **species**. Before you decide that a pin oak is just the right tree for your landscape, there are some cautions. The pin oak does well on **acid soils**. If the soil is too **alkaline** in your yard, your pin oak may look pale compared to the ones in Lions Park. This is caused by the inability of the pin oak to get enough iron from alkaline soil. If the soil is alkaline to any extreme, the tree will grow slowly, it may never develop a pleasing shape, and the leaves will often have a yellowish color rather than a deep green.

Pin oaks aren't the only trees that have specific needs with respect to soil acidity or alkalinity. It is always a good idea to have your soil tested before you spend money to plant the tree of your dreams. The **Iowa State University Extension** can help you with a soil test. We will discuss how you can get a soil test later on.

There are many factors that a homeowner should consider with respect to the oaks. Oak trees fall into two large groups; the **red oak group** and the **white oak group**. The pin oak is a member of the red oak group. This is important because the red oak group is more susceptible to the oak wilt disease. If there are any indications that oak wilt is in your neighborhood, you may not want to plant a pin oak. Oak wilt, while it is a serious disease, is manageable if the homeowner is careful to prune only in the **dormant** season and there are no diseased trees close by that could infect your tree.



The silver maples shown at the left are on the south side of Lions Park. These are typical silver maples. The tree on the right has a good stem for support. The tree on the left has multiple stems, a characteristic that is common in this species.

The silver maple has soft, brittle wood and grows fast, it is easy to transplant, and provides a lot of shade. On the negative side, though, it tends to fork low on the stem, have multiple trunks, breaks easily in a storm, and overtops other more desirable trees nearby. In fact, if we pay attention after a wind storm, many of the downed trees will be silver maple.

Spend some time in Lions Park so that you are familiar with the various trees. Many of these will be common in the yards of our neighbors. The first leg of the tour is deliberately taken on the public streets of Old Urbandale so you can become acquainted with some older trees and some settings that have developed into appealing treescapes. Sometimes the successes are accidental and sometimes well planned.

Take your leave of Lions Park to the south and walk east on Prairie Avenue toward 70<sup>th</sup> Street. Most of the trees along the two blocks to 70<sup>th</sup> are silver maple and honey locust. At 70<sup>th</sup> Street turn right and stop in front of the Olmstead-Urban House.



The three Colorado blue spruces located at the right of the house's porch are a good example of a successful planned planting. These trees are spaced well and by the angle of the planting and their graduated size they accent the home and invite the visitor to come right in.

There are hundreds of Colorado blue spruce on lawns and parks in Urbandale. It is clearly a favorite. The Colorado blue spruce isn't a native of Iowa, but it has adapted well. It has a pleasing pyramidal shape and distinctive blue-green color. When it is planted in a confined space, or outgrows the space it was originally given, it will grow in a more columnar shape. This tree can grow to over 100 feet in height and its bottom branches can spread to 50 feet. If you decide to plant a blue spruce, give it plenty of room to expand.

Further south on 70<sup>th</sup> street, between Madison and Douglas, 70<sup>th</sup> Street is decorated by an avenue of crab apples. These crabapples are some of the showiest trees in Urbandale. They line both sides of 70<sup>th</sup> for the whole block and are nothing short of spectacular every spring.

Crabapples are also one of Urbandale residents' favorite trees. They are easy to identify and can provide colorful leaves throughout the season. They are hardy, easy to transplant, and resistant to disease and blight. Few yards should be without a crabapple tree.

However, not all crabapples are created equal. There are over 800 **cultivars** of crabapple. They come in a great array of sizes, shapes and colors. Blossoms can be anywhere between near white to dark red. Leaf color in the fall can be dull yellow or deep red. Fruits can be as small as a pea or as large as a golf ball. In addition, some trees will bloom after the leaves erupt. When this occurs, the blossoms will be covered by the leaves and you will be disappointed year after year, or until you take an ax to the tree. When buying a crabapple tree for your yard, try to find out as much as you can about the tree by cross referencing the name of the particular tree with a professional nursery person or a good book from the library.

Notice that I said to check with a professional nursery person or a good book, a good nursery will have staff people who can answer your questions and direct you to a tree that will give you many years of pleasure. Insist on speaking to the person at the nursery who really knows the stock, not to the part time help nurseries rely on in the spring of the year. And, whatever you do, don't believe the picture on the tag.

Enough about crabapples! Walk south across Douglas to Oliver Smith. On the southeast corner of Oliver Smith and 70<sup>th</sup>, there are three very large catalpa trees. These three trees are indicative of what you can expect from this species. They make good shade trees, with showy white blossoms each spring. They are not native to Iowa but the northern catalpa will adapt to our winters. The large heart shaped leaves and the long slender seed pods make for a lot of litter in the fall. Try as I might I couldn't get a good picture of these trees because of the overhead wires and their close proximity to the street and the house.

Overhead wires, utility poles, street signs, political posters, fire plugs and various other artifacts can infringe on the beauty of our neighborhoods. Still, even when residential lots are small, and the streetscape is punctuated by our own visual "pollutants," trees can make a big difference in the quality of life.



Walk east to the corner of Oliver Smith and 67<sup>th</sup> street. If you stand on the northeast corner and look east you can see an older neighborhood with utility poles and wires that has been enhanced by adding attractive trees. From this vantage point you can see four crimson maples in four yards on the south side of the street.

It is doubtful that these neighbors planned this planting of crimson maples, still the effect is good. The crimson maple isn't found in nature, it is a **hybrid**. The leaves have a crimson red cast throughout the growing season and the fall foliage is great as a contrast to the other reds and yellows. This is a tree to consider for color and it doesn't usually get over 30- to 40 feet tall. It's another good choice for a small yard.



- The tour continues east to 66th street. Turns left (north) and passes by St. Pius X Church. The courtyard at the west entrance to the church features a green ash tree surrounded by an under story of shrubs and flowers. The green ash is common in Urbandale yards for a lot of the same reasons that the silver maple is. It is easy to grow, grows fast, and has pleasing shape and color. It's a good tree to plant if you want to plant shade tolerant flowers such as hostas and impatiens underneath. This courtyard is a good example of a garden that has a tree for a focal point.

