

“I Think That I Shall Never See”

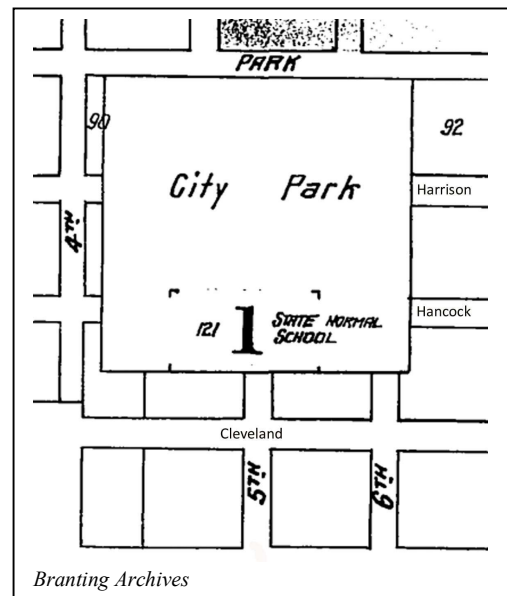
The George Washington Memorial Sycamore Row

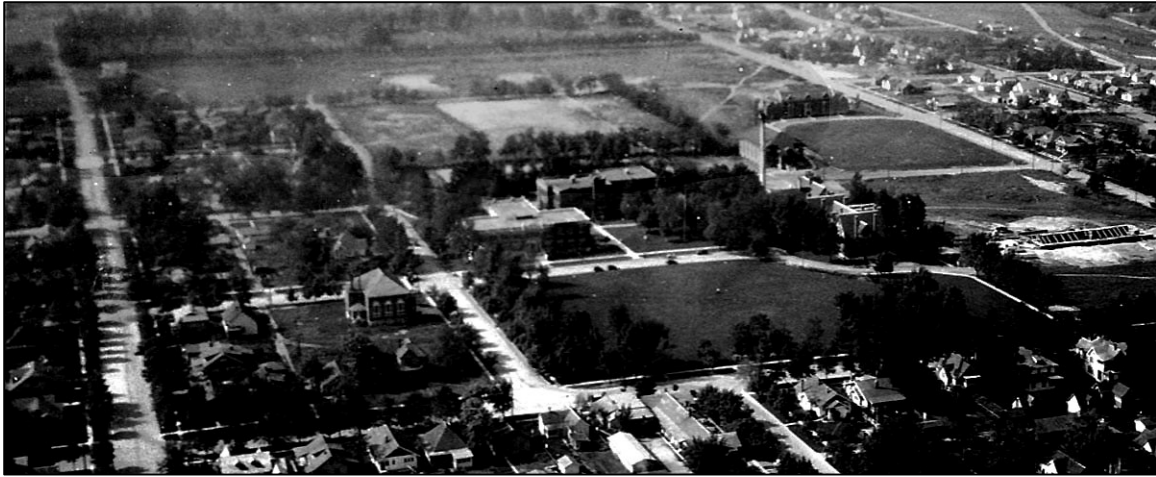
Upon arriving at the Lewis-Clark State College campus along Eleventh Avenue, one is met by a stately line of trees, stretching from Sixth Street to Fourth Street.¹ A close examination of the campus reveals that the canopy turns northward at Fourth and extends, with some breaks, from Eleventh Avenue to Seventh Avenue. The row of trees reaches a distance of six city blocks, or three-eighths of a mile. All of the trees are very mature, many with “breast height” circumferences surpassing 12 feet. How did this arboretum come to be a landmark for the campus and Normal Hill?

In 1874, Edward True, a Lewiston teacher and trained surveyor, was commissioned to produce a township map of the city, which at the time was one square mile, bounded on the north and west by the rivers and what are now Eleventh Avenue and Fourteenth Streets to the south and east respectively.

In February 1893, the Lewiston City Council deeded one-half of the 20-acre “Plaza Park” for use as the campus of the newly-created Lewiston State Normal School. The campus boundaries at that time were roughly equivalent to today’s Seventh and Ninth Avenues, Fifth and Sixth Streets, as seen in a detail from sheet one of the December 1900 Sanborn Map Company fire insurance survey. The avenues were renamed in 1901 to match the current designations. Cleveland is now Tenth Avenue. Seventh Avenue sadly lost its connection with the greenspace that would have dominated Normal Hill had it not been for the creation of the college. Eleventh Avenue was originally “K,” which explains why there is an “N Street” east of Normal Hill Cemetery.

