

FORT HUNT PARK ROYAL VISIT PIN OAK  
(Fort Hunt Park *Quercus palustris*)  
NPS Witness Tree Protection Program  
George Washington Memorial Parkway  
Fort Hunt Park  
Near loop road in Area B  
Fort Hunt  
Fairfax County  
Virginia

HALS VA-11  
VA-11

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY**

**FORT HUNT PARK ROYAL VISIT PIN OAK  
(Fort Hunt Park *Quercus palustris*)**

**HALS No. VA-11**

<u>Location:</u>	George Washington Memorial Parkway, Fort Hunt Park, near loop road in Area B, Fort Hunt, Fairfax County, Virginia
<u>Owner/Manager:</u>	U.S. Government, National Park Service
<u>Present Use:</u>	Ornamental and shade tree
<u>Significance:</u>	The Fort Hunt Park Royal Visit Pin Oak ( <i>Quercus palustris</i> ) is significant because of its association with the visitation of England's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in June 1939. The tree commemorates not only the arrival of the king and queen, the first reigning English monarchs to travel to the United States, but also the success of the Civilian Conservation Corps facility established at Fort Hunt.
<u>Author &amp; Discipline:</u>	Jonathan Pliska, Landscape Architectural Historian, 2006
<u>Project Information:</u>	The Witness Tree Protection Program was a pilot project undertaken by the Historic American Landscapes Survey and the National Capital Region of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Richard O'Connor, Chief, Heritage Documentation Programs; Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, Historic American Landscapes Survey; Darwina Neal, Chief, Cultural Resources, National Capital Region; Jonathan Pliska, Historian, Historic American Landscapes Survey; Jet Lowe and James Rosenthal, Photographers, Heritage Documentation Programs.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Pin oak, introduced to North America prior to 1770, maintains a historical home range stretching from Massachusetts to Delaware and west to Wisconsin and Arkansas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Dirr, *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*, 5th ed. (Champaign, Ill.: Stipes Publishing L.L.C., 1998), 828.

However, its growing zone now extends into each of the forty-eight contiguous states.<sup>2</sup> A correspondent of Linnaeus, German botanist Otto von Muenchhausen (1716-44), identified the species and issued its two-part botanical name, *Quercus palustris*.<sup>3</sup> The Latin phrase translates as “swamp oak,” and indeed this is an apt name given that specimens often inhabit swamps, riverbanks, floodplains, and other saturated terrain.<sup>4</sup> As one of the most frequently planted trees, pin oak has played an important role in the evolution of American landscape architecture, and a poll published in *American Nurseryman* magazine identified it as the most popular of all shade trees.<sup>5</sup>

Situated 2.5 miles north of George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate in Fairfax County, Virginia, the land comprising the present 190-acre Fort Hunt Park was itself owned by Washington from 1760 until his death in 1799. He operated it as part of his River Farm, and subsequent owners continued cultivation until 1893, when the federal government acquired the property and began construction of the Coastal Defense fortification. This military installation was renamed Fort Hunt by President William McKinley on 13 April 1899, in honor of the late Bvt. Maj. General Henry Jackson Hunt, a distinguished artillery officer in the Mexican and Civil Wars, and later governor of the Soldier’s Home in Washington, D.C. From 17 October 1933 until its disbandment in July 1942, Fort Hunt served as a camp for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives designed to curb depression-era unemployment by creating a wide-variety of conservation work in national parks and other public lands. CCC duties included forest protection, cleanup, landscape naturalization, trail construction, village improvements, roadside planting, and the construction of small park structures such as trail bridges, which enrollees engaged in each of these activities at fort Hunt.<sup>6</sup> Across America the CCC employed more than three million men, who together planted two billion trees.<sup>7</sup>

Regarded as a “model facility,” Fort Hunt played host to an array of eminent foreign leaders, including future British Prime Minister Anthony Eden in 1938, and most prominent of all, England’s King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in June 1939. President Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt showcased the camp during the monarchs’ royal visit of Canada and the United States. Though it was a hot day, the king and queen

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<sup>2</sup> Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson, *Quercus palustris: Pin Oak*, (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, November 1993), <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ST555> (accessed 12 June 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethyl Hyde Bailey, “*Quercus palustris*,” in *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada*, revised and expanded by the staff of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), 935.

<sup>4</sup> G. H. Collingwood and Warren D. Brush, *Knowing Your Trees*, ed. Devereux Butcher (Washington, D.C.: The American Forestry Association, 1964), 202.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffery Meyer, *America’s Famous and Historic Trees: From George Washington’s Tulip Poplar to Elvis Presley’s Pin Oak* (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 108.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 328.