The eastern redbud tree below the bell tower at St Pius Church is a tree that is worth an afternoon drive to see when it is in bloom.



The eastern redbud is small, usually not more than twenty feet in height and twenty feet in width; and in the wild, grows along the edge of a forest. When planted in a residential setting and given ample light on all sides it will respond with bright red-pink (fuchsia) flowers all along the leafless branches each spring. The redbud is a popular tree in Urbandale and can be planted either singularly or in groups with good effect. Its small size and limited leaf litter make it ideal for a small yard. When planted under larger trees, the blooms will favor the side of the tree that gets the most light. In colonial times, the flowers were eaten in salads or fried in oil to be served as a vegetable.

The walk continues north across Douglas along 66th Street. There is a long row of honey locust trees in front of the apartments on the right just after you cross Douglas. These trees are very representative of the honey locust in terms of height and breadth. In time they will get larger, as high as 80 feet with a trunk over two feet dbh. This is a native tree that is the bane of farmers. In the wild it usually has numerous three to four inch thorns all along the branches and trunk. These thorns are so hard and sharp that they can puncture tractor tires.

The honey locust is also prolific. It will become established along fence lines and encroach on pastures and cropland. To farmers, the honey locust is an obnoxious weed, but to a homeowner it can be the right tree in the right spot.



Despite all of the honey locust's faults, it has redeeming qualities. It sometimes occurs in nature without those horrifying spines and without the ugly large bean type seed pods. These naturally occurring thornless and fruitless trees can be utilized by the homeowner to good advantage. When the branches are pruned high on the trunk, usually to a height of twenty feet, enough light will penetrate the thin leaf canopy so that grass will grow underneath the tree. This tree also has a habit of turning to a bright yellow early in the fall and, in some cases, retaining the leaves well into autumn.

Planned plantings are important additions to the community. Urbandale Baptist Church has lined the perimeter of their property on the north east corner of Aurora and 66<sup>th</sup> with crabapples. In due time we will all enjoy these trees.

Further along on 66th Street at 3905 66th there is a burr oak in the front yard by the driveway. This tree is notable only because the homeowner knows for sure that it is 40 years old (2004.) The homeowner told me that the tree was transplanted twice and that it was once run over by a truck. Burr oaks are hardy!

There are a lot of trees along this section of 66th street. Mostly they are green ash, honey locust, some pin oaks, and a variety of unremarkable specimens. When you come to Townsend, turn left (west) and go past 67th and 68th streets to look at the hackberry in front 6811 Townsend.



I must have walked 40 miles around Urbandale and I spotted only two or three hackberry trees. I'm sure there are others but I think this tree that is native to the south-easternmost part of Iowa is overlooked as a residential tree. I suspect that as soon as a hackberry produces the cherry-like fruits the chainsaw is fired up. It can be messy when the fruits ripen and the birds come calling.

The hackberry can grow to 80 feet with a dbh of up to 18 inches. It not only provides berries that are relished by songbirds, it provides good nesting habitat. Robins and mockingbirds are especially fond of the berries, and vintners have been known to use the berry juice to make a respectable wine. The berries are edible and can be juiced for jelly, the large pits, however, are a deterrent to the homemaker.

Double back to 68th street and continue north. As you approach Meredith you should be able to pick out the burr oak trees that become common in the area. Go west on Meredith to the corners of 68<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup>. The south east corners of Meredith and 68<sup>th</sup> Street and Meredith and 70<sup>th</sup> Street have some great burr oaks. They are much larger than the first burr oak tree we saw at 3905 66th. By comparison, these trees could be as much as 25 years older than the 40 year old tree on 66th. This should give you an idea of what to expect of a burr oak 60 to 65 years old in Urbandale. Keep in mind that differing soils or other factors could affect the growth of a tree on your property.

If you plant trees that produce acorns or nuts, you will be inviting squirrels, squinties, blue jays, and other wildlife to dinner. The burr oak is a member of the white oak family and its acorns are favored by many of God's creatures. White oaks usually produce acorns annually, but occasionally a crop will fail. Recent research has indicated that a squirrel will prefer white oak acorns over red oak acorns when both are available in the fall.



This preference is actually a survival tactic. The white oak acorn will germinate within a few weeks of falling, and once it sends out a taproot it is no longer edible by the squirrel. If a squirrel has ample supplies of white oak acorns, it will bury the excess, but it will chew out the **germ** of the seed first so that it won't sprout. This way the white oak acorns will keep in the ground for up to six months to provide winter food. Oaks in the red oak group don't sprout until spring so the squirrel doesn't bite these acorns before it buries them

Cemeteries can be a treasure trove for people who want to view mature trees. McDivitt Cemetery across Meredith from the 70<sup>th</sup> street intersection is no exception. The entrance is graced by a long row of mature eastern red cedar. This is the tree that woodworkers favor for the aromatic cedar wood that is used in chests and closets. It is one of the most widely distributed native trees of North America, and is found in all Iowa counties. Even though it is not often thought of as a lawn specimen, it will spring up after the seeds are distributed by birds, and homeowners have been known to cultivate it. It provides food for birds with its berry-like cones and its thick needles and branches provide excellent nesting for many species, especially cardinals and the cedar waxwing. It is an evergreen standout in all seasons.



McDivitt Cemetery is home to several black walnut and shagbark hickories. It's a great place to gather nuts in the fall or to just sit and listen to the birds and think for a spell.



You should have no difficulty identifying these large trees in the middle of McDivitt Cemetery. The black walnut in this photo and the shagbark hickory in the far background are typical of these trees in size and shape. The small tree in the foreground is a gray dogwood.

There are lots of walnut trees scattered throughout Urbandale. No doubt you've heard the stories about the farmer who sold a large walnut tree on the back 40 for \$20,000 or more. Why, then, did the guy in the dump truck charge you \$1500 to cut down and cart off that large walnut tree in your back yard that you tired of?

There are good reasons for that.

The black walnut is a good example of a tree that responds to its planting site. Planted on open ground, without obstructions, the walnut (as well as many other trees) grows rapidly and branches profusely. The lower branches grow large and each branch produces a “**knot**” or imperfection in the **stem** of the tree. This “**open grown**” tree will form a fork at a low level thus stopping the development of a quality timber tree. Such a tree is not worth more than firewood.

