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The Historic Flowering Cherries of the Albina Tree Planting Program

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By Dave Hedberg, Urban Forestry Community Service Aide II



This mature flowering cherry tree on NE Mallory recently got some more space to grow, thanks to a sidewalk adjustment at the base of the tree (photo courtesy of Dave Hedberg).

When: Saturday, April 16, 2016, 1-3pm

Where: Whole Foods (3535 NE 15th Ave, Portland OR 97212)

Register here: <http://tinyurl.com/kingsabinhistory> (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1npSv-Q00PtALrgSbB4DI8MPBy5b3rTCqDGUTVqhKog/viewform>)

April is Arbor Month and it is a fitting time to reflect on how Portlanders have planted urban street trees- both today and in the past.

With the arrival of spring, many trees in the urban forest are budding and blossoming in spectacular displays of color. Take a stroll in Portland and you will likely see many beautiful flowering cherry trees, particularly in the Albina District

(http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/albina_area_portland/#.VwSRID95U00) (Boise, Eliot, King, Sabin, Overlook, Piedmont, and Humboldt neighborhoods). While they are certainly picturesque this time of year, these trees also have a deep connection to the history of the neighborhood. They point back to the grassroots activism of the local African-American leaders who worked to beautify the community.

Following World War II and the Vanport Flood (<http://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/essays/the-vanport-flood/#.VwU07D95U00>), Portland's African-Americans faced prejudiced real-estate zoning or "redlining" (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/91454>), which effectively restricted the community to Albina. Urban development projects, like Memorial Coliseum and Emanuel Hospital

(<http://oregonhistoryproject.org/narratives/commerce-climate-and-community-a-history-of-portland-and-its-people/portland-neighborhoods/race-and-progressive-resistance/#.VwU1Ez95U00>), further displaced significant numbers of black business owners

(http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/OHC/docs/multnomah_portland_BuildingsOfPDXAfricanAmericanHistory_REVISIED.pdf) and residents. By the 1960s, while much of the city celebrated relative affluence, members of Albina's black community were suffering from poverty and city disinvestment in their neighborhoods.

In 1961, local black leaders like Mrs. Opal Strong, took matters into their own hands. Organizing as the Albina Neighborhood Improvement Committee (http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/OHC/docs/multnomah_portland_HistoricResourcesAndTheAlbinaCommPlan.pdf), local leaders obtained \$1 million in federal funds to revitalize the neighborhoods. To beautify the area and foster a deeper sense of place, the Albina Tree Planting Program, part of the larger revitalization project, began planting trees in 1962. Headed by Rev. Faddie J. Crear, the program included both black and white residents and many celebrated it for its inclusiveness.

Throughout the twelve years of the program, leaders favored planting the Kwanzan flowering cherry. With so many trees planted, it is not easy to date conclusively, but it is fair to say that most mature flowering cherries in this area are associated with the program. The program also planted other species including: incense cedar, japanese maples, dogwood, and tulip trees. In 1964 alone, the program planted over 500 trees in Albina!



Albina Tree Planting program, ca. 1964, courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society, 52657)

Oregonian, Feb.12, 1966, p. 15.

Today, many of these flowering cherry trees have grown beyond the confines of their smaller planting strips, thereby lifting up sidewalks and creating hazards. Additionally, many of these trees, while beautiful, have come to the end of their life spans.

Just this year, members of the Albina Neighborhood Tree Team (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/570056>) obtained Urban Forest Stewardship Funding (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/478863>) to help lower-income neighbors to remove their dead or dying cherry trees, and replace them with a more diverse collection of trees. Selecting new flowering trees that are better suited for the smaller planting strips will continue the grassroots tradition of Albina.

As you admire the spring blossoms, take a moment to appreciate our neighbors, past and present, who have taken to the shovel, to plant new trees. Their investment rewards us all.

If the history of Portland's trees interests you, then please consider attending a fun talk and tree walk (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1npSv-Q00PtALrgSbB4DI8MPBy5b3rTCqDGUTfvqhKog/viewform>), sponsored by the King-Sabin Tree Team (<http://kingneighborhood.org/join-the-fun-sabin-king-tree-inventory-and-plan/>) on Saturday, April 16, 2016. We will explore this and many other fascinating tree histories in the King and Sabin neighborhoods.

For more information, please contact: Patrick.Key@portlandoregon.gov (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/mailto:Patrick.Key@portlandoregon.gov>)



Martha and Willie Jones moved into this home on NE Prescott in 1965, in the midst of the Albina Tree Planting Program. They may have participated in the planting of these flowering cherries (photo courtesy of Dave Hedberg).

0 Comments

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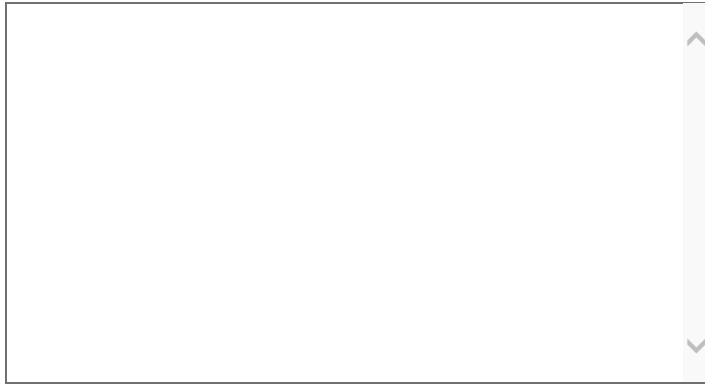
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