The campus expanded within the decade as the State of Idaho purchased property from the city to the west and south. By 1924 the campus had assumed the dimensions that would remain current until the 1970s. An aerial image taken in the spring of 1930 (see next page) shows a thin line of preexisting trees along Eleventh Avenue and one tree on Fourth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. The species of tree dominating the campus was the American elm (*Ulmus americana*). The approaching bicentennial of the birth of George Washington generated increasing local interest among civic groups. A national campaign inaugurated by President Calvin Coolidge in 1928 recommended the planting of 10 million trees. The initiative was projected to reach into every classroom in the nation. The administration, faculty and staff of Lewiston State Normal began to pool their funds.





Idaho Transportation Department Archives

During the week of Monday, 21 March 1932, 70 “European sycamores” were reported to have been planted in preparation for dedication ceremonies associated with Arbor Day that year. College president John Turner commented:

We hope it will be an inspiration for others to set out trees in Lewiston. Within a few years this row of trees ought to become a magnificent setting for the west and south lines of the campus.

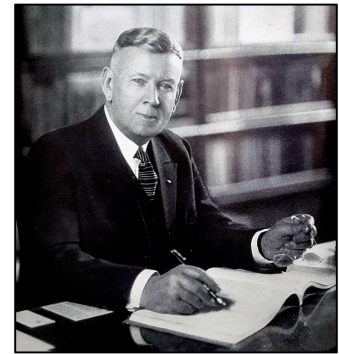
The trees were spaced at 40-foot centers, in accordance with the recommendation at the time.

On 19 April 1932, Fay Palmer, president of Pi Phi Gamma (Lewiston State Normal’s science fraternity), presided over an assembly program in the college auditorium that included the awarding of prizes to elementary school students for their bird house designs.² According to the report in the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, the number of trees planted had risen to 100, and the line of trees was formally dedicated as the “George Washington Memorial Sycamore Row,” the campus’ latest arboretum.³

The earliest clear image of the row appears in an aerial photograph taken circa 1942 (top of next page). Viewed looking to the northwest, the Eleventh Avenue segment runs along the bottom of the image. Fourth Street appears in the upper left, where we can see the memorial row between Tenth and Seventh Avenues.

The rows of trees running north through the image from the lower left predate the George Washington Memorial by at least 20 years, planted on the original west edge of the campus. In 1910, a new football field was prepared and grandstands erected. A photograph of the Normal’s 1934 football team verifies that the trees were not sycamores.

Lewiston’s mild to hot climate made the sycamore a less-than-ideal choice for the city if the wrong variety was planted. Most of the original sycamores in the Valley fell victim to waves of anthracnose, a blight caused by the *Apiognomonia veneta* fungus. As early as 1928, local horticulturalists Clay Embry and Presley Stillings advocated for a more discerning approach. The early sycamores had been sold to residents as the European *Acer pseudoplatanus*, when they were actually *Platanus occidentalis*, the American planetree, which cannot withstand the *Apiognomonia* fungus, with *Platanus acerifolia* (London planetree) suffering to a lesser degree.



President George Black. Lewis-Clark State College Archives



Fay Palmer, 1932. Lewis-Clark State College



Idaho Transportation Department Archives

An infestation that first appeared in 1946 caused a massive loss of the American variety throughout the city in the spring of 1948. In August, Gregory Eaves, the city’s park commissioner, stated that the trees had “no cure but the axe.” By the early 1970s, American sycamores had all but disappeared from Lewiston neighborhoods.

While not entirely immune, the European variety can withstand a fungal assault. One such infestation occurred in the fall of 1972. Over the decades, ensuring the safety of the George Washington Memorial Sycamore Row necessitated the repeated spring application of what is termed a Bordeaux mixture – a combination of 10 pounds of copper sulfate and 12 pounds of hydrated lime dissolved in 100 gallons of water. While not a perfect “ounce of prevention,” the trees are a testament to species resilience and exceptional care.

In September 1941, the college maintenance staff “completed the trimming of the stately sycamores on Eleventh Avenue.” The row has been praised in past decades as an example of the proper pruning of sycamores, although the current status of several trees on Fourth Street has elicited criticism from local arborists. Pruning to accommodate the later installation of power lines has produced unsightly results.