On the other hand, a black walnut grown in a forest setting with other trees close by may not branch or fork for many years. Instead, it will “reach for the sun” developing a long, straight, trunk with few, if any imperfections. The lower branches that do develop will die for lack of light and a twenty-five year old forest or “close grown” tree may be 25-30 feet tall and only six inches dbh. This tree will eventually develop a crown that provides shade to its lower areas and, over the next 100-125 years develop a trunk more than three feet in diameter and fifty feet from the ground to the first branch. This, my friends, is the \$20,000 tree.



Red Cedar

The homeowner may never see a \$20,000 tree in his or her back yard, but the walnut is such an interesting and productive tree that it should be considered if there is a proper site. At the same time, the walnut can be messy and time consuming. Raking up the leaves and picking up the nuts and shells that the squirrels leave behind can be frustrating.

It's time to leave McDivitt Cemetery and walk west on Meredith.

On the south west corner of Meredith and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street there is a yellow poplar. This isn't a great specimen because it has a low fork that distracts from its ultimate beauty. Nevertheless, the yellow poplar is a tree worth considering for the homeowner.

The yellow poplar is native to the Ohio River Valley and does best in large, uninterrupted stands from 1500 feet above sea level to 2500 feet above sea level. The virgin forests of the Appalachians contained billions of board feet of this important tree. Some trees in the original stands reached 120 feet in height and were in excess of six feet in diameter. The period after the American Civil War through the 1920's was the heyday for this magnificent hardwood. After the 1920's there were few trees over one foot dbh left in the forests. Today, it is making a comeback as second and third cuttings are being harvested to feed the current housing boom. While the virgin cuttings of this tree went principally to Europe as solid 4 foot by 8 foot sheets of paneling, today's harvest is mostly for plywood.



The yellow poplar will do well in Iowa, and should be a consideration for any homeowner who wants a relatively trouble free shade tree. Careful pruning when the tree is young, can train the tree to have a long straight trunk up to 20 feet before the first branch or fork develops and the crown that forms above this point will provide dense shade. The flowers of the yellow poplar are large and filled with nectar; so much so, that in Appalachia it is referred to as the "bee tree," and the honey produced by bee's feeding on its blossoms is prized.



Don't quit yet! We're on the home stretch. Follow 72<sup>nd</sup> Street South toward Urbandale High School. On the way notice the Colorado blue spruce at 4408 72<sup>nd</sup>. While this isn't the best blue spruce in Urbandale it's close to it. What I like about this blue spruce is that it is a house finch condominium. From early spring until late fall this blue spruce, and most others as well, is home to this delightful songbird. In addition, cardinals and other birds will also nest here. In the winter it provides shelter for the titmouse and chickadee.

Across the street from the blue spruce, at 4409 72nd, is a serviceberry. (That's pronounced "sarvicebury" y'all.) The serviceberry is also called "June berry" for the sweet purple berries that can be eaten or left for the birds, whichever you wish. These berries follow a great show of white blossoms and it is a regular bloomer. It's a great small tree for the under story or border.



Continue south on 72<sup>nd</sup> and just before you enter the High School parking lot you might be able to distinguish the elderberries that hang over the sidewalk on the east side of the street. It's a riot every August when the local winemakers compete with the grade school children and the birds for these goodies.

The final leg of this walk in Old Urbandale is through the high school walk way between the old part of the school and the new addition. This should lead you very near to where you parked your car by Lion's Park.



# The Second Walking Tour

## Approximately One and One Half Miles

The Second Walking Tour will be mostly on the Greenbelt area around Lakeview Park and north toward Interstate 80/35 and Northview Park. Parking is usually available along Townsend Avenue west of 76<sup>th</sup> street by the soccer fields, so this is where we will begin.

Start by walking south along the tree line at the easternmost part of the soccer fields. This tree line is a border with a drainage that is usually dry but can have moving water after a good rain. There are a number of trees and shrubs in this drainage trough. Most are not of interest to the homeowner looking for a yard plant. One tree though, is worthy of discussion.

There are several dead trees about 25 feet tall and no more than 10 inches dbh along this ditch. Many of these **snags** are American elm trees. The American elm once graced streets throughout our country as one of the most desired of all native shade trees. It would reach heights of 100 feet or more and develop a large crown above a vase shaped cluster of stems. These elms, when planted along streets, would form such broad crowns that the branches would intertwine overhead to provide an avenue of shade for the streets and yards below.

But no more! The Dutch elm disease that entered our country about 1930 has ravaged this beautiful tree. The trees still sprout from old roots, but before they are large enough to flower, they inevitably succumb to the disease. There is hope that some day resistant cultivars of this tree will be discovered, but the reality is that it will probably slowly die out completely.

When you reach the southeastern most corner of the soccer field, where a path continues toward the Jr. High School, turn right and go twenty paces west. You should be standing next to a respectfully sized American elm. Study this tree carefully. It stands about twenty feet tall and about 8 inches dbh. It is about as large a living American elm as you will find. Hopefully, when you find this tree it will still be alive and you will be able to tell your grandchildren about your visit with Americana.

Follow the tree line west and turn the corner to the south toward Lakeview Park. The entire wooded area to your left is similar to the trees along the drainage where we started. You might want to use some of this walking time to pick out more American elms, as they are abundantly mixed in with the rest of the flora. Continue walking straight south until you come to the blacktop path that circles the Lake. Other species that are in this wooded area are Siberian elm, mulberry, green ash, and some Eastern redbud. The Siberian elm and mulberry are not appropriate for residential planting and are both considered weeds by most farmers and foresters.

Lakeview Park has a large number of trees that the Urbandale Parks and Recreation Department has planted. I will point out the trees that caught my eye. You, however, may spot other trees that you like better, and that's OK!

Turn left on the blacktop walkway and circle the Lake clockwise. As you approach the dam there is a group of river birch in the center of the intersection. The river birch is native to the southeast one third of Iowa and does well in the Urbandale area. These river birch trees are typical of what a homeowner can expect of trees 10 to 15 years old. The multiple stems and small sized leaves make it ideal for a small lot or area. They can, however grow to impressive heights and girths.



