

Why The Oak Tree on Allman Avenue is Special



Some trees are kept as markers or monuments so that visitors can remember certain events or people. The Red Oak tree on the Kuse farm on Allman Avenue is that kind of memory tree.



Every school day many buses with children in them drive past the tall oak tree on Allman Avenue just a short distance before they turn into or out of the school driveway. What stories do you think that tree could tell the children about who or what has traveled along the road where it has been growing for more than 100 years?



When the oak was a young tree, Allman Avenue was not a road but just a trail followed by Native Americans who camped near the springs close to the Black River. Then, in the 1870's, the area around Medford was logged but the lumbermen were not interested in oak trees. Huge white pines were cut down and sawed into boards and hemlock trees were cut so that the bark could be peeled to make tannin for the local tanneries. The road past the oak tree became a logging road where teams of horses and oxen pulled huge loads of logs to the sawmill. The road was iced in winter to make the sleds glide more easily. Water from the nearby river was hauled in a tank on a sleigh or ice wagon and poured into the ruts on the road.



Ice Wagon – Photo from Souvenir of Medford Booklet

Settlers bought the cutover land to develop farms. In 1881 John Peter Kuse and Hannah Marie Kuse bought the land on which the oak tree stood from homesteader, Lawrence Johnson. By 1883 the Kuses were trying to clear the land and their son, Joe, and grandson, Walter, continued that work.

By the 1920's, when Walter Kuse was blasting the stumps and removing rocks near the oak tree, it was already a tall tree that the family called the big oak. Since it was near the road and not in the middle of a hayfield it was allowed to stand as a shade tree.

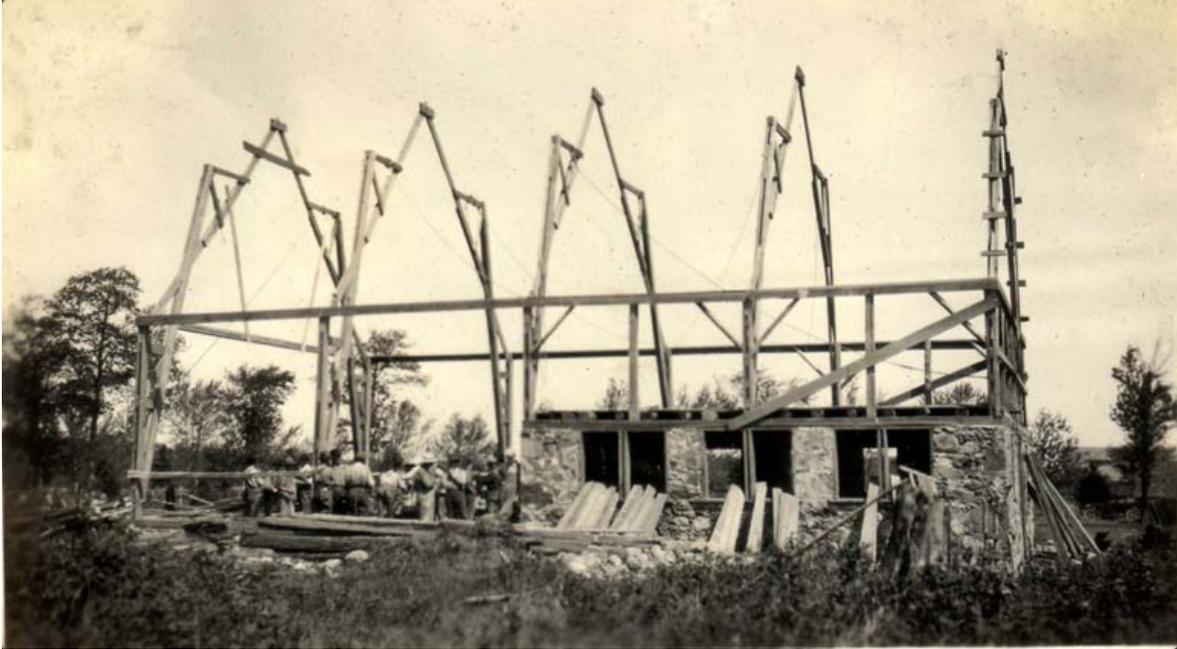
One day as Walter was working in the field near the tree, he saw a horse and a buggy with two ladies in it going down the gravel road. One was a family friend, Mrs. Hulda Bonas, who lived on a farm west of Medford. The other was a pretty young lady Walter had never seen before. She was Miss Amanda Janke, the sister of Mrs. Bonas, who had come from Fredonia in southern Wisconsin to visit.

