

Mystery Photo 8

To find the trees, go to the southwest corner of the parking lot and head south on the limestone road. Take about 70 steps and look east toward Sherman Boulevard.

If you had stood in this spot twenty-five years ago, your view would look similar to the photo below.



These six large Norway maples were probably planted some time between 1912 and 1917. They lined the roads leading from Hopkins Street to the Milwaukee County House of Correction. Walk around and you will see several rows of Norway maple and Norway spruce trees between where you are standing and Hopkins Street. On old photos, the rows of trees are easy to see. Today, the forest has grown up around them.

I've always enjoyed walking between the rows of trees and imagining what this place was like 100 years ago. Maybe my walks were special because I figured only a handful of people knew the mystery of the planted trees. But now that time is running out, I think I should share the secret. If you want to take that walk, you had better head out soon—because the trees are dying.

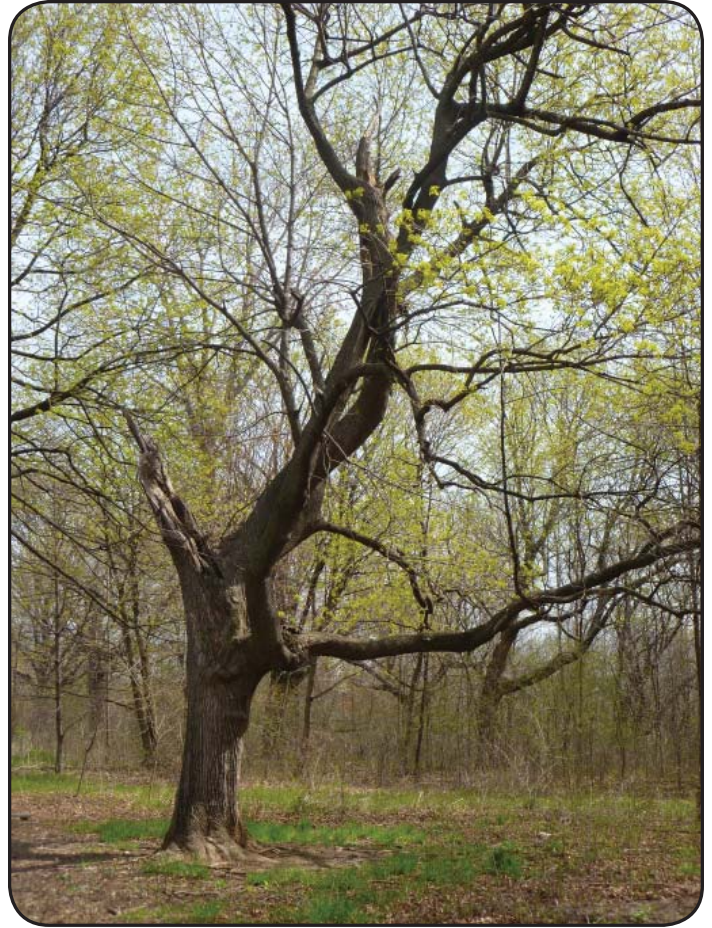
The average life expectancy of a Norway maple tree is 60 to 80 years. The maximum life expectancy is around 100 years. You do the math! These big, old trees have reached their limit!

They endured heavy equipment; foot traffic; frost cracks; tar spot disease (caused by a fungus); all kinds of borers, beetles, and other insects; woodpeckers; and the many hazards of urban living. Unfortunately, it will be very easy for you to find dead branches, broken limbs, and fallen trees on your walk.



maple leaves with tar spot disease

That “leaves” just one question . . . why is there a cast iron rod in one of the trees? At one point, quite a few of the Norway maples had these rods. They are actually cables designed to support tree branches by connecting a heavy



or failing branch to the trunk or another stronger branch. I could be wrong, but I've always suspected that many of these maples were topped when they were young so that they would branch out more. Then, several years after that, the caretakers had to brace some of the branches because they started to split.

With or without our help, trees have life stages and life spans just like people. These trees have passed their prime and are in a stage of decline and decay. When they are gone, they will hopefully be replaced by the sugar maples, basswoods, and oaks that kids, volunteers, and staff have planted in their shade.