The larger trees often have roots that come to the surface and make lawn care difficult. When trees are young, as these are, the homeowner can successfully plant flowers, both annuals and perennials underneath them. Some homeowners will replace their river birch as soon as they reach an undesirable height. They are fast growers so this tactic is convenient, but expensive.

Walk south from the river birch across the dam. Look east toward the Jr. High school to see the black willows that line the drainage trough below the dam. This is the same drainage that we followed in from Townsend Avenue by the soccer field. The additional moisture here has made a suitable place for the willows to grow. These water loving trees will sprout along any waterway that has water available for most of the year. The water can be either moving or standing.



The willow that you might choose for your yard would be cultivars of this tree that have been imported from China. We will see good specimen of the weeping willow on Walking Tour Three.

After you leave the dam and walk west you will pass three pin oaks on you left between the asphalt path and Aurora Avenue.



Stop walking when you get to a point opposite of where you first entered Lakeview Park and found the walkway. Look across the lake to locate the small sugar maple by the sign on the other side. This photo was taken in the first week of October and shows a typical sugar maple in its annual color change. Part of the tree is bright red and part of the tree is green. As soon as all the leaves turn color they will begin to drop. This tree was completely bare only two weeks after the first color change was noticed. This doesn't mean, though that all sugar maples will have a short color season. Some are brilliant for three weeks or more.

Some people plant silver maples because they like the red color that the young trees display in the fall. The silver maple is a fast grower so a sizable tree is above the roofline in just a few years. Silver maples, however, rarely maintain the characteristic of changing to red leaves in the fall. Once a silver maple reaches 15 to 20 years of age, its leaves will change to a yellow, rather than red. The homeowner who wants a tree that can have bright red leaves each autumn would be better advised to plant a sugar maple or a red maple, and then exercise patience while these slower growing trees reach a substantial size. Eventually, a sugar maple can reach 100 feet in height and three feet in diameter. Some have been known to live for 150 or more years.

Further along, about two hundred feet, there are some white ash trees between the walk and the lake.



The white ash is a good choice for the homeowner who wants a tree of smaller proportions that provides a pleasing shape and fall color. Like its cousins, the green ash and the blue ash, it is relatively fast growing. The purple color of the fall leaves is especially beautiful.

The resident who is planning to plant ash trees needs to be aware of a recent insect infestation that is threatening all of the ashes. In the late 1990's the emerald ash borer was found in a Michigan nursery. It has since moved to several locations in Michigan and also to the east coast around Philadelphia.

This insect has the potential to do to a great deal of damage to ash trees if it should find its way to our area. The emerald ash borer lays its eggs under the bark of ash trees and the larvae eat the **cambium** layer of the tree's outer protection. All trees, so far as we know, that have been attacked by this insect have died within a few years.



The emerald ash borer has the potential to damage much more than our trees. It could force a major change in our national pastime. For more than 80 years, Major League baseball has favored bats made from white ash. If we lose the white ash the best baseball players in the world may have to switch to aluminum bats. Alternative woods sometimes used by bat manufacturers are sugar and red maples.

At the westernmost point of the circuit around Lakeview there is a red maple with three Austrian pines nearby. The juxtaposition of the pines with this the red maple emphasizes the red fall foliage of the maple. This cluster of trees is a good example of how trees of differing species can compliment one another. The Austrian pines however, are susceptible to a disease that may limit their life span.

The asphalt walk continues around the west end of the lake and branches off toward Townsend Avenue just after the pavement turns east. Follow the north branch toward Townsend.

One of Urbandale's most spectacular trees is on your left about halfway to Townsend.

If the Lone Ranger were in these parts, he would no doubt tell Tonto to meet him underneath this wonderful cottonwood. The cottonwood is one of the largest of the eastern hardwoods. It can grow to 100 feet and the trunk diameter is often as much as four feet.

Its wood is light and strong and has many commercial uses. In most cases the cottonwood is too large for a residential lot, but it can be used for a shade tree on a small acreage. It is also one of the fastest growing native trees. The tree pictured here is in excess of five feet dbh and 85 feet to the top. Its an Urbandale treasure.

The cottonwood's large limbs form a very attractive latticework during the dormant season, and its leaves will dance in a breeze making sounds like a gentle waterfall. One of its shortcomings though, is the cottony covering on the seeds that blow in the wind when the seeds are ripe. The seeds can become a nuisance when thousands of them find their way to your air conditioner's condensing unit and plug up the coils.



Pass by the cottonwood and look straight ahead to the pedestrian tunnel that goes under Townsend Avenue.

Staghorn sumac bushes are on both sides of the tunnel entrance. This large shrub is native to eastern Iowa but has **naturalized** well in central Iowa. Its leaves are among some of the earliest to turn red in late summer and they stay on the branches well into the fall.

Staghorn sumac isn't often thought of as a residential plant, but some of our neighbors have utilized it on front lawns. It can become a thicket if the home owner isn't careful, but keeping it in check by annual pruning and culling of unwanted sprouts isn't difficult and a well tended staghorn sumac can set your yard apart.



The yellow-green trees in the background of the picture of the staghorn sumac are green ash. After you go through the tunnel the walk takes first a right and then an immediate left. On the right hand side of the walk after the left turn is a Norway maple.



The Norway maple is native to northern Europe from Norway to the Caucasus. It is very similar in appearance to the sugar maple and is often confused with it. The Norway maple is smaller than the sugar maple at maturity. The easiest way to distinguish the Norway maple from a sugar maple is to break the stem of a leaf. If a milky juice flows out, it is a Norway maple. This tree is a good choice for a yard that is too small for a sugar maple, but keep in mind that the leaves usually turn yellow in the fall rather than the bright red of the sugar maple.

While you're looking at the Norway maple be sure to notice the shrub next to the walk on the west side of the tree. This is a red-osier dogwood. This dogwood is a native plant that has beautiful red stems that make a great display in winter. The plant can grow to 15 feet and it can become a thicket if not managed. It's a great shrub for a windbreak or screen.

