Who does his duty is a question
Too complex to be solved by me,
But he, I venture the suggestion,
Does part of his that plants a tree.

—James Russell Lowell, “On Planting a Tree at Inveraray”

“... There were no trees, no fence, and not a blade of grass, but a deep bed of sand lay all around the house. ... In the spring vacation of the second year we were requested to bring flower seeds or shrubbery ... and I returned with a trunk filled with roots and seeds. [That year] three thousand young trees were planted along the walkways.”

So wrote one young woman of her first visit to campus in 1835. The campus back then consisted of a single edifice—the austerely new Mount Holyoke Seminary—surrounded by all the bleakness of a construction site.

Students these days don’t show up on campus with trunks full of things to plant. But when they arrive, that same sense of place likely looms no less large than it did for that young girl. And four years later, it’s leaving the place—the campus—that makes many students misty-eyed under their mortarboards, just as, more years later, it’s the place that will draw them back, time and again—a glen, a walkway, a garden, a special tree.

“People get very attached to a beautiful campus,” observes Ellen Shukis, director of the Mount Holyoke Botanic Garden. Shukis is a member of a group of people who meet regularly as the Five College Arboretum and Botanical Gardens Committee. The beauty of a campus, they believe, is more than just a matter of aesthetics. “How a campus looks can be a determining factor in a student’s choice of college,” says R. Marc Fournier, assistant director of buildings and grounds at the University. Some years ago, he notes, a survey of prospective college students revealed that 50 percent felt the campus visit was a “decisive factor” for them and 62 percent said that the appearance of the grounds and buildings “influenced them most” during these campus visits. “So it’s not just an aesthetic issue,” Fournier says, “it’s also a factor in attracting and keeping students. But it’s not limited to students. Faculty and staff, too, take pride in how the campus looks.” And then there are the alumni/ae,
many of whom have a vested historical interest in—and often deep pockets for—preserving the look of a campus.

The task of keeping the campuses beautiful falls to many dedicated people who work “behind the scenes.” The broad range of care-taking concerns that fall to Shukis, Fournier, and their Five College colleagues are best encapsulated by the title “horticulturist.” John Bator has been at Amherst since 1971. Like his colleagues, he can recite both the common and Latin names of most trees on campus the way parents can recite the names of their children. He also happens to be an accomplished photographer whose work has appeared in national magazines like Sanctuary, published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society, as well as in the archives of the Smithsonian. Modestly, he says, “I’m really a landscape technician. I work with a landscape committee. We use landscape architects for the big jobs but we do all the rest.”

Frequently that means moving trees, big trees. John recalls “the Easter Parade” down Main Street a few weeks ago when he was charged with moving a 20-foot flowering Japanese stewartia from in back of the Emily Dickinson Homestead to the east side of the music building. The homestead, he explains, is now being prepared for a historical installation and the tree was not authentic in that landscape. Michael Marcotrigiano, who is a specialist in plant propagation and ornamental-plant breeding, describes himself as official “defender of trees” at Smith. He is also the director of Smith’s Botanic Garden, where he oversees a staff of 14, and teaches a course in horticulture as a faculty member in the department of biological sciences. His goal, he says, is “maintaining open space and long-lived trees.” He also talks about “balancing the needs of a botanic garden, a landscape, and a campus.” It’s a balancing act that he and his colleagues engage in every day and something they talk about frequently when they get together.

Although each has its own distinctive landscape, features, and ambience, the campuses share a lot of history and sometimes, literally, roots. With the exception of Hampshire, which was set down in the midst of rolling pastures and orchards in 1970, the natural environment of the other four campuses has been dug and seeded and propagated for many decades with the intention of having nature serve the interests of study. Each of the campuses is an arboretum with

The Smith College Botanic Garden encompasses the 125-acre campus, which includes The Lyman Conservatory (12,000 sq. ft. under glass) and specialty gardens (woodland, wildflower, herb, terraced rose garden, formal knot, and gazebo garden).
its own unique plantings, some of which represent one-of-a-kind species or rank as the oldest or largest of its kind in New England or even North America.

Where did all those plantings come from? In the early years, Mary Lyon appears to have encouraged students to dig up and dig in plants from home. Sometimes seeds and seedlings came not from the nearby woods and fields, however, but from as far away as Asia. And the person largely responsible for many of those transplantings to what was then a four-college neighborhood was the Johnny Appleseed among college presidents: William Smith Clark, the third president of Massachusetts Agricultural College, which is today the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. In 1876 Clark was invited by the Japanese government to help establish an agricultural college in Sapporo. During his eight-month sojourn there, he collected and sent back to Amherst both seeds and seedlings of many unusual ornamental trees, a special interest of his. Clark was aided in this campaign by Professor William Penn Brooks, who joined him in Sapporo, where he taught until 1890.

