

# Annie Oakley: A Tree and Much More

Saline resident Sue Kelch ruminates about the local Oak tree.

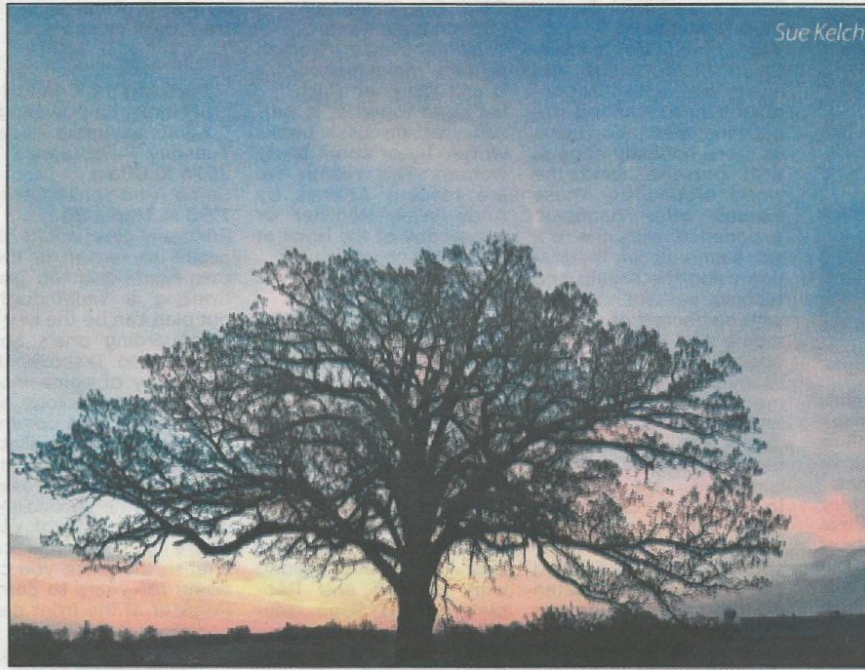
By Sue Kelch

Annie Oakley  
That's her name, Annie Oakley. I met her 30 years ago when I moved into my neighborhood across the street from her. We are neighbors, and she's been a kind, generous neighbor.

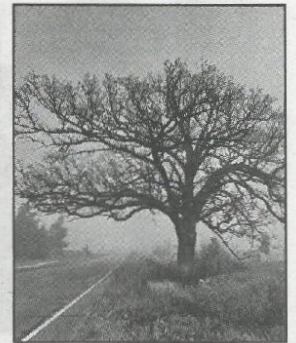
For as long as Saline has had a "Welcome to Saline" sign on Maple Road, she has stood as a sentinel, ushering in all as they come or wishing them well as they depart with her majestic outstretched arms and swaying branches. She whispers "I have been here long before you were. I have seen many things." I wonder what has she seen; but she never tells her secrets.

She is captured here at sunrise in her mountain pose; contrary to how it sounds, the mountain pose is an active pose. The deep shades of pink and blue in this sunrise photo proudly highlight her majestic outstretched limbs, branches, twigs and leaves. She holds court as we gaze in awe up at her; while underground her roots are anchored firmly and nurture her and all the life she supports. We cannot see these roots, but we know they stretch as far as her arms. Her longevity shows in her deep crags and bark; not withering but proud and stately.

Now if you were like me, you may have become frightened of craggy trees like these after watching the Wizard of Oz. But she simply won me



Sue Kelch



her trunk and weighed down her limbs, how many floods tried to sweep her away? How many foggy days have swirled their mist around her, shrouding her and discreetly giving her the key to lock away her secrets?

Does she smirk at us, holding the secrets and tales of what we have not seen and what she will not share? Or does she just gaze at it all, her branches breathing as they sway, leaves rustling and beating to the passing seasons. I would venture to say that some of my wonderings may have an acorn of truth to it, but she does not give out her secrets.

over. For one, she doesn't have any apples to angrily throw. And you can just sense the gentle soul in her, wizened by the decades. She is lovely in her old age, albeit tired, and probably lonely. Only when she is gone will we know her true age and the elements of weather she endured. Years that were droughts, floods, and everything in between. But she never tells her secrets.

There is a stream nearby, where I've seen deer and her-

on drink and muskrats swim. Perhaps that stream fed a grove or even stand of oak trees. One hundred years ago, likely more, she was just a sapling with her parents and many cousins, aunts, uncles, and siblings. Did an acorn fall from her, and then was carried to the next county where a tree now grows? Were most of her family cut down, leaving only her to remain, when they carved a dirt road? What was it that saved her, that made her the survivor?

I wonder what she has seen, what tales the birds have told her of their travels, chirping and singing away while they live their lives and raise their young. Perhaps a passing coyote sighed and laid at Annie Oakley's feet while resting in the shade with her pups, grooming and nursing them. Then leaving their mark as they went on their way. I wonder how many horses have plowed the back 40 and rested under her midway through their toil, while the farmer wiped his sweaty brow and rewarded his steeds' labor with sweet alfalfa, a drink, and a pat or two.

There was once a barn nearby her, it was sadly abandoned and sagging and dilapidated, then finally torn down. Did the barn belong to the land owner who cleared the glade? Was this the barn used for storage and the horses? I remember when Annie Oakley used to have a surviving sister beside her on Maple Road. The sister is now gone. I have asked Annie Oakley, but she never tells her secrets.

Perhaps she was a witness tree? In the 18th and 19th centuries, without the sophisticated equipment that is available now, surveyors would use terms such as "the property extended from the oak sapling 45° north of the creek, to the south of the stream 90°..." As oak trees were long living, they were typically used as markers. Many witness trees had initials carved in them for this purpose, was Annie Oakley ever branded?

Some witness trees are also protected, as they were present "to witness" a great or historical event, to the extent that the National Park Service has a "Witness Tree Protection" Program. Did Annie Oakley witness anything historical? Or was she just a hushed observer of lovers picnicking under her shade on a sweltering hot summer's day? Perhaps she provided cover for a hunter, as a child hides behind his mother's skirts? Did she serve as a canopy for a wedding, and upon her branches and leaves are written the names of ancestors and descendants of the newly betrothed? How many young children climbed out of her wide lap onto her branches, then swung from her limbs? And how many birds were beckoned to build a nest, use as a perch to scan the countryside, or rest while migrating?

How many sunrises have cast her shadow? 30,000? 50,000? How many full moons have winked at her in the night as they passed over her? How many violent storms tried to topple her, how many snowfalls crowded

*About the author: Sue Kelch has been watching and photographing Annie Oakley for over 30 years now.*

*Annie Oakley is located at the entrance of my subdivision, and for decades I stopped in front of her at the intersection on my way to work. Many dawns I would stop and take a photo, and this is my favorite. In five minutes the sun peaked out of the horizon, almost as if asking if we are ready for the day to begin. I have that photograph too, and many others.*

*My first love is photography, and I created the Silver Shutterbugs Photography Club at the Saline Area Senior Center. I am also a member of the Writer's Group, Genealogy Club, and serve on the SASC Board as well as Saline's Alpha Boards and Healthcare Task Force and member of the First United Methodist Church for over 25 years.*

*My husband Ray and I have been members of SASC for over 10 years, and enjoy all of their offerings including fitness classes, informational sessions, social outings and programs, and collaboration with the schools including Pen Pal and reader's programs. SASC is our go to place all around recreation; they do a phenomenal job with activities.*