Hulda had become well acquainted with the Kuse family and often stopped at their home on her way to town. While Amanda was visiting she stopped there, too.



Walter decided this was someone he would really like to get to know better. He asked Amanda to write to him. For about three and one half years they wrote and then Walter asked Amanda to marry him.

During that time Walter worked to prepare the farm home where he and Amanda would live. He built a new barn. The oak tree can be seen in the distance at the left side of the picture.



On September 22, 1926, Amanda Janke and Walter Kuse were married. They lived on the Kuse farm for many years.

Walter continued to clear land and cut trees on the farm but he never cut down the oak. He always remembered that he was standing near that tree on the day he first saw the young lady who was to become his wife. Now the oak tree stands as a reminder of the love Walter and Amanda had for each other.

In the 1930's the Wisconsin Conservation Department began to replant cutover lands. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) planted many young evergreens, but also seeded acorns as part of a reforestation effort. Children were able to collect and sell acorns for a \$1.50 per bushel. Hildegard Kuse, then about eight years old, gathered a bushel of acorns from the big oak and some other oaks west of the farm. On October 4, 1936, her father, Walter Kuse took the bushel of acorns to the Courthouse and collected the money for her. If the acorns from our big oak sprouted and grew the trees would now be tall, full-grown trees.

Other acorns may have grown from the big oak as well. Acorns falling directly under the tree may not have a good environment for growing into mature trees but often animals carry them some distance away. Blue jays particularly have been known to swallow acorns and deposit them at places distant from the parent tree. Not all acorns get the opportunity to grow.



Many become food for wood ducks, turkeys, deer, squirrels, and other animals.

In 1995 Mike Riegert who was measuring trees to find some of the largest or champion trees in Wisconsin measured the Kuse oak. At that time he found that it was eleven feet or 132 inches in circumference at a distance of four and one-half feet above the base. It had a crown spread of fifty-eight feet and was about sixty feet tall. That was not as big as the record Red Oak for Wisconsin. The largest was a tree in Shawano, Wisconsin, which was eighty feet tall and 182 inches in circumference. Even though it is not a state record tree our big oak is so large that it takes three or four children with arms outstretched to reach around it.

In 2010, fifteen years later, foresters Cathy Mauer and Scott Mueller measured it again. It was sixty-two feet tall with an average crown spread of sixty-six feet and measured 145 inches or over twelve feet in circumference.



Over the years the oak has weathered storms and other dangers. In about 1998 a heavy windstorm broke huge branches from the tree. A neighbor cut some of the branches for firewood and saved a cross section of one limb so that the growth rings could be counted. That limb, which came from high up in the tree, showed many years of growth.



Growth Rings on a Red Oak Branch

In about 2000 a gas line was laid along Allman Avenue. The Kuses and their neighbors were concerned about the damage to tree roots that could happen along that line. The gas company agreed to use a special machine that tunneled under the roots rather than digging a trench that would cut them.

In 2003 a spring ice storm brought down more branches. One branch showed that the oak had been a woodpecker home. The bird had cut a nesting cavity into the tree and also bored other round holes into the branch. Woodpeckers could often be heard drumming on the tree branches during mating season.

Resources compiled by Dr. Hildegard Kuse and Dr. Loretta Kuse