

## Area Bloggers



TOP

# Champion Tree Guards Heritage

AUGUST 15TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

## Champion Tree Guards Heritage

***By Annabeth Miller***

It has been a sort of “keeper” of one of the most unique tracks of land in Southeast Missouri. It’s a sentinel guarding the bluff above the river.

The champion American beech tree has watched Indians paddle canoes down the river and the march of Europeans into the western half of the nation. Steamboats, paddlewheels, barges and more have floated by spot at the top of the hill – situated at a precious point looking out over the Mississippi and protecting the old St. Vincent’s Seminary in Cape Girardeau.

Now this champion beech tree guards the eastern ground of the River Campus of Southeast Missouri State University. But its roots are deep in the heritage of the region.

] Back when its was a seminary, it was a part of the young student’s tradition. The beech tree was the “Initial Tree” and young seminarians would climb the thick branches and carve their initials into the tree for posterity. Still today, you crane your neck up to the sky, and you can see their initials carved for decades in the limbs of this giant tree.

Mark Twain wrote about the Seminary in his 1883

<images/Blog Images/NewsAugust2011/8.15.2011 boughs.jpg>

book, *Life on the Mississippi*. He writes, “There is a great Jesuit school for boys at the foot of town by the river. Uncle Mumford said it has as high a reputation for thoroughness as any similar institution in Missouri.”

When SEMO developed the spot for the River Campus, they were wise to keep such treasures as the enormous beech. They even put wonderful benches at points near the tree, so visitors can pause, and look up at the magnificent span of branches.

I sat there the other day during a quick visit to campus and wondered –what prayers were offered by the seminarians under the shade of that beech? What devotionals were written? What scripture was studied?

And now, as the center for arts education, what music is studied under the boughs of that tree? What lines are rehearsed for a theatrical performance? A friend has told me that she is actually a little glad they didn’t have the River Campus when she was a student – she would have wanted to sit and watch the Mississippi instead of being inside practicing music!

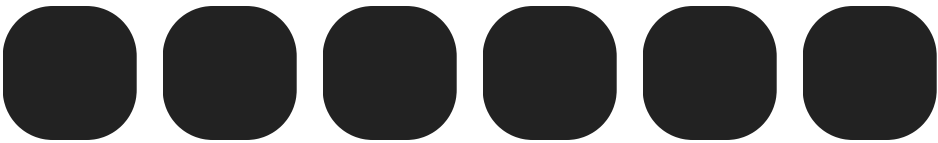
Next to the beech tree is the Old Mississippi River Bridge Scenic Outlook, A small, restored portal of the old river bridge is all that remains today. At the overlook there is a viewing scope that provides a commanding view of the Mississippi River. You can stand at the outlook, and watch the river make its way to New Orleans and view the impressive Bill Emerson Memorial Bridge. It’s a great way to use the portal to the old bridge – keeping a bit of the old to view and appreciate the new!

*Annabeth Miller is the editor of the ShowMe Times and a lifelong resident of Dexter.*

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