

Meier's Oak

Price County

Some trees may not be historic in the most limiting sense of the word, yet their stories throw small but illuminating shafts of light on the times in which they lived and the people who "owned" them. Such a tree is the Big Oak that may still stand on the Meier homestead in Price County, near Ogema.

It was estimated to be over 300 years old, 100 feet tall, with approximately 1,330 board feet of prime lumber. Here is its story, told mostly in the words of Roy Meier, whose father first homesteaded the land in 1883.

Around 1860 a tote road starting in Jenny (Merrill) went north to haul supplies to the pine camps at the headwaters of the Spirit, Jump, Chippewa and Flambeau Rivers. This oak is located where the tote road crossed the Spirit River.

Timber cruisers sometimes called it the Squirrel River, because the grove of white oak harbored so many squirrels. Locally the trees were called blue oak because when the steel of the ax or saw came in contact with the wood, the steel turned blue.



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Roy Meier

Originally, the oaks had no value as lumber because they could not be floated to market. Around 1900, Roy Meier's father cut a tree and had it sawed into planks to be used in making sleigh runners. In 1907, he used and sold many of the rock elm, which were mixed in with the oak, for barn timbers.

About 1910, the M. T. & W. Railroad came as far as our farm and a shipbuilding company from Manitowoc came looking for oak timber. My father offered to sell the oak trees, except for the one largest tree. He admired that tree and wanted it to stand and send out acorns.

As it turned out, the deal fell through anyway, because the company was unable to find more oak in the area. After Roy's father died in 1919, Roy was especially glad the large old oak his father had loved still stood.

By 1924 "Roddis of Marshfield started buying veneer in the area," so Roy started cutting rock elm and some of the oak. "But of course, we would not cut the big tree."

Then came the Depression and hard times, and no one was buying trees. By 1940, however, the veneer companies were again looking for good timber.

We were very short of money when Peterson of Park Falls came looking for veneer logs. He offered me \$100 for the Big Oak. I went to the house and asked my wife. She said, "We need so many things, but let's try and get along without selling the Big Oak."

There are perhaps a dozen small oak trees coming. We think they were started from acorns from our Big Oak. Lightning has hit it once but only made a streak down the side. This has healed over. So it will keep producing acorns, and the squirrels will bury some for seed.

Source: Roy R. Meier, Ogema