

LIFE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FOREST TREES.

Eloven years ago I examined the stumps of two white oaks and the grave of the third, which told this singular story by circumstantial evidence so strong that it could not be doubted. In the year 1502 an acorn fell about one half mile from where I am now writing, (Rockville, Ind.) and by favorable chance sprouted and grew into an oak. In 1594 another acorn sprouted about 20 feet distant from it. It may have grown on the tree mentioned, as it was then 92 years old. In 1731 a tornado from the northwest blew down a still older oak, which in its fall struck against and greatly damaged the top of the one born in 1502. There is to-day the well-marked grave of the fallen giant, the dirt piled upon the southeast side of the hole, and a long depression in the ground where the trunk fell and rotted till not a vestige of its wood can be seen to-day (though some traces of the bark of the roots can). This depression points to the stump of the damaged oak. The two younger had been freshly cut down when I examined them. Their stumps were about four feet across and there was not over an inch difference between their diameters, though 92 years difference in their ages. The younger had a large, healthy top, no broken or dead limbs, and it had put on rings of growth from the beginning of more than average size. The older one had been injured in its branches by the fall of the still older one before mentioned (in 1731) and for 57 years had put on very small rings of growth (about 25 to 30 years to the inch instead of twelve to fifteen, as it should), when a new set of branches developed to take the place of the damaged ones, and the rings began to increase in size and gradually attained to the average. I examined their tops, which coincided with what has gone before. There were the peculiar knots in the top of the older one where the dead limbs had rotted off and were healed over. (Any expert timberman will readily recognize them.) During this delay the younger oak caught up with the older one in size. The size of a tree is a very uncertain indication of its age.

In all the cases of the hundred I have examined of the oaks (the oldest trees of the forest I think), I never saw but one that was here when Columbus discovered America. That one was by far the largest I ever saw, and was over 600 years old, about twice the age of the other largest ones. I could not get its exact age, as it was so decayed near the heart I could not distinguish the rings. It was between six and seven feet in diameter, and forked about sixty feet up, and each fork was as large as the other largest trees. It was not sound enough to make good lumber, being what in this region is called "doughty," a state between soundness and rottenness. It had been down a year before I examined it (being out of the country when it cut), so that it was very difficult to examine it. I have mislaid my memorandum of it, but it would be about as follows: At the age of 200 years it had some ill-fortune which caused it to form about 100 small rings. It then regained its health and formed normal rings for 140 years, when another mishap caused small rings till within the last fifty years, when it was putting on fair growths again. This tree was, about one and a half miles from Rockville, Ind., and was noted among hunters and woodsmen. It was a disagreeable, showery day when I examined it, and for that reason I did not examine its top to see if dead and lost and healed over limbs coincided with the small rings, but I have often done so in other cases and found them to coincide.

Last May (1884) I examined a sycamore and water elm in the Wabash River bottom, the former six feet in diameter, and the latter five, each 180 years. They stood about 150 feet apart. They were standing on the upper end of a newly made bottom (I mean new as compared with the higher and older bottoms a little more inland from the other, say 200 years old.) This was the largest sycamore I ever saw that was sound to the heart. I have seen hollow ones nearly eight feet in diameter. This tree seems never to have met with any mishap till the log man came along, as the rings of growth are unusually large.

These trees very probably sprouted twelve to fifteen feet below the present surface of the bottom. They generally begin life on the lower end of river sand bars, and as sedimentation builds up the surface, they put out new surface roots at every two or three feet of elevation. Such trees, with their several sets of surface root, are often seen in drift piles, and also still standing on the verge of a deep river bank, where one side is exposed by the erosion of the river. Their roots are often hollow, like their trunks, the hollow (and root too) decreasing in diameter downward until it terminates in a point, like a cone standing on its point. In the southwest corner of this county is a hollow cottonwood stump on what is now a high bottom of the Wabash, in which the hollow extends downward twelve feet. Mr. Joseph J. Daniels an intelligent, observing man, on whose land it stands, told me so. Such silting up over the surface roots would kill most of the upland trees, or those that grow from the high bottoms.—*Naturalist.*

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