

# TREE MAINTENANCE IN PHILADELPHIA<sup>1</sup>

by Robert McConnell

First, a brief history of Fairmount Park. The park can be traced to early 1812 maps of Philadelphia which show a 5-acre area designated as *Faire Mount*. Additional acreage was acquired throughout the 1800's. In 1855 a city ordinance was passed officially creating Fairmount Park.

In Philadelphia today, the Fairmount Park System encompasses over 8,000 acres of park land. In 1972, the United States Department of the Interior named the park to the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to maintaining 2.5 million public trees, the Fairmount Park Commission also oversees the upkeep of 300,000 street trees. Each year, these numbers increase with the planting of 5,000 to 6,000 additional trees. The open spaces of *William Penn's Faire Mount* have grown both in size and beauty in the 300 years since Penn first visited his possession in the New World.

As the park grows in size, the costs of maintaining it increase, also. For 1975, our operating budget is \$7,070,000 and our total capital budget is \$22,132,000. Out of the operating budget, our recreation division receives \$1,694,000; grounds maintenance receives \$1,565,000; the horticultural division receives \$1,474,000; the buildings maintenance division receives \$1,234,000, and the general support or administrative division receives \$1,112,000.

In 1975, the horticultural division will use \$500,000 from the capital budget for tree planting, \$589,000 from the operating budget for tree trimming, and \$300,000 from the capital budget for dead tree removal. As of June 1975, our street tree division has removed 2,000 trees as compared to the 584 trees removed by private contractors.

As director of Fairmount Park, one of my duties is to see that the rules and regulations set forth in the street tree ordinance are carried out. This job and the education of public citizens, private con-

tractors, and all interested organizations concerning the proper pruning, planting, spraying, and every day care of street trees are the responsibilities of our Street Tree Division.

The street trees under our care are not owned by the Fairmount Park Commission; the private property owners whose properties are adjacent to these trees are the actual owners. However, before these owners can take any action such as spraying, pruning, or cutting the trees, they must secure the permission of our Street Tree Division. This is accomplished through a series of permits issued through our division, which is rather unique because of the enforcement authority it possesses. For example, if a street tree should die, it is the property owner's responsibility to remove the tree at their own expense. If the owner fails to do so or ignores notices from the Street Tree Division to do so, the Fairmount Park Commission will have the tree removed and bill the property owner for the expense.

Pruning or any other tree work must also be done at the property owner's expense by a competent tree surgeon who must be fully covered by property damage and liability insurance. The Fairmount Park Street Tree Division does bear the responsibility for the care of trees growing in the park and on public property.

During the last fiscal year, the City of Philadelphia provided \$120,000 for our Roadside Beautification Program, which involves the removal of dead trees and the planting of new ones. This money was provided in addition to the monies already mentioned in our capital and operating budgets. The City of Philadelphia provided this money for the work done by private contractors in an effort to give city residents some relief concerning this costly item.

In addition to caring for our street trees, we are also responsible for any trees planted by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society under the 10,000 Trees Program. This is a campaign to so-

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the International Shade Tree Conference in Detroit, Michigan in August 1975.

licit contributions from private individuals to plant 10,000 trees for next year's Bicentennial. As of this date, the Society has raised \$250,000 to plant 1,438 trees, with an additional 700 trees to be planted in the fall. They are to be commended for doing an excellent job.

The Street Tree Division is also responsible for the upkeep of any new and unusual plantings in Fairmount Park. For example, last May, the first 'moon' tree was planted in Washington Square near Independence Hall. This tree, the first of 50 to be planted in the United States, was grown from seed carried to and from the moon by Astronaut Colonel Stuart Roosa during the Apollo 14 flight.

Another program under the jurisdiction of our Street Tree Division is the tree planting program. If a property owner wishes to have a tree planted in front of his home, he can arrange for a private contractor to plant the tree. The Street Tree Division is available to guide the owners as to the best tree to plant, the best location to plant it, and any other information necessary for the successful tree planting.

When the Street Tree Division was first organized in 1912, it was their job to plant trees in front of private homes. This service continued for about 50 years and during this time the cost rose from \$15 to \$55. The service provided in this program included the planting of a tree with a 2-2½ inch diameter and a lifetime guarantee. Many of the trees were planted in downtown areas. In order to accomplish this, the division had to remove the concrete, haul away debris, and provide the necessary soil and water. We also provided cedar stakes and wire guards to protect newly-planted trees. As you can imagine, the program gained in popularity to the point where we were unable to keep up with the many requests.

Later, we decided to end the program to the great disappointment of many people. In order to alleviate some of the dissatisfaction, it was decided to initiate the Free Tree Program. Under this program, the Fairmount Park Commission supplies trees free of charge to people in the community.

The organization sponsoring the tree planting is responsible for picking up the trees at our nursery and planting them. This must be done in lots

of 20 trees or more under the supervision of a qualified landscaper. The program's objective is to promote community involvement and tree planting on a large scale. The City provides \$40,000 per year for this program, which has been very successful.

In a city the size of Philadelphia, we encounter a great number of shade tree problems, some of which are caused by insects and disease. For example, during the year 1975, we will remove a total of 504 trees at a cost of \$71,000. Three hundred of these trees are plagued with canker-stain disease and the rest are afflicted with Dutch elm disease. Hemlock scale has caused a serious problem in the 240-acre Wissahickon Valley and we now spray this area by helicopter twice a year at a cost of \$8,900. Both the spraying and removal work are done by contract. The City of Philadelphia spends over \$18,000 every year for a full-time spraying crew in an attempt to control Japanese beetles, aphids, and our biggest problem, the tussock moth.

The gypsy moth is a grave problem in Pennsylvania and many of the state's forest areas have been completely defoliated. In an effort to prevent this in Philadelphia, the Mayor's Task Force on the gypsy moth has been set up with myself as chairman to prevent this pest from defoliating our street trees and parklands. This task force has been very successful. We work very closely with the Pennsylvania State Authority, who use parasites to combat the gypsy moth. At this time, two varieties of wasps are dropped into affected areas by helicopter; these parasites will build up and hopefully destroy the gypsy moth before the problem gets out of control. We have also sprayed our woodland by helicopter with Dipel to prevent the spread of the gypsy moth.

Our Mayor, Frank L. Rizzo, is extremely interested in park beautification and open space. He has given us millions of dollars for the programs I have described and to purchase additional park land.

*Fairmount Park Commission  
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