Back home at Massachusetts Agricultural College, their efforts resulted in the first trees planted in what is now known as the Rhododendron Garden near Hillside, the chancellor’s house, built almost a decade later in 1884. Although many were the first of their kind in the country, “Undoubtedly [Clark] was an influence in the extensive plantings of North American trees on the campuses of the area,” observes an article in a 1988 issue of the Mount Holyoke Quarterly, adding, “It is highly likely that Mount Holyoke benefited from the plant introductions made by Clark and Brooks,” including a number of ornamental trees from Japan. A 1968 campus tree list cited in the same article included three kousa dogwoods (Cornus kousa), nine Japanese maples (Acer palmatum), and one dawn redwood (Metasequoia glyptostroboides). It also credits Clark with introducing two spectacular trees into the western hemisphere—the katsura tree (Cercidiphyllum japonicum) and the Japanese tree lilac (Syringa reticulata). Both can be found thriving on the Mount Holyoke and University campuses today.

Smith’s Botanic Garden appears to have benefited, too, from Clark’s efforts as well as from a generally widespread interest in plants from Asia in late-19th-century America. A number of

New England Champions (based on circumference, height, and spread) at Smith College include the Metasequoia (pictured here), a Japanese umbrella pine, a shagbark hickory (Carya ovata), a northern red oak, and a London plane tree (Platanus acerifolia) near the art complex.
specimens dating from those years rise over the campus today: a large ginkgo tree (Ginkgo biloba) located in the systemics garden and a Japanese umbrella pine (Sciadopitys verticillata), a Chinese dogwood, a katsura tree (Zelkova), and a Chinese scholar tree (Sophora japonica). The old dawn redwood (Metasequoia glyptostroboides) that today shades Burton Lawn was a species thought to be extinct until 1941, when, according to Smith's historical record of plantings, a grove of these trees was found in China's Szechwan province. Seeds from the trees were reportedly collected and distributed. Smith's grand specimen traces its heritage to those seeds as does, likely, Mount Holyoke's.

Only one other figure dominates the local campus landscapes on the same scale as Clark. “Like George Washington, who seems to have slept in every 18th-century home in the Colonies, Frederick Law Olmsted, plus his son and associates, appears to have had a hand in the landscape design of just about every large estate, park, and campus during the last part of the nineteenth century and the early years of this century,” observes the same article in the winter 1988 issue of the Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly. And Olmsted, it would seem, often slept here in the Connecticut River Valley.

Olmsted’s influence took root at two of the campuses in particular—Mount Holyoke and Smith.

1894: The Botanic Garden at Smith College takes shape under William Francis Ganong, professor of botany and director of the Botanic Garden, and Edward J. Canning, head gardener. Together they expand a small greenhouse and potting shed to create a conservatory known as Lyman Plant House; build a rock garden (today the oldest rock garden in North America and modeled after one at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew); create the systemics garden to illustrate plant classification systems; and further develop Olmsted’s plantings and plans for the Botanic Garden.

1896: A work order from Olmsted, dated October, includes a preliminary study for arrangement of new buildings...
A sampling of trees on the green at Mount Holyoke College between the library and Clapp buildings.

Autumn views of the Smith campus from Paradise Pond.

Planted in the late ’70s below the Octagon at Amherst College, this mature silk tree (Albizia julibrissin) has defied the odds. Though rated as only marginally hardy in this zone, it continues to grow on a dry, exposed western slope, surviving its first winter without the dieback that normally occurs. Perhaps it appreciated the extra care given initially: a fall feeding of liquid seaweed and a winter blanket of burlap stuffed with pine needles! Exotic puffs of fragrant pink flowers in summer add a touch of mystique to the campus. —JB
“At Hampshire when alums come back to get married on campus, they always want to be sure to get the apple tree in the picture, too.” — Leslie Cox

The wintry silhouette of the Tupelo/black gum/sour gum (Nissa sylvatica) dramatically framed by the Octagon, one of the oldest buildings on the Amherst College campus.
(on the Mount Holyoke campus) and suggests that two months earlier the firm had completed a "topographical map of the College." The work order had been done just eight days after the fire that destroyed the Seminary building.

1899: Asa S. Kinney joins the Mount Holyoke staff as both botanist and horticulturist and executes Olmsted's plans for plantings around Mary Lyon and Brigham. Subsequently, Kinney took charge of rendering the plans for the entire campus.

1996: Smith trustees adopt the Landscape Master Plan to guide the preservation, rehabilitation, and enhancement of the Olmstedian character of the campus arboretum and also the development of a landscape design to support the scientific and educational mission of the Botanic Garden.

