

The Maple Tree Field has been dominated by a large sugar maple as long as I can remember. In the intervening decades from my first awareness of the tree it has undoubtedly grown a great deal, but there are other trees in the perimeter of the same field that have now eclipsed it. Still, it is THAT tree that has given the field its designation, and the family has commemorated it for well over half a century. Its lacy, pale green in May tells us that true spring has arrived. The dark green summer foliage provides shade for the sheep flock when they pass a few days in that pasture, but the tree really “comes into its own” when the fall color season arrives.

The tree has suffered some damage in recent decades, but it is still the tree we look at to judge the seasons. And, it is the tree that someone in the family has photographed every fall as long as there has been a camera on the premises. There are even black and white snapshots of the tree in the fall! Most of these pictures we have eventually consigned to the wastebasket, but until very recently, we still took those new versions of the picture every year. I have not photographed the tree in fall for many years, but I would be willing to bet that someone in the family has.

It is a sign of home. There have been others, of course. There was a huge elm tree at the end of the lane that had an even longer family history. When my father was attending the one-room country school on the corner, he and other school children often walked the short distance to the farm lane and practiced pitching stones at a hole in the tree trunk. I dare say the two of my uncles who had attained local renown as baseball pitchers might have attributed some of their accuracy with a baseball to a long childhood of throwing stones at a hole in the big elm. And maybe my dad, too, understood that there may have been a connection between that childhood activity and the later ability to throw out a base stealer from his position behind the plate.

And, of course, there is the silver maple Great Grandfather Lars Augustinsson planted in about 1900. The remains of that tree and its offspring shade us here in the cabin yet. But still, it is that sugar maple in the pasture—in the Maple Tree Field—that keeps us connected to the rhythm of the farm generation after generation.