

Do you have a special tree on your property? If so, there is a group overseeing the Woodbridge Notable Tree Project that would like to know. Paul DeCoster, a Yale- educated lawyer who practiced for many years in New York before moving to Woodbridge, is devoting his analytical skills and passion for detail to the project. He spoke at the September meeting of the Garden Club of Woodbridge about the project, its aims, and how it fits within a statewide initiative surveying trees.

Around the time of its founding in 1739 and continuing to the early 1800s, Woodbridge (then known as the Amity parish) was largely wooded. One of Woodbridge's most notable trees from that time was the Woodbridge Oak on the northwest corner of Center and North Pease Roads. According to materials distributed by Mr. DeCoster, during the American Revolution, American soldiers camped beneath the giant oak, the spread of which would shelter an entire regiment. George Washington rested under it and reportedly said, "Surely, this tree is the giant of all oaks." The tree, which was a yellow oak, was cut down in 1881 for public safety when officials determined it was dying.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, much of the forested land in Woodbridge was clear-cut for farming as in most other parts of Connecticut. Farming activity continued well into the 20th century, keeping large swaths of property free of trees. Over the past 75 years, farming activity ended in most areas of town, leaving a second growth forest of native hardwoods and other species. These are supplemented by many species that are not native to the region.

Though many trees in Woodbridge do not warrant special recognition, some are notable due to their size, condition, and species or because of local historic significance. Because these trees are on private property, the success of the Woodbridge Notable Tree Project depends on residents to bring their existence to the attention of organizers so that they may be evaluated for possible inclusion on the list.

To date, over 4000 notable trees in Connecticut have been identified and listed in a database maintained by the Connecticut Notable Trees Project sponsored by the Connecticut College Arboretum and its Director, Glenn Dreyer. The state project began over 30 years ago. Of those trees listed, 6 are in Woodbridge, 5 of which are on the DeCoster's property. Paul's wife, Judy, whom he met at Yale Law School and who also practiced in New York and is now treasurer of the Garden Club of Woodbridge, grew up on their property on Amity Road, formerly owned by Morris Tyler, President of the Southern New England Telephone Company.

Project organizers are confident there are more worthy trees in Woodbridge and are seeking the public's help in identifying them. Over the next 18-24 months, their goal is to find, identify and measure about 50 specimens, which are likely to meet Notable Tree Project standards. Trees will be measured by a trained Notable Tree Project volunteer. That information will then be shared with the state project for evaluation. Inclusion on the list will not limit in any way the owner's ability to trim, prune or cut down the

As part of his talk, Paul DeCoster assembled an extensive packet of materials that contains information about the history of the Woodbridge and Connecticut Notable Tree Projects, submission forms and explanations, and color photos of significant specimens identified thus far in town. Several copies of this material are available at the Woodbridge Town Library for viewing. A Notable Tree Nomination form is available at the Woodbridge Park Association's website, <http://woodbridgeparks.org/news-events/>. Paul DeCoster may be reached at pjdecoster@optonline.net.