<sup>7</sup> “Civilian Conservation Corps Museum, Pocahontas State Park, Chesterfield, Va.,” in *Virginia State Parks* (Richmond, Va.: Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia State Parks, 5 December 2006), [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/cccmus.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/cccmus.shtml) (accessed 13 December 2007).

toured the entire facility, and talked with the men about their diet, food, and work. After inspecting the camp's barracks and mess hall, the king studied a display of photographs showcasing the work of the CCC across America that had been set up on bulleting boards outside the buildings.<sup>8</sup> Either that day or shortly thereafter, Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker planted two pin oak trees (*Quercus palustris*) at this spot in honor of the occasion, one of which survives today. The Royal Visit Pin Oak commemorates not only the arrival of the king and queen, the first reigning English monarchs to travel to the United States, but the success of the CCC as well. The tree further recalls an uncertain time in world history. The royal visit was not a goodwill tour, but aimed at shoring up western support for an increasingly inevitable war against Nazi Germany. Less than two months after the plantings, Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, marking the beginning of World War II in Europe.

As a living monuments to a royal visit, representative of the CCC and Roosevelt's New Deal, and a reminder of the world's uncertain future on the eve of World War II, the Royal Visit Pin Oak gains further significance from its planter. Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker (1889-1982) ranks among the most important foresters, silviculturists, and conservationists of all time, and was one of the first ecologists to call attention to the global implications of deforestation and desert encroachment. After receiving a Forestry Degree from Cambridge University, he was assigned assistant curator of forests in Kenya in 1922. There he worked with some 9,000 native Kikuyu tribesmen to replant millions of harvested trees and reclaim land lost to the Sahara Desert through years of soil erosion. These efforts marked the beginning of the Men of the Trees, an international movement that has promoted tree planting and conservation in 108 countries. In the United States alone, Baker conceived of and organized the CCC, worked against soil erosion in the arid southwest, and helped lead a successful movement to preserve California's redwoods. He also crisscrossed the globe giving lectures, organizing exhibitions, and advising leaders on every continent except Antarctica. During his lifetime Baker founded the Forestry Association of Great Britain, established the first tree planting program in India, coordinated plantings in Jerusalem with leaders of the city's Islamic, Hebrew, and Catholic communities, and received the Order of the British Empire. His tireless efforts resulted in the planting of an estimated twenty-six million trees internationally. A bronze relief commemorates his birth in London's West End, but it these trees, the Fort Hunt Park Royal Visit Pin Oak prominent among them, which constitute his enduring legacy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kay Fanning, Katarzyna Piotrowska-Nosek, and Bryne D. Riley, *Fort Hunt Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway: National Park Service, Cultural Landscapes Inventory* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, National Capital Region, Cultural Landscapes Program, 2004), (2b)3.

<sup>9</sup> International Tree Foundation, "Our Founder – A Man Before His Time," in *International Tree Foundation* (Sandy Lane, Crawley Down, West Sussex, England: International Tree Foundation, 2003), <http://www.internationaltreefoundation.org> (accessed 28 June 2006); Paul Mantle, *The Man of the Trees: Richard St. Barbe Baker*, Paul Mantle, <http://www.manofthetrees.org> (accessed 28 June 2006); Men of the Trees, Inc., "History of the Founder of Men of the Trees," in *Men of the Trees, Western Australia* (Guildford, Western Australia: Men of the Trees, Inc.), <http://www.menofthetrees.com.au/history.html> (accessed 28 June 2006); West End Local History Society, *Memorial to Richard St. Barbe Baker* (Hampshire, United Kingdom: West End Local History Society, 2006), <http://www.hants.org.uk/westendlhs/barbe/index.html> (accessed 28 June 2006).

Fort Hunt Park retains little historical integrity from the CCC era. A small brick building built ca. 1935 appears to be the sole remaining structure constructed by the Corps, and circulation routes have been drastically changed through alterations to roads, trails, and entrances. According to the site's cultural landscapes inventory, "Civilian Conservation Corps-era planting plans suggest the entire park was to have been treated as a picturesque landscape: an overall cover of woodland was opened here and there into fields or small glades, with flowering, irregular woodland ridges."<sup>10</sup> It seems possible that this management strategy was at least somewhat implemented, but later abandoned during World War II when the camp housed several top-secret military programs, including the interrogation of high-ranking Nazi prisoners of war. In 1946, the U.S. War Department declared Fort Hunt surplus property and in 1948 the NPS began developing the former military installation as a park. Today, the Royal Visit Pin Oak is among the few remaining botanical specimens dating to the CCC occupancy. There is no signage or other display in place to identify the trees.<sup>11</sup>

