

## The story of oneTree 2019's Big Leaf Maple

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oneTree 2019 is a big Leaf Maple, over 200 years old and 31 feet in circumference. It started life about 1815, 50 years before the land was settled by Europeans. The tree grew in the Chemainus River Delta in Halalt Territory part of the Coast Salish, both nourished by bountiful Salmon.

The land saw European settlement in 1865 by Sir Edmund Hope Verney who had commanded the ship "Grappler" out of Esquimalt, before moving to Chemainus, then back to England and becoming a member of Parliament. Politically a "liberal", Verney petitioned the Island government of the day to live up to their promises to the Indians and although the Grappler was often charged with maintaining order with the local natives, he prided himself with never using the ships' guns.

The oneTree maple was Included in 100 acres purchased in 1892 for \$2500 by retired British Royal Navy Capt. Charles Edward Barkley. A picture of C.E. Barkley's house is included in the "memories" excerpt which shows the oneTree maple to the right. When the E and N railway came through, CE Barkley opened the first post office in his house by the maple and named the area "Westholme" by which it is still known today. It is his death that opened a very interesting wormhole of history: On November 22, 1909, the house started to burn in the middle of the night and, in his eighties, he ran back in twice to get historic documents, perishing in the fire on his second attempt. What was so important? He was trying to save his grandmother's diary. (See: ***The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley: 1769-1845.***)

In a nutshell: CE Barkley's Grandfather was Capt Charles William Barkley, who in 1786, less than a decade after Captain Cook, came to Nootka Sound. Before the settlement of Vancouver Island, before The Bigleaf Maple Tree was even a sapling, Frances Barkley came to Yuquot, or Nootka, with her husband Captain Charles William Barkley on a trading expedition. At the age of 17 she married Captain Barkley, and instead of remaining quietly at home, she went with him on a voyage across the world to Vancouver Island, for otter pelts. She travelled the seas for eight years, having several children onboard, sadly losing one due to illness. They sailed from England to Vancouver Island to trade for Otter pelts, discovering and naming Barkley Sound, re-discovering and naming the Strait of Juan DeFuca (now Salish Sea) and more before sailing to China to sell the pelts.

Frances saved them in the Americas and in China when unveiling her flowing red-gold hair she was taken to be a goddess and was able to command their freedom from the natives. They sold the furs in China, but on their next stop in Mauritius their ship and cargo were confiscated, as Captain Barkley was trading without a formal licence from the East India Company to avoid the high fees. His ship, maps, and instruments were transferred to the trader John Meares, who claimed these discoveries for his own. It was only with Frances Barkley's journal that things were put straight. Without it, Barkley sound would be Meares Sound. She became the first European woman to visit Vancouver Island and Alaska, as well as possibly the first to circumnavigate the globe (though one other claimed to have done it a few years earlier disguised as a man).

Around 1815, an indigenous Bigleaf maple tree began to grow in the Chemainus Valley, in the traditional territory of the Halalt First Nation. The river was full of steelhead, trapped in weirs to provide a rich food

source to the inhabitants of the land. Chemainus was settled by Europeans starting in 1858 as a logging town, and by 1865 a house was built near the tree.

The tree grew in the sandy, gravelly soil, spreading huge leaves in a carpet at its base in the fall, leaves that decomposed and provided nutrition to the soil as they composted. The Barkley family named their home Westholme, meaning "home in the west". This name stuck, spreading outward through the area until a nearby settlement absorbed the name as well.

Captain Charles Edward Barkley settled there with his son and daughter. The maple was not the only tree in the area, with a number of other maples close by along with cottonwoods. A famous tree in the region was affectionately known as The Big Fir Tree, which by the turn of the century had lost its top, but was a stout 48 feet in circumference. Although The Big Fir Tree blew down during the First World War during a storm, the maple endured, growing to the point where it deserved the title of The Bigleaf Maple Tree.

Another completely unsubstantiated rumor has one Ralph Stanley Meisner, who bought the property with his wife Nena about 1940 mysteriously disappear only to be found 7 years later as a skeleton sitting beside the river on the property with his teeth in his hat beside him.

In the late 1990's with the tree starting to die, the top and upper limbs were trimmed for safety reasons. In the ensuing 20 years the rot kept creeping up from the bottom as it does with old maples, but also down from the top through the places where the heartwood was exposed and vulnerable from trimming. Ever heroic, the maple shot new limbs out from the still healthy sapwood, but the new growth was very weak and would often crash down on the barn or into the cattle pens below. All the while the heartwood structure of the tree was decaying and making the tree more and more unstable.

With a heavy heart the owners asked Live Edge Design if we could take the tree down and make something memorable from it. The tree had meant a tremendous amount to their family. The rope swing had been on the tree since before they bought the property and was well used and loved. Searching for Easter eggs in the nooks and crannies of the tree became a family tradition. The entire tree was a favorite play area for the children and it provided summer shade for the cattle.

### **The epic takedown of the tree.**

The plan was that Canadian Tree Service, who had long looked after this tree would take the tree down from the top by climbing it and flying the limbs out with a crane so as not to damage the buildings close to the tree or the wood from the tree. We asked Advantage Crane to recommend a crane for the job- they recommended a 90 ton construction crane, the biggest crane we could get in the yard. It was all supposed to be done in 6 hours.

After putting his massive outriggers out, the crane operator loaded 27 tons of steel weights on the opposite side of the crane as the tree to balance out the anticipated weight of the tree. When this weight hit the crane deck the outriggers sunk a couple feet into the ground because of the deep silty soil of the flood plain beneath the driveway. The next couple of hours were spent shoring up the outriggers

to make sure the crane would not destabilize when the full weight of the tree dangled at the end of the long arm of the crane.

The next problem was that the quick growing sucker limbs proved to be very weak even though they were 10-12 inches thick. We were trying to fly out the first big limb with the crane attached to the new growth when they began to break, nearly landing the limb on the barn and forcing the climber to abandon his post by pushing off into mid air and demonstrating why they tether themselves to a sturdy limb. This left him dangling in the air, but much better than falling to the ground.

After that things went pretty smoothly for a while, the big crane having no problem flying the big limbs out over the barn, but it was fairly late in the day when we fired up the Stihl .090, one of the largest production chain saws ever made, with a seven foot bar attached. Even with the big saw, it didn't come close to reaching the other side of the tree, so we had to cut all the way around the tree to free it from the root. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way around the saw blew up. Being late in the day, we decided to send the crane operator home and our Sawyer spent the night rebuilding the saw.

The next morning we finished the cut and hooked some massive cables and chains around the trunk and hooked them to the crane. Directly beside the crane it could lift 90 tons, at the extension of the crane to reach over the barn, the maximum safe lift was 15 tons. The tree didn't budge. We trimmed a bit of the tree off, got out the calculator again, and decided that the tree shouldn't weigh more than 24,000 (12 tons) pounds. When it still wouldn't lift it, we figured it must not be cut all the way through, so we wedged the cut and sawed and wedged until we could see daylight all the way around and through the space between the trunk and the root. The crane still could not lift it.

There was no way to get the crane closer to the tree. So we had to send the crane home. A bigger crane would not fit in the yard.

Because we had this massive tree completely severed from the root with no way to move it or lay it down, we had some big steel plates made and bolted it back to the root for safety. Then we built scaffolding around the tree and sawed it in half from the top down. Then we got the crane back and it managed to pull the trunk out one piece at a time. The trunk weighed 41,000 pounds. With all the limbs and root included, the entire tree would likely weigh at least 80,000 pounds (40 tons).

More to come...