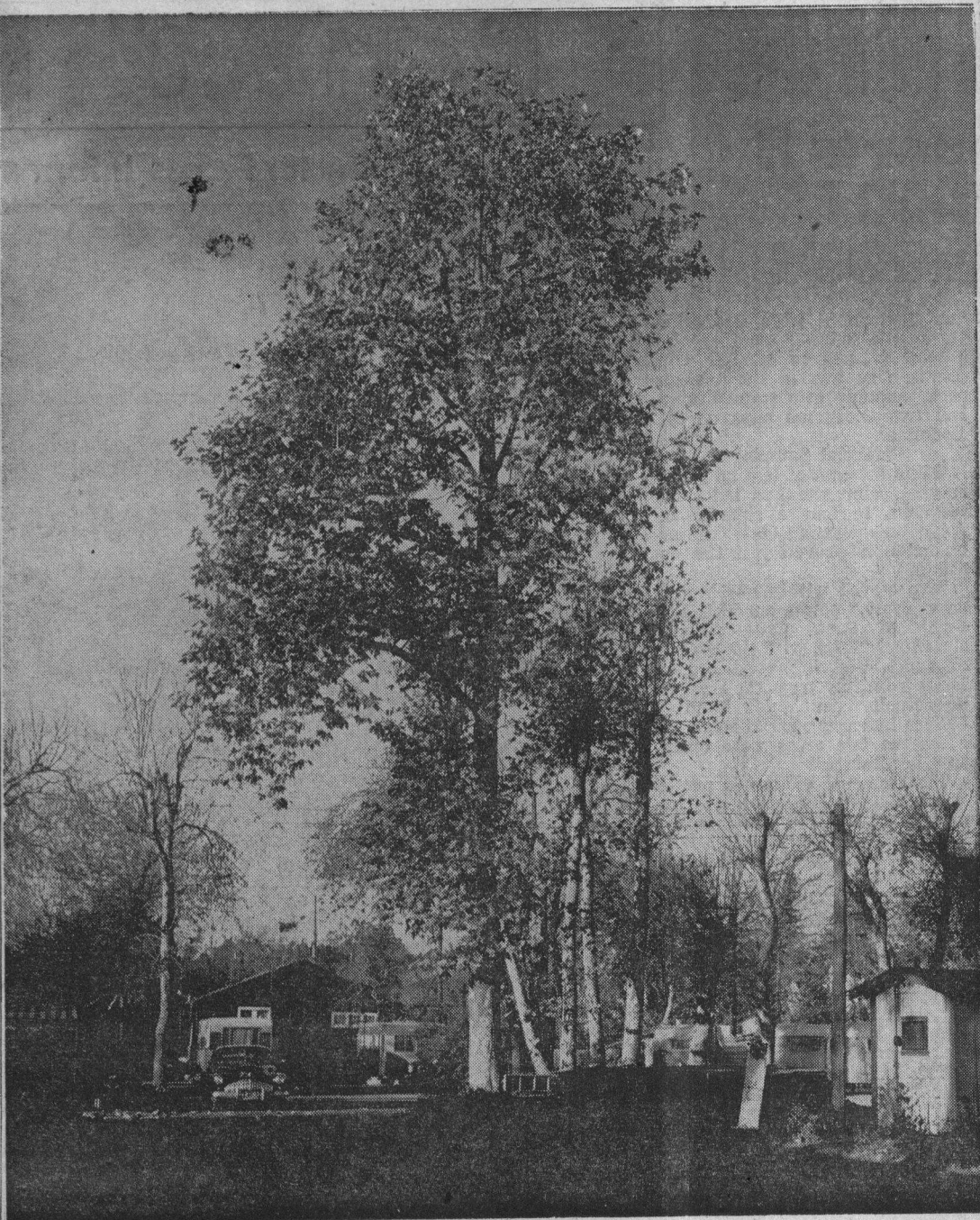


Western Sycamore Is Neighbor Good To Have



Western Sycamore Is One Of Santa Cruz County's Natives

(Editor's note: Here is another in a series of articles about the trees found in Santa Cruz county.)

By Wally Trabing

The Western sycamore (*platanus racemosa*) is one of the county's native trees.

Although you find it powering its way along the San Lorenzo river in competition with its other eager forest brethren and many times in the thick of the

forest, it is a tree that most of us identify with town growth.

The leaves, shaped like huge bird tracks, are standard decorations for school festivities around Thanksgiving time.

Sometimes called Buttonwood, Buttonball-tree of the Plantree, this tree grows throughout almost all of California, central Arizona and New Mexico.

Its trunk is smooth with bark that is scaly and grows thicker at the base with age. This gives the tree a mottled, marble-like effect that is easy to identify at a distance.

Its flower is tiny and blooms in the spring. A very recognizable feature of the sycamore is the small fuzzy ball which appears in the summer and breaks up in the winter. These scatter like tiny parachutes in the wind, spreading seeds for new trees.

The leaves vary in color from the fresh garden spring growth to the golden, light yellow winter hue.

Some trees have grown to 80 feet, but 40 and 50 feet is the average. Some grow tall and straight like the one in the picture, other sycamore trunks lean and twist as the surroundings dictate.

It is an ancient tree. A variety very close to the western sycamore is called the Plane tree in Europe. It was mentioned in some of Plato's work, according to Tree Expert Donald Culross Peattie.

It is a fine shade tree. Its wood is cross-grained and splits with cutting.

The western sycamore, pictured above, is a neighborly tree. You find it lining residential streets for shade, and lining the river banks growing wild. It is a native of this county. This great and unusually straight-trunked tree is the pride of the Riverbank Auto park on Water street, near the bridge.

WASHBURN TO TALK