At Amherst, however, practical considerations sometimes won out over Olmsted's vision. According to a 1990 Amherst College campus planning study, "Much of Olmsted's original 'grand plan' for the campus was in large part ignored. The perimeter boulevards and traffic circles, entry from the east instead of the west, the romantic, low density parklike development of grounds with their native species and sinuous paths and drives were never realized." Had they been, the report points out, "subsequent development could not have taken place easily within these confines." What Amherst took from Olmsted's plan instead "was a shifting from a linear focus of original buildings on a

WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND

Mount Holyoke students grouped around the fallen hulk of "the old black walnut... a splendid specimen of its kind, its trunk being 25 feet in length before the branching out of the first limbs, its trunk between four and five feet in diameter and the tree 100 feet high..."

According to College legend, the tree grew from a walking cane absentmindedly left behind in the earth by a hiker. In 1800 it was moved and for many years graced the entrance to Mount Holyoke's first science building, Williston Hall. Legend had it that the tree would stand "just as long as Williston Hall stood." On July 21, 1917, a nor'easterly gale felled the tree after its roots had been undermined by excavations for a basement under Williston. A few months later, on December 22, Williston Hall burned to the ground. But the story did not end there. Shortly after the tree had been felled, the U.S. government offered the College $200 for the trunk—to make gunstocks for World War I. "Sentiment was so strong among members of the College," it's reported, "that the offer was refused," and its massive trunk was "carted" to a neighboring sawmill, "where it was sawn into beams and the wood stored for future use." When the College launched its Endowment Fund Campaign in 1920, alumnae eagerly purchased knitting needles, coat hangers, and small black gavels made from that wood. Today, "the old black walnut" can be seen in some of the wood paneling at the entrance to Clapp Lab.
hill [college row] to a square [old quadrangle], from outward facing to inward oriented, and a movement to the east [eventually leading to a series of sub-quadrangles]."

“For Amherst, less has always been more,” observes Jim Brassord, director of facilities planning and management at the college. “We have always tried to capitalize on natural vistas, as we do with the site of the War Memorial. We also strive for diversity in species, which may or may not be indigenous to the region, in order to ensure the health of the plantings and to preserve them for those who might be interested.”

The chief obstacles to preservation of “open space and long-lived trees” on campus, the horticulturists agree, are nature, growth, and funding. The forces of nature from time to time have taken their toll on these campus gardens, sometimes with dramatic results. Even those not old enough to have any recollection of it speak in hushed tones about the hurricane of 1936. A clipping from the Daily Hampshire Gazette in 1946 reports that at Mount Holyoke “1200 trees lost in the 1936 hurricane” were finally being replanted, that planting having been interrupted by World War II.

“Seventy lindens and pin oaks and red maples were set out on College Street, forming a ‘tree belt’ extending from Park Street to Morgan Road.”

The biggest crisis to date for all the campuses, however, has been the loss of the American elm due to Dutch elm disease. About 20 years ago, says John Bator, Amherst had to take...
down about 80 elms in one year. "If you look at pictures of the University campus before that blight," observes Marc Fournier, "every one has stately elms in view. The loss of the American elm changed the whole face of the landscape on campuses throughout New England." Even as they plant new disease-resistant strains and inject the few elms that have survived, they're all worrying now about new blights, this time to the hemlocks and ash, which, they report, are being "taken down left and right."

Growth and expansion have exercised another kind of impact on the campus landscape. This has been an issue of particular concern to Fournier and his colleague Jack Ahern, director of the University's Arboretum and head of its School of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. The University was founded as a land-grant institution, Ahern points out, "so agriculture was one of the core disciplines and integral to our mission. In fact, throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, horticulture was considered part of a basic liberal arts education." But during the building boom of the 1970s, he says, "we lost the arboretum vision of the campus, and with it the mission of connecting learning with the natural environment, with horticulture. And we've been working for nearly two decades now to remake that connection."

Michael Marcotrigiano is one of a number of Smith faculty contributing lectures to the new course in landscape studies launched at Smith this spring by Ann Leone, professor of French language and literature, who has written and lectured on the meanings of gardens and landscape in French literature. Leone is also a graduate of Smith College. "While landscape architecture is too careerspecific for a liberal arts college like Smith," Leone concedes, she and Marcotrigiano think the college is an ideal place to offer landscape studies because of its Botanic Garden and plant-houses, its library collections, its program in environmental studies, and the Smith Landscape Master Plan, which offers a model of design for "both an aesthetic and sustainable environment."

Sometimes caretaking the campus means saving trees. In late April, construction of the new Harold Alfond Management Center at the Isenberg School of Management required the removal of four 20-feet-tall maples, a memorial tree, and a 60-foot pin oak. "I just couldn't let that pin oak go," says Ahern's colleague Marc Fournier. "We had estimated that the root ball would weigh about eleven tons," but using a crane and a technique known as bare-root removal, he reports, "we saved the tree and replanted it at the southeast
corner of the Fine Arts Center before the April 20 deadline."