The shrub between the Norway maple and the red-osier dogwood is an American hazelnut. This shrub should be a must for anyone who has room for it. It is relatively easy to care for and produces white blossoms in the spring followed by delicious nuts around the first of September. Wildlife relish these nuts. (People do too!)

Walk through the pedestrian tunnel under Meredith Drive and look west across the greenbelt to the grove of bald cypress. Most people would wonder why this swamp loving tree; one that we usually think of as a tree that grows only along the southern coastline of the United States, would be thriving in Urbandale, Iowa. The bald cypress is actually native to the extreme south eastern counties of Iowa and grows along the rich bottomlands of the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers.



The bald cypress is a deciduous fir. Its leaves are needles just as the leaves of other firs are needles. Each fall it sheds the needles in the same way that other deciduous hardwoods shed their leaves and its branches frame the winter sky bare as oaks. This tree adapts to upland sites as well as to lowlands that are covered by water. Its wood is naturally rot resistant and many docks along the lower Mississippi are made from this tree and have been in place for nearly 200 years. Some living bald cypress trees are believed to be as much as 2000 years old.

The bald cypress is tall and narrow so it can fit into a medium sized yard. Its summer leaves are feathery in texture and provide great nesting for birds. The fallen needles do, however, tend to mat on the ground under the trees.

Walk west on Meredith Avenue past the bald cypress to the little park with picnic tables at 82<sup>nd</sup> Street. This small space in Urbandale's greenbelt is home to two trees that have character.



The white pine on the left is the largest white pine I found. It is about 29 inches dbh and is about 65 feet tall. The red cedar on the right is about 50 feet tall and 22 inches dbh. I estimated the age of the white pine by counting the branch **whorls** or whorl scars all along the trunk. Some whorls had to be estimated as tree growth has obliterated the scars at the bottom and in part of the midsection. As you can see this is not an exact science. Still, I would estimate this tree to be about 40 years old.

The red cedar on the right is another story. It doesn't grow a new whorl of branches each year the way a white pine does. We can, however infer this tree's age to some degree. Red cedar grows much more slowly than the white pine. Since these two trees are growing close together we can also guess that soil and growing conditions are similar. It would be reasonable to assume that the red cedar is at least as old as the white pine, or possibly older. My conclusion is that this red cedar is probably 40 plus years old.

Retrace your steps to the greenbelt that goes north of Meredith and enters North View Park. There are two little leaf linden trees on the left about halfway to North View. The “little leaf” or European linden is a hybrid that is relatively easy to grow and has few disadvantages. It’s a great lawn tree and the blossoms can perfume a city block in the spring.



Walk due north, by way of 80<sup>th</sup> Place, to the entrance of North View Park where Urbandale Parks and Recreation has planted a number of staghorn sumac. Inside the park there are a large number of small green ash and silver maple trees planted along the roadway. The only remarkable trees in this area are a group of volunteer black cherry along the west edge of the park in the land that separates the park from the residences. In early September these trees are loaded with wild cherries.

The fruits of the wild cherry hang in large clusters and are a favorite for our avian friends. The fallen cherries are messy and the trees are not especially attractive. The wood of forest grown black cherry trees is highly prized by wood workers and furniture makers, but as a residential tree this one doesn’t fare too well.

Walk through the park between the ball fields to the east gate. On the north side of the traffic circle there are three mature oak trees, one red oak and two white oaks. These trees could easily be century trees. That is, 100 or more years old. The vantage point for viewing these trees is a little difficult due to the brush underneath, but the viewer will get an understanding of what our ancestors saw when they first came to the area. The red oak is on the left.



Exit North View Park to the east through the gate and turn right on the walkway that leads back to the greenbelt. The woods on the right offer little in the way of good lawn trees that the homeowner would find interesting.

The under story of this parcel, however, is another matter, but the matter isn't good. A shrub called the bush honeysuckle has captured a sizable portion of the woodland. This honeysuckle isn't native to Iowa and is considered an **invasive species**.

It grows to a height of 15 feet or more and is very shade tolerant. This enables it to grow in the under story and crowd out our more desirable native plants. Birds spread the abundant seeds of the honeysuckle and it damages woodlands for miles around. It is highly recommended that homeowners not plant the shrub and destroy it when it is on their property.

George Warford, Iowa DNR  
District Forester identifies the  
bush honeysuckle.



The walk you are on now winds back to the greenbelt and follows a path between 77<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> streets. After about 150 yards there is a crosswalk that joins these two streets. On the east side of this crosswalk there is a good example of a Washington hawthorn. This shrub is an attractive small, bush like tree with a short trunk and a rounded crown. It is a regular spring bloomer, with a profusion of small white flowers. It is green through the summer and the small bright red fruits become conspicuous in late summer. The fall foliage is brilliant red. It is not native to Iowa but it will establish easily. This is a great shrub for a small sunny location.



