

Stowe Center's Black Walnut Tree

by Bernie Michel

Asylum Hill's Strategic Plan for the next 10 years will most likely include an effort to improve the tree canopy in the neighborhood. Increasingly experts are discovering how important trees are to our health, from a neighborhood to the entire planet. Mature trees are especially valuable, as they provide much more benefit than those just planted. So when we discovered that the Black Walnut tree just west of the Stowe Visitor Center had been taken down, we were dismayed.



A conversation with Amy Hufnagel, currently acting Executive Director of the Stowe Center helped a lot. As Amy explained it, trees are a part of the Stowe collection. "In the same way that we care for a fine piece of furniture or a building, we care for the trees or every plant that is a part of the landscape of the Stowe Center." Amy said.

Earlier this year, they lost a pawpaw tree due to extreme weather, and then recently the black walnut that was well over a hundred years old had to be taken down. As Amy put it, "It was a detriment to so many buildings that you had to make a choice of what stays in the collection, the buildings ... or the tree." They enlisted the services of Savatree, a tree and landscaping company to do the work. Before it was removed, they had connected with Mystic Seaport who would be able to use the wood to repair some of their historic boats. They were even involved before the tree was taken down to determine how the work should be done to maximize the uses for every part of the tree.

The stump in the photo will still need to be removed, because the space will later be used to create an outdoor classroom for the many school students who visit the Stowe Center each year as well as a space for the community. It's being made possible by a grant from one of Harriet Beecher Stowe's descendants.

Again as Amy says, "It really is a parkland... and yet it's very minimally treated by the neighboring community as a parkland. And so by design, there are a number of things we can do to be more park-like and inviting to our surrounding community."

There is one other effort being made to memorialize this long time part of the Stowe estate and that is keeping one large piece of the tree and later on incorporating it into a little garden area, a stump garden or stumpery as they're called. Having done their research though, it seems that freshly cut black walnut wood has certain properties that are often detrimental to other plants, but these properties only last for about 8 months or so. So the Stumpery will have to wait a little while, in tree years, a very little while.

For more information On the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, the House and activities go to: <https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org>