A May 2020 ground survey accounted for 48 remaining trees from the 1932 planting – 20 on Eleventh Avenue and



Views of the memorial row as seen in photographs of cadet pilots in the naval training program, 1942. *Idaho Transportation Department Archives*

28 on Fourth Street. The Eleventh Avenue segment is missing six trees, most taken out to allow for driveways. The Fourth Street section has gaps where an estimated 13 trees once stood, thus bringing the ground survey total to at least 67. This comports with the 70 said to have been planted. The section on Fourth Street from Ninth to Tenth Avenue requires extrapolating positions, as the construction of the Sam Glenn Complex sacrificed many trees. The longest sequence of uninterrupted adjacent trees is thirteen and occurs twice, once on Fourth and once on Eleventh.

One final issue requires clarification: Why was the memorial row of trees planted along Eleventh Avenue and Fourth Street? In 1932, President Turner had referred to “the west and south lines of the campus.”

Until 1938, no buildings existed on the south side of what is now Eleventh Avenue between Fourth and Sixth Streets. The property was still assigned as a buffer between the campus and Normal Hill Cemetery. In 1938, the reorganization of the city fire department led to the construction of a station at Sixth Street and Eleventh Avenue, now the home of the campus maintenance department. As late as June 1945, the Sanborn Map Company surveys continued to label Eleventh Avenue from Fourth Street to Sixth Street as “not open.” For a few years after World War II, the city allowed the college to construct what was popularly called “Victory Village,” a settlement for returning veterans and their families while the veterans studied to become teachers. After the college closed in 1951, the housing was eventually razed or moved to other local sites. Taken together, these facts are most certainly indicators that the memorial row on Eleventh Avenue was not planted to line a city street but as the defining feature of the campus’ southern boundary.

Beginning in 1907, the dimensions of the campus had been extended at several points to the right-of-way for Fourth Street. Where we find parking lots and the College Place dormitory today was once a well-established neighborhood with its own grocery store. Homes lined both sides of the street from Seventh to Ninth Avenues well into the 1920s. Fourth Street had an 80-foot right-of-way and once looked very much like Third Street today from Seventh Avenue to Eleventh Avenue.

President John Turner had spoken correctly.

Now approaching 90 years old, the trees in the memorial row have a long life ahead of them. With proper care, they could live well into the Twenty-fourth Century.

Endnotes and Citations:

1. When planted in 1932, as explained in this article, the trees were listed as “European sycamores” by local professional arborists and the plant scientists at Lewiston State Normal and the University of Idaho. The college Arboretum Committee currently lists the trees along Eleventh Avenue and Fourth Street as *Platanus acerifolia* (London planetree). The London planetree is a hybrid of the *Platanus occidentalis* (American or western sycamore) and the *Platanus orientalis* (oriental or eastern planetree). A reading of Lovett’s *Guide to Horticulture* (1892) confirms that the European sycamore was once classified as *Platanus orientalis*. Hence, the designation “European sycamore” in 1932 was a vestige of an older, less distinct classification.
2. The mother of David Leroy, former Idaho Attorney General and Lieutenant Governor, Fay née Palmer Leroy (1912-1984) graduated from Lewiston High School (1930) and Lewiston State Normal (1932). In 1979, she was selected as Idaho’s “Mother of the Year.”
3. The 16 April 1930 issue of the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, page 7, makes reference to the planting of a red oak by Pi Phi Gamma and states that it “was added to the tree family of the institution,” leading one to believe that the campus arboretum was well-established by that year. In 1904, “a shrubbery garden and arboretum” were planned for the area between where Reid Centennial and Thomas Jefferson Halls now stand.

Kootenai Herald, Kootenai, Idaho, 4 May 1895, page 2. This reference relates the story of Robert Grostein, who came to Lewiston in 1862 and planted a Lombardy poplar switch that he had used to prod along his reluctant mule. “Twigs were severed from this parent poplar as the years went by till now every street in the city is shaded by a line of them on each side.”

Lewiston Morning Tribune, 2 October 1904, page 2

_____, 7 February 1932, page 10

_____, 6 March 1932, page 5

_____, 29 March 1932, page 5

_____, 20 April 1932, page 10

_____, 25 September 1941, page 7

_____, 3 June 1948, page 16

_____, 7 August 1948, page 12

_____, 4 July 1952, page 8

_____, 3 June 1972, page 7

_____, 8 March 1991, page 58

Lewiston Teller, 23 June 1887, page 2. This citation references what was called “Thatcher’s Grove,” an arboretum once found in the 700 block of Main Street. The site served the community for Fourth of July celebrations and band concerts from as early as 1879. Its successor, “Delsol Grove,” was a popular site in east Lewiston before the development of Fifth Street Park (now Pioneer). See *Lewiston Tribune*, 27 May 1898, page 2.

Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Washington, 6 November 1910