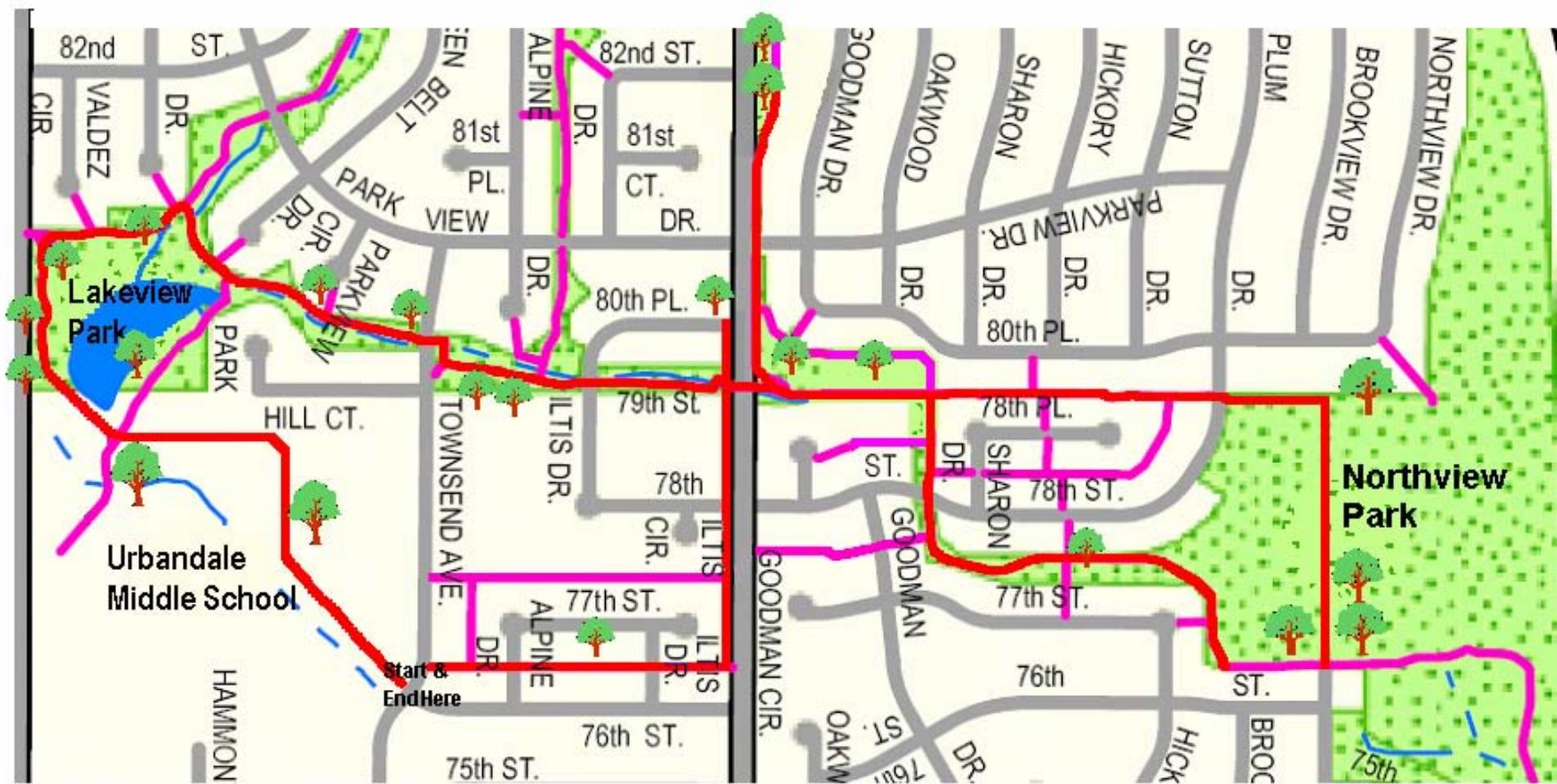
The trail will continue south back to Meredith. After you come to Meredith, cross the street and backtrack west to the southeast corner of Meredith and 80th Place to see a paper birch.



The paper, or white birch, can be anything from a small multiple stem plant, as seen here, to a stout tree up to 70 feet in height. Its natural range is much further north of our area, and this causes it to be somewhat short lived here. The white bark on the trunk is a real eye catcher.

In the fall, the leaves turn a golden yellow. This homeowner has dressed up the corner of his lot with this beautiful tree even though there is a risk that he will have to replant from time to time. The risk is worth the effort!

Walk east until you come to the walkway behind the residences between 75<sup>th</sup> and 76<sup>th</sup> streets. There are a variety trees in the yards along this walkway. The walkway you are on will continue south to exit on Townsend, the starting point for Walking Tour Two. If you started Walking Tour Two by parking on Townsend you should be standing just a few feet from your car.



Follow the red line as your walking path.

This is the map of walking tour 2.

It's printable from a word document separate from this presentation

# Third Walking Tour of Urbandale, Iowa

## Spring in the Bottomland

### Approximately 1 ½ miles

### (More or less)

Our third walk is as different from the second as the second is from the first. The Third Walk will feature trees of a typical Central Iowa bottomland as we walk along North Walnut Creek between Douglas Avenue and Hickman Road.

This time we can park at the Urbandale Public Library and begin at the front of the building. A long row of swamp white oaks line the sidewalk between the library and the parking lot. These oaks are a native of the Iowa bottomlands (especially south of Des Moines), but are very adaptable to a number of sites. It's too bad that this very attractive tree is often overlooked as a lawn specimen. It is relatively fast growing, long lived, and handsome. In time, the swamp white oak can reach 80 feet in height and 60 feet wide. It often carries its leaves well into the winter.



South of the Library, along the walk to Walker Johnson Park, there is a small arboretum that can be interesting. If you have completed Walks One and Two, you should be able to identify most of the trees in this mini park. There is a medium sized swamp white oak near the forks in the path. This tree should give you a good idea of what a larger swamp white would look like on you lawn.

Look around the mini park and try to identify as many species as you can. There are several white pine, honey locust, crabapple, and green ash. Along the wood line you can find box elder, black walnut, American elm, and oriental maple.

The path leading west will take you to Walker Johnson Park. The bottomlands here, and throughout the North Walnut Creek walk have many cottonwoods, and other unremarkable species such as box elder and mulberry.

If you like open space with a lot of play area, go ahead to Walker Johnson Park. The trees here are a repeat of what was observed on the first and second tours, with the added attraction of several birdhouses erected by the Cub Scouts; the exercise, any way, will do you good.

However, if you want to look at trees, keep left as you leave the library parking lot and follow the path along North Walnut Creek and under 86<sup>th</sup> Street.

While the trees in a typical Iowa regenerating bottomland aren't particularly spectacular, there is the bonus of wildlife, especially birds. On the spring day that I walked along North Walnut Creek, hairy woodpeckers, nuthatches, purple finches, blue jays, cardinals, and robins were spotted. The more adventurous walker might try this walk early in the morning, before dawn, and listen for a great horned owl, or the barred owl.





The large weeping willow is in a yard adjacent to the creek trail.



This ornamental pear at the corner of Maple Drive and Pine Circle is contrasted by the eastern redbud and Norway spruce in the background.

The Norway spruce is decidedly different from the blue spruce. As it ages the branches develop a distinct drooping figure. While it isn't a native, it can be a striking tree for any lawn large enough to accommodate it.

