

Gratz Starts Tree Project

Town Plans for 200th Anniversary Celebration

By Charles Schoffstall, Gratz Shade Tree Commission

In preparation for its 200th anniversary celebration in the year 2005, the Borough of Gratz, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, planted 65 trees along Market Street (State Route 25) in March 2000. There are additional plans to plant 65 to 80 more trees in March 2001. This was quite a challenge for a small town of around 600 people who are knit together through history and marriage. The goal is to restore the town's tree-lined streets that many senior residents remember while growing up. The town fathers had the insight over a hundred years ago to plant many trees along Market Street for future generations to enjoy. The town council decided it was now our turn to plant trees for future generations.

The streets of Gratz were lined with many beautiful trees fifty years ago — maples, horse-chestnuts, catalpas, and others — but improper trimming and diseases eventually took their toll and today only a scattering of those trees remain. Most of these are in poor condition. Charles Schoffstall, a Gratz native who for a time lived in New England, suggested a tree project when he returned to the area several years ago. After attending a shade tree commission meeting in October 1999 in a neighboring town, Charles was inspired by the neighboring shade tree commission and by Norman Lacasse from the DCNR Bureau of Forestry to form a shade tree commission for the town of Gratz. A committee of four volunteers then went to the Gratz Borough Council and presented plans



Gratz tree planting, March 16, 2000. Left to right: Chas Schoffstall, Andrew Norris, Norm Lacasse, Gummy Rothermel, Ralph Knohr.

to establish a shade tree commission.

Because the town will be celebrating its 200th birthday in the year 2005, the committee suggested the planting of trees along Market Street as the number one project for highlighting this event. In the next four years the trees should be well established and growing. The committee will draw up a municipal shade tree ordinance, establish a shade tree commission, perform a lot and street tree survey, submit grant proposals to the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council, and seek necessary information to purchase, ship, dig and plant trees. The town would be required to match any grants with cash or like services. The Gratz Borough Council reviewed, and approved the volunteers proposal and agreed to support the commit-

tee in this new venture. A shade tree ordinance was created and approved at the January 2000 Gratz Borough Council meeting. The Gratz Borough Shade Tree Commission now consists of volunteers Robert Rothermel (Secretary), Elizabeth Reed, Paul Adams, Tom Adams, Tom Hepler, and Charles Schoffstall.

The initial tree planting plan was to plant 25 trees along the Market Street two-block area in what is called the Gratz Historic District. Homeowners along Market Street were given a one-page description of the plan to plant trees during spring and fall of the year 2000, and spring and fall of the year 2001. The Gratz Shade Tree Committee (GSTC) contacted each homeowner and asked for permission to plant a tree or two if required, and for a donation of \$75 per tree if they so



Left to right: Norm Lacasse, Paul Adams, Chas Schoffstall, Mark Long.

desired. The GSTC had to quit taking orders when it reached 65. During three days in March 2000 the 65 trees were planted to meet the planting goal for the year. Planting of requests for the next group of trees (65 to 80) is scheduled for three days in March 2001 weather permitting. This will complete the tree project for Market Street and Center Street.

The Spring 2000 tree planting project had 24 volunteers, and the GSTC was very fortunate to have Norman Lacasse (DCNR) visit and work with us on our first day of planting trees. His guidance and expertise in planting and trimming the 400-pound trees was excellent. At this time, it appears that all but 4 of the 65 trees are growing and appear to be healthy. Quite a few more residents have volunteered their help to plant additional trees in the spring of 2001. C. Sitlinger & Sons Construction donated heavy equipment and T. Hepler Trucking & Equipment also volunteered their help again next year to plant more trees. Financial support from the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council's grant program was given to the Gratz Borough Council in the form of a Mini Grant of \$100 and a Tree Planting Grant of \$1000. Local donations from

Gratz Bank, Metal Industries, Reed's Inn, Peddlers Junction, Fuzzy Bunny and four individuals who purchased trees for their neighbors was also greatly appreciated. The trees were purchased from Jade Nursery in Enders, a local nursery. They are Redspire and Chanticleer cultivars of the pear variety and are of 3.0" to 3.5" caliper weighing around 400 pounds each.

Our town received tremendous support from Pennsylvania Power & Light Company (PP&L) to remove and trim trees that were creating problems where tree replacement were desired. Mr. Richard Hartz, Line Clearance Inspector, is working with our committee and giving us his professional guidance. The Shade Tree Commission is working with PP&L and Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences with a new Municipal Tree Restoration Program (MTRP) to plant 18 trees under utility wires in the spring of 2001.

This tree project has created enthusiasm and communication among the residents of Gratz in many ways. Completing a lot-by-lot survey of tree condition, maintenance needs, and location of trees to be planted, promoted interaction between the Sewage Authority, Water Company, PP&L, business

establishments, residents and property owners. Not only have the people managed to get to know their neighbors in town, past memories and stories have resurfaced. Many residents remember the tree-lined streets and how they played tag around the trees and even climbed them. The horse-chestnut trees with the brown and white ponies inside the chestnut were always a favorite with the children. The following poem was learned and memorized in the Gratz schools by hundreds of former students inspiring the planting of trees for future generations. Many of the older residents of town remember reciting the poem before their classmates. As one resident commented, "as I remember, it was very easy to relate this poem to the many trees that lined the streets of Gratz." This poem also became a popular song a few years ago and people hummed and sang the tune.

"Trees" by Joyce Kilmer 1886 – 1918, an American poet and journalist.

*I think that I shall never see,
a poem as lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed,
against the earth's sweet flowing breast.
A tree that looks at God all day,
and lifts her leafy arms to pray.
A tree that may in summer wear,
a nest of robins in her hair.
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,
who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
but only God can make a tree.*

The founder of our town, Simon Gratz, not only laid out a well organized street and lot plan, but even named the cross streets for trees — Pine, Chestnut, Spruce, and Cherry. The Gratz Shade Tree Commission is looking forward to completing the Market Street planting by the end of March 2001. The trees will look great for the 200th birthday celebration of the town in 2005.