## PART II. BIOLOGICAL INFORMATION

*Quercus palustris* is one of approximately 450 diverse species classified under the genus *Quercus* within the oak family Fagaceae.<sup>12</sup> Pin oak may be identified from a distance by its distinctive branching structure: the lower branches pendulous (descending), the middle horizontal, and the upper upright. However, the leaves are the surest way to differentiate pin oak from the myriad of closely related species. As with many oaks, *Quercus palustris* exhibits five to seven lobed, deciduous leaves arranged alternately on branches. The dimensions of the leaves, at 3" to 6" long and nearly as wide, are not particularly unique. However, the lobes are irregularly toothed and pointed, with unusually deep, U-shaped spaces (sinuses) between them. The leaves are a lustrous green color above and a lighter green beneath with auxiliary tufts of hair. Fall coloration is variable, but they typically turn a russet brown, bronze, or red, and dead leaves frequently remain on the tree over winter.<sup>13</sup>

Acorns, produced from September to early December, provide another means of identification.<sup>14</sup> Brown, often striated, the upper one-quarter to one-third of each nut is covered by a saucer-like cap. The acorns resemble those of other species, except that at ½" high and ⅔" to ¾" wide they are more broad than long.<sup>15</sup> Pin oak begins producing

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<sup>10</sup> Fanning, et al., (3b)5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., (3b)6

<sup>12</sup> Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethyl Hyde Bailey, "*Quercus*," in *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada*, revised and expanded by the staff of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), 933.

<sup>13</sup> Dirr, 826-27.

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. McQuilkin, "Pin Oak," in *Silvics of North America: 2. Hardwoods. Agricultural Handbook 654*, online ed., tech. coords. Russell M. Burns and Barbara H. Honkala (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, 1990), 1368, [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics\\_manual/volume\\_2/silvics\\_v2.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/silvics_v2.pdf) (accessed 13 June 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Dirr, 827.

acorns by about age twenty, and as a tree matures lower branches die off, transforming its habit from strongly pyramidal to more rounded or oval shaped. The species' common name may have derived from the remaining stubs, which are often distinctively pin-shaped. A straight, dominant central leader (trunk) persists throughout the lifetime of a pin oak tree.<sup>16</sup> The bark is light to dark gray-brown, bearing the ridges and furrows characteristic of oaks. *Quercus palustris* is monoecious, meaning that male (staminate) and female (pistillate) flowers both bloom on each tree. Male flowers appear as long, droopy brown tassels (catkins) while female flowers take the form of spikes concealed at the juncture of leaf and stem. Neither is diagnostic of the species nor particularly showy.<sup>17</sup>

*Quercus palustris* typically experiences a longevity of greater than 150 years, ceasing growth after reaching physiological maturity between eighty and 100 years of age.<sup>18</sup> Planted in 1939, the Fort Hunt Park Royal Visit Pin Oak is sixty-seven years old in 2006, both chronologically young and physiologically juvenile. Normal size for the species ranges between 50' and 90' tall, with a crown spread of 25' to 40' and trunk circumference of 75" to 115".<sup>19</sup> With a maximum annual growth rate of 24" to 36", *Quercus palustris* is one of the fastest growing oaks, and a moderately fast growing tree overall. The surviving Royal Visit Pin Oak has not been measured, but appears to be in sound condition and stands a good chance of growing into a large specimen tree.

As mentioned above, pin oak is an extremely popular species. As juveniles, the upright pyramidal crowns, absence of heavy side branches, clean trunk, and rich glossy leaves the species one of the most desirable oaks for street and ornamental planting.<sup>20</sup> In addition to parks and lawns, individuals grow successfully in parking lot islands and highway medians, and although sensitive to elevated ozone levels, the species is considered urban tolerant. The trees accept clay, sand, or loamy soils but require a strongly acidic composition, and are very sensitive to soil pH above 6.7. In high pH soils iron-deficiency may lead to yellowing, stunted growth, decreased fruit production, and even death due to decreased chlorophyll production. As a native to stream banks and flood plains, pin oak grows well in areas frequently inundated with water for extended periods of time. A shallow, fibrous root system allows *Quercus palustris* to thrive in these flooded conditions, but if the roots have not yet established themselves this submersion will likely kill the tree.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> McQuilkin, 1369; "*Quercus palustris*" in *Flora of North America*, vol. 3, [http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora\\_id=1&taxon\\_id=210001860](http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=1&taxon_id=210001860) (accessed 14 June 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Bailey and Bailey, "*Quercus*," 933; Collingwood and Brush, 203.

<sup>18</sup> McQuilkin, 1369, 1370-71; Jeffery L. Reimer and Walter Mark, *SelectTree: A Tree Selection Guide* (San Luis Obispo, Calif.: Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute, 2004), California Polytechnic State University, <http://selecttree.calpoly.edu> (accessed 21 June 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Gilman and Watson; Dirr, 827; John Dickerson, "Plant Fact Sheet: Pin Oak, *Quercus palustris*," in *PLANTS Database* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Plant Data Center, 5 February 2002), [http://plants.nrcs.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs\\_qupa2.pdf](http://plants.nrcs.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_qupa2.pdf) (accessed 23 June 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Collingwood and Brush, 203.

<sup>21</sup> Gilman and Watson.