

White Oaks Mark the Course

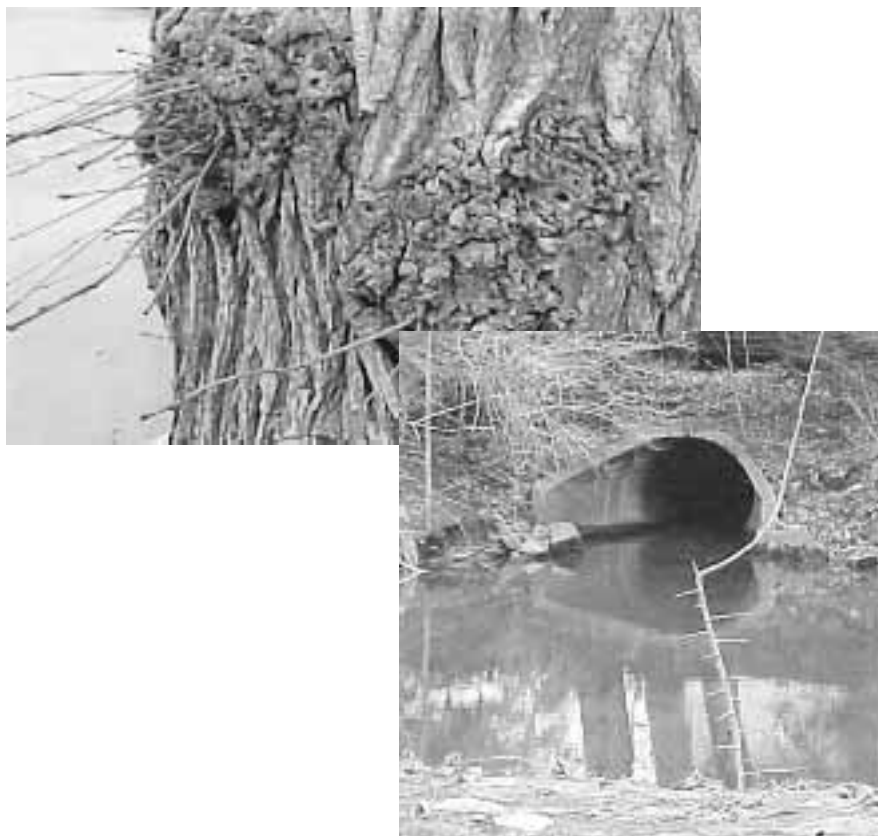
One of the most prominent features of an engineering survey of the Rhode Island State Agricultural School and Experiment Station Farm drawn in 1889 is the brook. It starts at the eastern end of the map, runs west for about a half of a mile, and then turns abruptly south to cross Route 138 (Kingstown Road). In 1897 the Olmsted Landscape Architectural Firm advised President Washburn to form "a channel deep enough to carry the ordinary flow of this brook." The firm added, "this should not be a formal channel at all ditch-like in appearance, but a mere assistance to the stream in finding its way through the confusion of boulders."

Forty-five years later in a map by Damon of the shade trees of the RI State College campus, the brook prominently cuts across the northern part of the campus. It is described as "a ravine with a small stream of water running through it." It further states that "on both sides of the stream are natural groves of swamp and white oak trees of all sizes up to two feet in diameter, extending from the bridge on West Campus Avenue east to the eastern boundary of the College land."

The trees that stand today give clues to the original landscape. With a little sleuthing, we can follow the course of the water which has since been diverted underground. By following the remaining oaks which once stood on the bank of this brook, we trace its course as having run across the lawn of the University Club to Upper College Road, into the Observatory Gardens, and through to the Kelley Engineering Quad. Here it surfaces in a culvert just east of the Library.

The oak trees which once flanked this stream are members of the white oak species. They are characterized by leaf lobes and buds more rounded than those of the sharp-pointed red oaks. This species, the Swamp White Oak, *Quercus bicolor*, is native to southern New England. It is able to survive spring floods followed by our droughts of late summer and autumn. Its dark green leaves with white hairs beneath give it the Latin species name of '*bicolor*.' In the autumn its leaves turn yellow, and in the winter you may find one-inch long acorns with deep bowl-shaped caps under these trees. Another identifying characteristic is their coarsely furrowed bark with long, flat ridges. Chris Nerone of the Biology Department describes its projecting twigs as the "odd branching patterns seen on the bole of the Swamp White Oak tree."

By Susan Hammen-Winn Ph.D. '89



Campus Beautification

MY TAX DEDUCTIBLE GIFT IS FOR:

- Please have someone contact me directly
- Bench with plaque \$2,500
- Bench w/plaque and landscape planting \$4,000
- Tree Cluster (four trees) w/plaque \$1,500
- Tree w/plaque \$400
- Gift for General Landscaping Purposes

A check is enclosed for: \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIP: _____

Phone Number: _____

Plaque To Read: _____

Please make checks payable to:

URI Foundation
79 Upper College Road
Kingston, RI 02881-2023