This tension between these two kinds of growth—buildings and plantings—is often felt most keenly when budgets are pinched and funding scarce. "When cuts have to be made," says Fournier, "it's often the grounds that feel it first. Sometimes we have to choose between mowing and pruning. And that's not the kind of choice I like to face." So, in order to restore the connection between the curriculum and the campus landscape, Fournier and Ahern have been working with many others on campus to help their campus "reinvent itself" as an arboretum. Two years ago they helped produce a campus tour map, with three different walking "loops" that alumni/ae can take to enjoy the unique plantings. They have also revived the observance of Arbor Day on campus. And in cooperation with the University's alumni/ae and development offices, in 1995 they brought back the tradition of planting a class tree. "It's a way to draw the community in, to help the students and the alums invest in the landscape, too," says Ahern.

All the campuses have special lore that surrounds trees and the planting of trees. The "pioneer class" of Massachusetts Agricultural College on April 29, 1869, planted 27 trees—one for each member of the graduating class. Although "the Elms of '71" no longer stand tall, there is a marker, dedicated June 17, 1913, testifying to their presence. A 1924 issue of the University's Alumni Bulletin reports on one of the most unusual plantings to take place at that campus, witnessed by Dr. William P. Brooks himself. Strolling through what was then one of the oldest stands of Scotch pines in the country, located northeast of the president's house, he recalled that "the trees were set as seedlings by members of the class of 1875 as an exercise of one of our forestry classes under Professor Samuel T. Maynard . . . Maynard had a unique way of determining where we should set each tree. . . . He told us to take a handful of potatoes and throw them as high in the air as we could. Then we were to plant a tree where each potato fell to the ground. That ensured a more or less natural distribution of the trees as nature might have placed them . . . ."

The halls of ivy were not always so. Graduating classes at Mount Holyoke, says Ellen Shukis, followed the practice of planting an ivy until 1900 or so, when planting a class tree supplanted that earlier tradition, perhaps, she jokingly suggests, because by then they'd run out of buildings to cover.

Mount Holyoke's "unofficial symbol," the copper beech, planted by Asa Kinney in 1904, still stands between Dwight Hall and the addition to the library.
In Hampshire lore, the Hampshire Tree has been variously compared to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. For many alumni and graduates alike, “the tree will always represent Hampshire’s true spirit” —Michelle Beach (’96F).

But for plantings at that campus, few could surpass the legendary Asa Kinney. Kinney came to South Hadley in June 1898, as a newly minted graduate student from Massachusetts Agricultural College. During the next 41 years, until his retirement in 1939, as both botanist and horticulturist he made “valuable contributions to the beauty of the campus.”

(Fagus sylvatica) that Kinney planted in 1904 in honor of his daughter’s birth still stands between Dwight Hall and the Miles-Smith addition to the Williston Library, and has become the unofficial symbol of the college. As the youngest of the five colleges, the Hampshire College landscape has none of the historical context of the other four, yet its master plan reflects a similar concern for preserving open space and its tree lore is just as lively. In fact, the Hampshire College logo has always been a tree—an apple tree. It was originally designed by Eric Patterson, the son of the college’s first president, Franklin Patterson. “At Hampshire, we’re committed to the memory of the space we inhabit, which was once the site of real working farms,” observes Leslie Cox, director of the Hampshire Farm Center.

“There’s an old apple tree by the Red Barn where students climb up and just hang out,” he says. Despite its newness, the campus environment apparently exerts a strong emotional pull on the heartstrings of its graduates. “Every fall,” Cox reports, “lots of alumni come back to pick the pears off the tree at Stiles House,” which is the original homestead of John Stiles, the farmer who sold the first acreage to the college.

“When alums come back to get married on campus,” he adds, “they always want to be sure to get the apple tree in the picture, too.” Cox says he plans to set out about 100 sugar maples this spring at a spot near the entrance to the campus: “They’ll be set out much like an orchard and forty years from now students will be able to harvest maple syrup.”

Finding common ground has not been difficult for this Five College committee. In looking to the future, they all have needs they hope to meet by working together. Each of them is now engaged in completing a current inventory of trees on campus, for example, so they are talking about creating a shared database of the specimens in their collections. “One of our goals,” says Fournier, “is to reintegrate the arboretum part of the campus with the curriculum.” The best way to do that, they believe, is by making the trees and plants on campus not just beautiful but also better known and more accessible. They regard the inventory as just a first step toward a larger vision. “Ultimately,” Fournier explains, “we’re hoping to find funding to share that inventory using GIS software.” And that means, he says, that “someone in China or Australia could tune into this on-line global network and discover that some of the choicest trees in North America are right here—on these five campuses.”

—CA