

THE GIANT ASPEN

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In June, 1906, my father filed on a homestead on the N.E.6-36-14, W. 2nd. This was father's third homestead, the location ten miles east of the village of Quill Lake. At that time, and for several years later, there was one poplar tree growing on this quarter which we will call the "giant aspen" (*Populus tremuloides*). My older brother, Clair, states that the species name is correct. The Aspen Poplar was used almost exclusively as firewood and was much superior to the Balsam Poplar (*Populus balsamifera*), locally referred to as black poplar because of the much darker colored bark. There were scattered trees of this species in our community but it would comprise less than one percent of the poplar population.

When cut down in 1910, the giant aspen measured 23 inches in diameter some two feet above ground level. The height of this tree was about 45 feet. As a youngster I well recall this poplar, the crown towering well above the neighbouring trees. The land in that district is relatively level and this tree had no apparent advantage as regards moisture supplies.

A further reference to tree growth in this community may be in order. On the quarter section, above mentioned, and on the east half of section 7 there was a fair stand of large aspen poplars, occupying an area of about 250 acres. They were not as large as the giant aspen but would range from 14 to 16 inches in diameter. In the winter of 1907-08 W. Ratz of Quill Lake operated a small sawmill on section 7. Power was provided by a stationary steam engine burning slabs. Saw logs were cut by the settlers and sawed into rough lumber.

During the period 1904 to 1910,

when this community was settled there were numerous bluffs of aspen poplar ranging up to 12 inches in diameter. These trees were used extensively in the building of log houses and barns.

It is my opinion that the information presented here might be worth recording for the following reasons:

- (a) The size and probable age of the giant aspen; and
- (b) The location of this small stand of forest trees in what is commonly referred to as the park belt. The nearest lumbering area at that time was 23 miles to the north of the Nora district, and again some 25 miles northeast in the North Mountain community.

Assuming that the giant aspen was particularly vigorous specimen it may have been a small sucker or seedling in 1850. The other large poplars, cut for lumber, perhaps commenced growth in the early 1860's. (In the older section of Nutana, Saskatchewan there are two trees of the Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) that were planted in 1911. This is a rapidly growing species and these trees are now about 67 years of age and approximately 30 inches in diameter). The records of the fur traders and other early western travellers there frequent reference to widespread fires on the plains and the adjacent parklands. It seems probable that a fire swept through this territory north of the Quill Lakes, in the late 1860's. The extensive stands of young aspen poplars developed during the next 36 years. The small acreage of large poplars, in some manner, escaped the fire. By 1907 these trees would have reached an age of about 45 years and the old giant, in 1910, age of some 60 years.