

## Tree of Life

The silver maple tree has a history of sustaining life. Ohio Valley pioneers found silver maple sap superior in sugar quality to other maples. The tree also benefits wildlife, providing nesting for ducks and food for squirrels.

Over 75 ft. high and six ft. in diameter, the giant silver maple tree on Willow Valley grounds stands majestically, supported by a complex network of shallow fibrous roots. The slightest breeze emits a dance from silver green leaves. This species: (*Acer saccharinum*), a common tree by most standards, makes up for in tenacity what it lacks in pedigree. Despite broken bark and limbs lost to years of storms, it is a survivor...over 198 years and going strong!

In fact, if not for the determination of Grounds Manager Nathan Eshleman, it may have suffered the same tragic fate as many ancient arbors. The arborist we consulted, said "Cut it down." Nathan didn't like that answer: after all, this tree was more than just ornamental; it symbolized Willow Valley's sense of history and permanence. So he got a second opinion. Well, it's all in how you look at things because the second arborist found a way to save our silver maple.

After root zone fertilization and aeration, major trimming was performed. Hollow branches were cut and cables erected to control the direction of limbs close to the farmhouse which is now the Welcome Center. Younger, less sturdy, smooth-barked limbs were supported by cables attached to older bigger branches and connected by cables to grey shaggy bark on the main trunk.

Now the branches all support each other rather than each branch trying to support itself in times of rough weather. And, when I think about it, that really describes life at Willow Valley, too.

*Rosanne Pritts*

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