

Historic tree collections management: a new vision for old trees

Author: Metzger, Laurie

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Advisor: Lyons, Robert E.

Department: University of Delaware, Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

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Abstract: Since before the birth of civilization, trees have stood. As civilizations emerged, the destinies of cities and of trees have become intertwined. Municipalities and institutions of horticulture maintain large numbers of trees, many of which are in the process of senescing. In a botanical garden, park or arboretum, a collection of historic trees comes with the benefits shade, beauty and a display of natural history but those benefits come with the challenges of safety, liability, aesthetics and a commitment to environmental protection. As institutions of public horticulture are seeking innovative means of understanding, showcasing, and managing their historic trees. This research explored the details of management plans created and currently used by experts in the field. It delved into the practical methodologies of arboriculture and into the culture of public horticulture with the aim of revealing the most current techniques. It addressed the terminology being used for historic trees worldwide. Additionally, the research examined ways to combine strategies used in museum architecture for living collections. The research found that institutional priorities rule when it comes to the treatment and that the issues competing for priority include safety, minimizing risk of litigation, and overall aesthetic value. Research showed that visitor awareness and resources are both challenges for public gardens with historic trees. This proves the need for a written policy designed to prioritize the historic collection. Additionally the research indicated that sometimes for fear or lack of knowledge, administrations judge too harshly, cut too quickly and focus too closely on one specific priority. The trend is that institutions are reactive as opposed to proactive in the treatment of aging trees. However, with information from institutions world wide, methods were revealed for prolonging the life of ancient trees, creating useful management plans and building meaningful historic tree collections.

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