

The Tree looks like a giant spray of green lace reaching up to the dull, gray sky. The leaves have become visible now, though they have a lot of growing to do before they can hide the birds singing in the canopy. Still, spring seems to be here, and the predominant area colors have changed from black, white, and gray to various shades of green.

Anyone who is familiar with the farm here knows immediately which tree the Tree is. That does not mean that there are not other notables among the trees that populate the woods, fence rows, yards, and, in some cases, the centers of fields. The Big Maple Tree identifies the Maple Tree Field. The ash tree, unfortunately dying like nearly all the white ash, is in the middle of the Speicher Field. The maple where we had our rope swing is another of those trees we know as individuals.

Dominant, though, is the Tree. It is a silver maple, not native to our area, but it has been here a long time and has many descendants, some deliberately planted and others self-sown. It lives just south of our cabin, too close, really, but it has grown a lot since we built this house on the site of two previous cabins. In our yard we have four trees we planted as seedlings from the Tree. After thirty years they are becoming notable in their own rights, but they pale in comparison to the Tree.

We should have measured it when we built the cabin. We know that it has grown considerably since we put up our house in the mid 1970s. Now, the Tree has a circumference of 22 feet at three feet from the ground. A little higher from the ground it is even larger. The Tree is not a record-setter, but it is definitely big.

The old saying that "big oaks from little acorns grow" cannot be any more true than "big maples from tiny seedlings grow." From the annals of family history, those of us in the present generation have gotten the story. Around 1900, my great-grandfather, Lars Augustineson, planted the seedling. When the Augustinesons had homesteaded here in 1873, they had only one neighboring family, the Perketts, who lived just north of the homestead that has become our farm. Some years after my great-grandparents came, the Perketts moved to the Traverse City area.

They did not forget their friends, though, and they maintained

contact through the years. On a visit to their old home area at the beginning of the 20th century, they brought a small seedling of the silver maple they had at home in Traverse City. Great-grandfather Lars planted the tree south of the log house where the Augustineson-Erickson family lived.

And, in time, the tree became the Tree. It provides shelter and homes for numerous birds. It makes shade for our cabin. It has given us seeds to provide little trees to anybody in the family who would like a descendant of great-grandfather Lars' tree. Around its base is an inviting environment for shade-loving plants. There are violets there, and wild currants, and lillies-of-the-valley. Several large stones lie there, too, partly in an attempt to divert Fly, the border collie, from digging there.

The Tree will soon be solidly green above, a nice contrast to the gnarly, rough gray bark of the trunk and branches. Later on, in the fall, the Tree will show its worst side. While other silver maples--those that grew from the seeds of the Tree--turn a pleasant, if rather bland shade of yellow as autumn comes, the Tree's leaves become worn, yellowish-beige, rather colorless. It says "blahhh" and drops its leaves. We have to look north, to the soft maples, or west to the sugar maples, to appreciate the spectacular fall colors. But, the Tree has done its part, and I guess it deserves a chance to fade into the background for one season. When winter arrives, it becomes a stark black network of branches reaching high over the cabin. With snow on the ground, it becomes beautiful again. But, for now, we are glad for that lacy sheer green of the Tree in early spring.