We said that Tour Three is 1 ½ miles (more or less) because you can make it as long or as short as you like. The trail goes all the way to Hickman Road but the walker can double back, or loop around, at any point to investigate the lawn trees in these neighborhoods, and then return to the parking lot at the Urbandale Library.



This Eastern Redbud is just off the path that leads away from N. Walnut Creek toward Roseland Dr. Its worth the detour when this small woodland tree is in bloom.

Double back to the bottomland by North Walnut Creek. There are so many trees in this area that the casual walker can miss a real beauty. As you walk south on the trail beside North Walnut Creek you will eventually come to a fork that, if you bear right, will take you over a bridge to continue the walk on the west side of the creek. When you come to the fork, STOP! Reverse directions for 30 paces and look west over the sign that asks residents not to dump yard clippings on public land.

Look past this sign to the large black walnut tree in the background. It's the straight one in the center of the photo. This walnut tree is a good example of a tree that is on its way to becoming a very valuable tree. This regenerating bottomland is mostly American Elm, honey locust, black cherry, cottonwood, willow, green ash, silver maple, and box elder.

These are fast growing trees that invade a cut over bottomland. They act as nurse trees for black walnut and other species. The black walnut grows fast toward the light and gets above the canopy of the other smaller trees.



This black walnut was measured to be 25 inches dbh and 28 feet from the ground to the first limb.

Leave the walnut tree and follow the trail across the bridge. Walk about 100 paces to see where the Williams Family has taken responsibility for a small area of the bottomland. Here the sign identifies the project to be part of the Urbandale Adopt a Trail project.

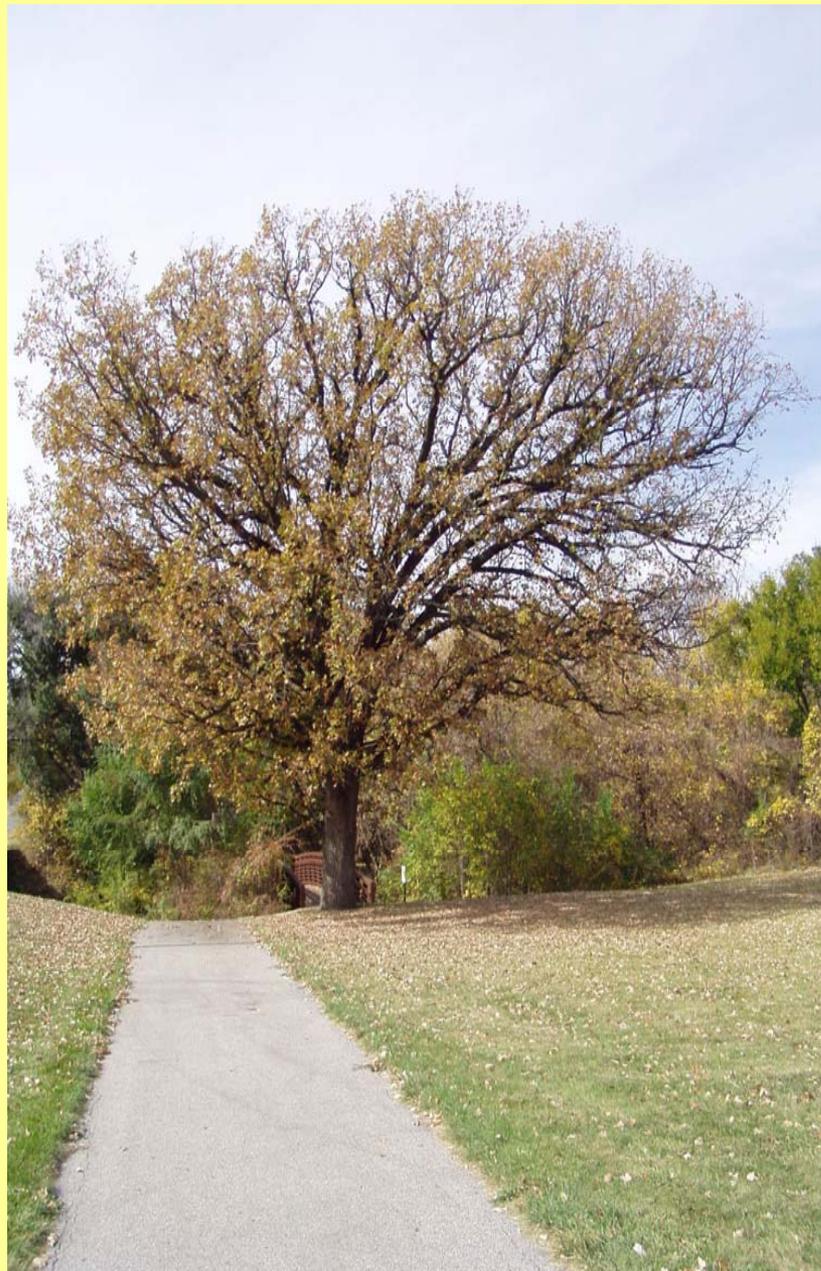
The Williams Family has mown the area and planted several desirable trees and shrubs. The ones identified here with the asterisks are serviceberry, burr oak, and swamp white oak. There are two black hills spruce in the distance.



Are there other families or groups in Urbandale who would sponsor more tree culture?

Continue south from the Adopt a Trail sign to re-cross the creek at Hickman Road.

As soon as you cross the bridge you will see this mature burr oak. Continue your walk by turning north along the creek until you come to the path that turns west behind the homes along Rocklyn Drive.





This struggling burr oak is on the edge of the wood line and it is stretching to get as much light as it can. The result of this is that the tree will be misshapen.

This burr oak will probably never be much of a tree. When you plant a tree too close to other trees or structures that deprive it of light, you will probably end up with a tree that is as poor structurally as this one. This burr oak is on the east side of North Walnut Creek about halfway between the bridge near the walnut and Hickman Road.

