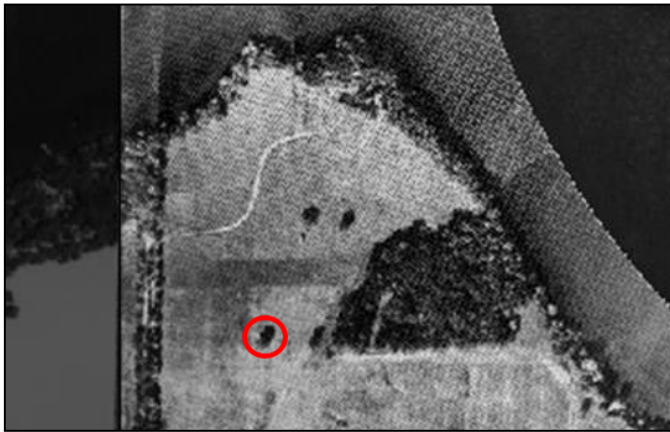


## Second Oak—Legacy of Change

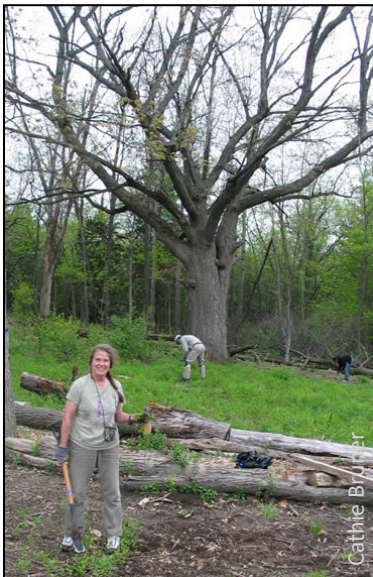
By Adam Gundlach, Preserve Field Projects Coordinator

The Preserve's recent historical context and the process of change on the land is aptly captured through the lens of aerial images dating back to the 1920s. In the early to mid-1900s, the open fields of Frautschi Point were privately owned, share-cropped, and shaped to meet the needs and desires of those who lived there. A fringe of oak trees remained along the Lake Mendota shoreline, and a couple of lone oak trees stood watch over the ground where fields were conceived and carved out of the existing savanna and woodland. Later, abandoned to natural succession between the mid-1950s and present day, the fields around the open-grown oaks quickly filled with early successional growth. Some of the early regeneration included a crescent moon of young white oak trees around what has been dubbed the "Second Oak," near the south edge of Frautschi Point Woods.



This airphoto from 1927 shows the Second Oak circled in red.

Ever since, time has been busy painting a shady future for the area surrounding the young white oaks. Around 2005, volunteers led by Volunteer Steward Glenda Denniston put significant effort into first exposing the Second Oak, and then maintaining a sliver of an opening along the field edge. This work allowed a glimpse of the formerly open-grown savanna tree. Walk past the oak from the field edge and it becomes clear that time has continued to paint



shade. The young cohort of white oaks have gradually acquired more neighbors, elbowing their way in to capture as much light as they can.

While oaks are still relatively common canopy trees in portions of the Preserve, a cohort of younger-aged oaks, such as the crescent moon of Second Oak progeny, exists nowhere else on the

Volunteer Glenda Denniston stands in front of the Second Oak after it was daylighted in 2006.



Today a cohort of young oaks forms a crescent shape (blue outline) around the Second Oak.

property. We have plenty of examples in those remaining canopy trees of what happens in the absence of management—the oaks drop limbs and slowly decline as they are crowded out by shade-tolerant species; decaying stubs on the trunks of oaks and a carpet of woody undergrowth mark the change.

In winter 2019-20, Preserve staff plan to remove select competing trees growing into the canopies of the white oak cohort around Second Oak to promote their healthy growth into the future. Some competing trees will be felled and removed from the site, while others will be girdled and left as standing snags. As conditions allow, seed will be sown and prescribed burn plans drafted for the southern edge of Frautschi Point to aid in maintaining an open community around the oaks.

Change is constant. The job of land managers is to guide the process of change toward objectives, in this case, preserving native diversity and cultural resources. The Second Oak and its offspring are emblematic of both, the continuation of a charismatic biodiversity keystone species and a physical waypoint on the cultural timeline of the people who have inhabited these lands over the centuries.

**"Change is the only constant in life."**

~ Heraclitus of Ephesus



The orange leaves of the Second Oak and its progeny stand out in this October 2019 photo.