

# Rebirth of the Williamsport Shade Tree Commission

*by Kenneth Cooper, Chairperson, Williamsport Shade Tree Commission*



**W**illiamsport, Pennsylvania is located in northcentral Pennsylvania along the West Branch of the Susquehanna River in Lycoming County. The city has a population of approximately 30,000 and is known as the “Home of Little League Baseball.” In years past it was known as the “Lumbering Capital of the World.” The Williamsport Shade Tree Commission was resurrected in March 1993. There were three main objectives to be achieved. Its first was to educate the public about the importance of their urban forest on the streets of Williamsport. Beyond education, the second important objective was the enforcement of street tree ordinances and licensing of arborists. The third objective was the compiling of an inventory of city street trees. The inventory would document the location of each tree type, size, condition, and site evaluation.

The Pennsylvania College of Technology’s Forestry Department and the City of Williamsport received a \$5,000 grant under the Urban and Community Forestry Program to undertake an inventory of the city’s street trees on 110 miles of streets. The project was completed and computerized by arboriculture students and tree

commission members and volunteers. The inventory provided needed information for the removal of hazardous trees and future planting as well as conflicts with utilities. The inventory revealed 57 percent of the urban forest was in poor condition, 24 percent in fair condition and 19 percent in good condition. Silver maples made up 30 percent of the urban forest, and these had reached maximum maturity and were diseased and hazardous and creating liability problems.

The Rotary Club of Williamsport participated in our public education program in April 1993 with a grant of \$1000 for a membership in the Elm Tree Research Foundation. The Foundation granted us 300 American Liberty Elm saplings. In cooperation with two local Boy Scout Troops, Troop 35 of St. Boniface Catholic Church and Troop 41 of Messiah Lutheran Church, the saplings were planted under the supervision of the Shade Tree Commission.

In September 1993, through a grant of \$30,000 from the State Department of Environmental Resources Bureau of Forestry, 190 Japanese Zelkovas were planted in the Historic District on West Fourth Street.

In fall of 1994, after the completion of reconstruction of Woodland Avenue, 90 trees of sawtooth oak and Japanese pagoda trees were selected to be placed between curb and sidewalks as a part of the city's street reconstruction and urban forest plan.

The Municipal Tree Restoration Program (MTRP), in cooperation with Pennsylvania Power and Light, removed 32 trees beneath power lines and planted 50 trees of the species serviceberry. Under this program data will be collected annually to determine how well the trees perform in various street environments.

The American Liberty Elm saplings planted in May 1993 in our nursery were ready for placement on our streets in April 1997. A grant of \$8000 from the Williamsport Lycoming Foundation enabled the commission to plant 116 trees in five locations on city streets. The remaining elms in our nursery are to be planted in the future as they mature.

Our tree replacement program for 1998 began with a U.S. Forest Service grant of \$20,000. Since our inventory revealed a high percentage of hazardous trees, the commission decided to embark on our Hazardous Tree Project Phase I. Hazardous trees were evaluated by

the city forester and commission members. With the inkind contribution of the city's Streets and Parks Department and the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company, 135 hazardous trees were removed.

Property owners were notified of the hazardous trees fronting their property and asked to participate in the voluntary program. Every hazardous tree was removed, the stumps were ground, and an appropriate tree was planted on a cost share basis not to exceed \$200. Property owners' participation was greater than 90%. 105 trees consisting of ten different species were planted and mulched by a contracting arborist. A number of the hazardous trees removed were in non-plantable sites.

The commission will begin its 1999 Hazardous Tree Program Phase II with a \$15,000 grant from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Community Forestry Program. It is our goal to remove 80 to 100 hazardous trees and replace them with appropriate species.

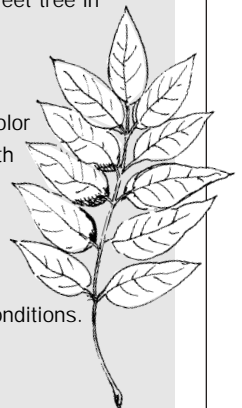
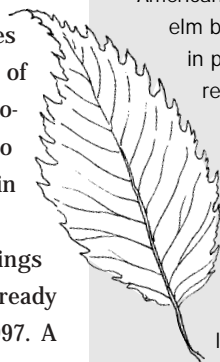
## What Was Planted

**AMERICAN LIBERTY ELM** is a disease resistant variety of American elm. The tree is a result of the search for a disease resistant elm which began at Cornell University in 1933. General leaf size, shape and color, bark color and texture, and other growth characteristics are typical of American elm. In practical urban plantings, major losses from Dutch elm disease is not anticipated in young American Liberty elms because of their limited attractiveness to elm bark beetles at this stage of growth. Care should be taken in planting large numbers of these trees because their disease resistance has not been fully proven.

**SAWTOOTH OAK** is a smaller growing, wide spreading oak. Its long sharp leaves can have good yellow fall color. The tree is easily grown and prefers acid, well-drained soils. It can have problems with chlorosis when planted in alkaline soils. It grows rapidly in moist sites and can have problems with anthracnose. It is a nice shade or lawn tree and can be used as a street tree in large planting areas.

**JAPANESE PAGODATREE** is usually upright-spreading with a broadly rounded crown. The tree has a bright, lustrous green color and develops a late fall color. It flowers in the later summer with perfect creamy-white, mildly fragrant flowers. As a young tree it prefers fertile, well-drained soils. Once established, the tree withstands heat and drought well. It is tolerant of road salt and other polluted conditions. Japanese pagodatree is a good tree for large urban planting area, lawns, and poor soil conditions. The tree's principle assets are attractive flowers and foliage.

*For more street tree suggestions, see page 27.*



ILLUSTRATIONS: PHYLLIS KIPP