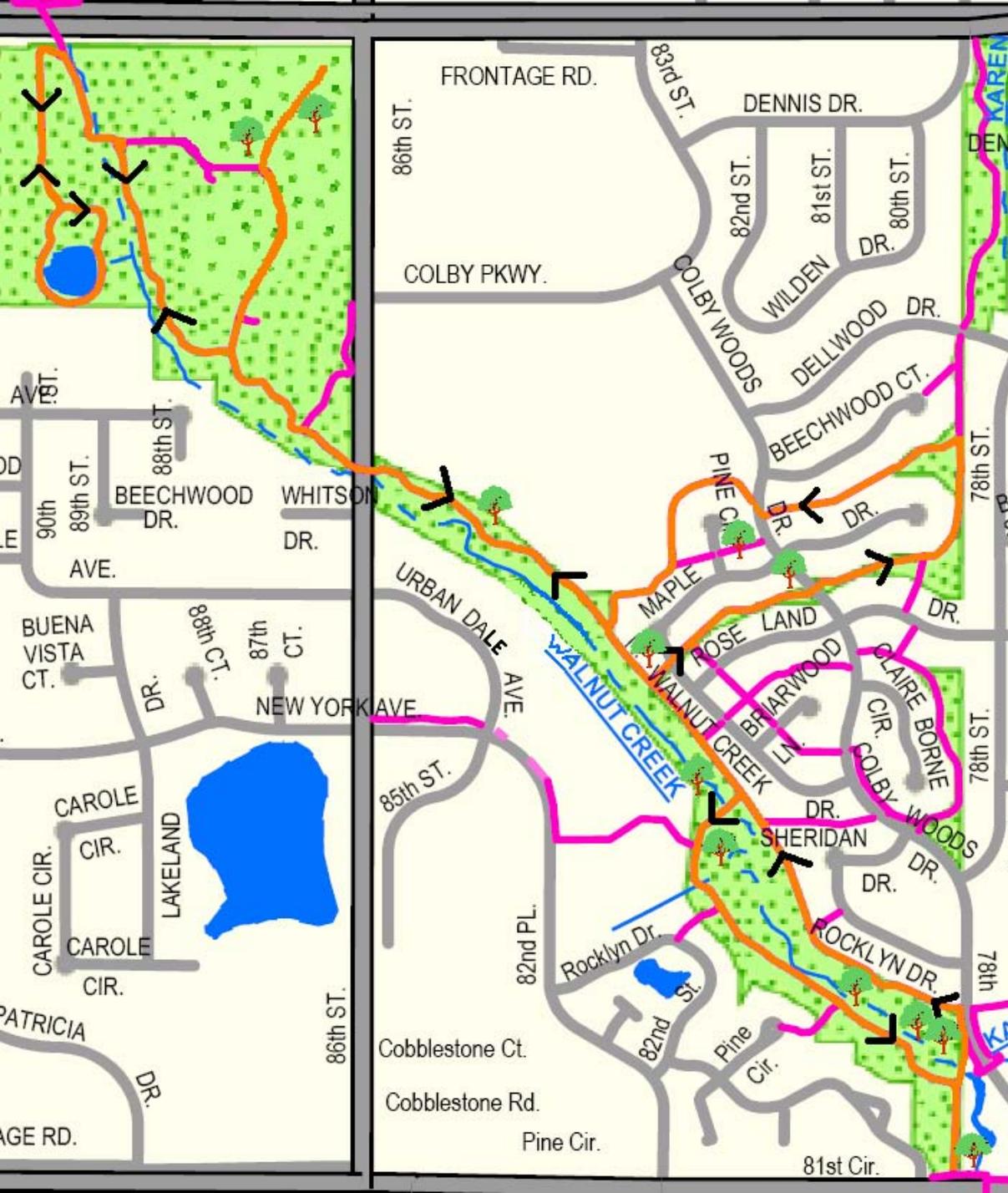
The burr oak is the sapling trunk in the foreground that is diagonal.

Its always a good idea to stay on the path when you are in a wooded area.

Several times during this walk I spotted this woodland nemesis. When you see “leaves of three, leave it be!!!” A good dose of poison ivy rash will cure almost anyone of a desire to walk into the woods.



Poison ivy can be a shrub, vine, or even a small bush. Its three shiny leaves and distinct white berries should alert everyone to keep a distance. This vine is about an inch thick and it has climbed well up into the trees. Look closely to see some of the white berries. Birds are capable of eating these berries without suffering any ill effects, but a human can get a rash in the mouth and esophagus. The results can be disastrous.



This is the map of walking tour 3. It is printable from a word document separate from this presentation.

## POSTSCRIPT

There are many trees in Urbandale that would be great subjects for this project. Unfortunately, they just weren't along the way of these walks. Among those that would have made a contribution are the crabapple trees along Douglas Avenue between 100<sup>th</sup> Street and I 80/35.

There is another grouping of three ginkgo trees at the corner of 75<sup>th</sup> and Townsend. Ginkgo trees have a brilliant golden fall foliage and are pleasing to shape. They are also easily grown and have historical significance in the evolution of trees. They have a very undesirable and smelly fruit. If you desire the ginkgo, be sure to plant the fruitless male trees.

Throughout my walking about Urbandale, I kept hoping to find a mature sycamore in a good location. There are several along 66<sup>th</sup> Street between Douglas and Meredith, but none of these were real classics. The sycamore can be very beautiful, especially in the winter when its white bark stands out against a gray sky. The sycamore isn't a good tree for a lawn because of its high volume of scaling bark and broken limbs. It also has tough leathery leaves that are difficult to dispose of each fall.

OK! So I missed YOUR favorite tree. I knew it would happen! Now it's your turn to walk around our city and discover the trees and shrubs that please you most. Have a good time, keep off of private property, and please, please, don't pick the stems or flowers.

Homeowners may want to have their soil tested before they select a tree for their property. If so, a soil test can be arranged by calling the Iowa State Extension in your area. The number can be found in the government section of your local telephone directory.

Thanks are extended to the Iowa State Extension service for all of the assistance they provided. The many bulletins, pamphlets, and brochures published by Iowa State University Extension are available to you through your extension service.

Special appreciation is extended to Paul Wray, Ph.D. for the many hours he and his associates have provided to me and tree lovers throughout Iowa.

Thanks also to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry. Special appreciation is extended to Mr. Duane Bedford, DNR District Forester, for his often sought advise. Also for Mr. George Warford, DNR District Forester for his assistance as a verifier of the identity of all the trees and shrubs featured in this work.