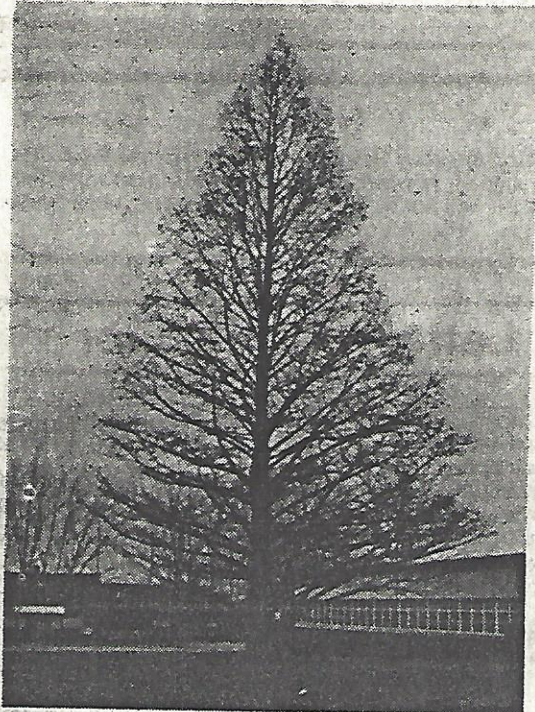


Mentone heritage



This unusual tree has been part of Mentone School for about forty years. (Photo by Melva Smith).

For years pioneers cut down trees and cleared the land for farming. Often men prided themselves on the amount they cleared. However, some people began to wonder if too many trees had been cut.

One of these men was J. Sterling Morton. In Nebraska where he lived there were not enough trees to break the force of the wind or enough tree roots to hold moisture in the soil, so he persuaded the state authorities to set aside an April day to plant trees. This was called Arbor Day because arbor is another word for tree. Nebraska people planted one million trees on that first Arbor Day in 1872.

After Morton's death they chose the day of his birth, April 22, for their Arbor Day. However, the date of Arbor Day varies from state to state because the best time for tree planting varies. California selected March 7, Luther Burbank's birthday. Some people honor John Chapman who was known as "Johnny Appleseed" because he distributed apple seeds and sprouts in the Ohio Valley in the early 1800's.

Arbor Day is often celebrated by school children. One part of the heritage of Mentone school children is the bald cypress tree in the west school yard. Dale Kelley, longtime Mentone principal, told us once that the tree was planted

by Pat Harrison, the agriculture teacher. Harrison left Mentone in the early 1940's, so the tree must be about forty years old.

Bald cypress trees are rare in northern Indiana because they prefer mild winters and the wet soil of the swamps in southeastern United States. In the south the wood is used for posts and flats for nursery plants because the wood is rot resistant. Here the bald cypress is an ornamental. Although it is a member of the pine family, it sheds its leaves in the fall.

A Mentone student can stand by the bald cypress and see several other kinds of trees. The sugar maples and walnuts that were planted along the street are natives of this area, but the catalpa trees across the street in front of the old gym are another example of an ornamental tree that has been planted beyond its original range. According to one source, catalpa wood provided strong wood for railroad ties, so they have become fairly common.

There is a tulip tree in Yazel's yard north of the school. Although these are members of the magnolia family, they are also called yellow poplar. In 1931 these became the state tree of Indiana. On April 26, one of the Warsaw restaurants (McDonalds) will celebrate Arbor day by giving away tulip trees.