

Northern Red Oak
Quercus rubra

Location West side, Poorhouse Lane trail

Physical Characteristics

Height (ft.)	76
Circumference (in.)	142.5
Spread (ft.)	47
Points	230

Estimated Age 183 yrs. (1837)

Commentary

Nominator: This Northern Red Oak is one of the largest, if not the largest, and oldest red oaks in West Newbury. By size alone, being over 75% of the current size of the State Champion Red Oak, this tree should qualify to be on the Roster.

Furthermore, this Northern Red Oak likely has a special place in West Newbury history. The tree dates back to around 1837, based on circumference size, and is located on property that was purchased in the 1830's by the Town to become the Town Farm and on which the historic Alms House was eventually built. I have no doubt that people who lived in the Alms House and others who worked the Farm, even before the Civil War began, watched this tree grow up during the 1800's. Although currently on private property and potentially subject to development, the location of this tree is just about 30 feet off the remaining town property on which the Poorhouse Lane trail is located. It is an integral part of the surrounding landscape and the ambience of the Poorhouse Lane trail. Furthermore, parts of this area are trending towards old growth forest habitat and should definitely be preserved during any future development.

Committee: In terms of size, age, and historical context, the Poorhouse Lane Northern Red Oak is impressive as a survivor of almost two centuries and qualifies for the Roster of Significant and Remarkable Trees in West Newbury. As for size, this tree would be in the top 25% of the largest red oaks in Massachusetts, based on the comparative size of the state champion Northern Red Oak. The age of the Poorhouse Lane Red Oak was estimated using the standard growth factor table and the value for red oaks of 4.0.

In dating back to pre-Civil War days and being part of the Town Farm property in the 1800's and 1900's, the Poorhouse Lane Red Oak has significant historical and cultural value. Finally, the range and habitat value of Northern Red Oaks is another noteworthy factor. The Northern Red Oak is among the most northerly of all the oaks, and red oak acorns do not sprout until the second season (unlike the white oak acorns), which makes them an important over-winter food stock for scores of wild animals from birds (including pheasant, grouse, jays, and turkeys) and small rodents (mice, chipmunks, and squirrels) to large seed eating mammals (deer and black bear).

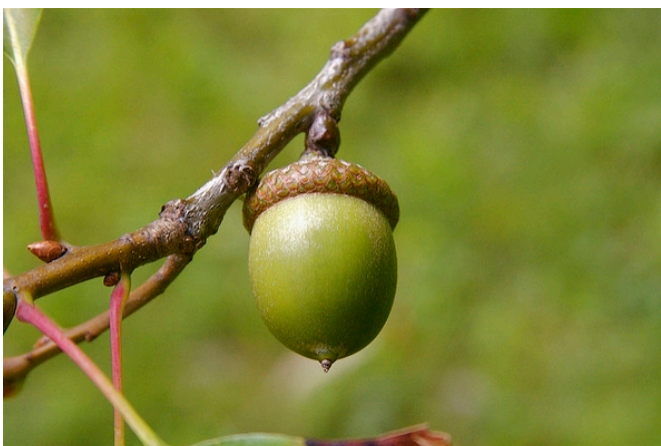
Other Committee Comments: As noted, this tree started its life as part of the West Newbury Town Farm (established in the 1830's), and it has survived for over 180 years. Generally, an old growth forest is characterized by some very large and very old trees (200 years old or more). This Northern Red Oak is a key element of the area adjacent to Poorhouse Lane that, if left intact, could be classified as an old growth forest, something that is rare in West Newbury due to its agricultural past in which much of the land was cleared of trees to raise crops and pasture animals. Standing tall next to Poorhouse Lane trail in the stretch now abandoned as a road, trail hikers cannot help but notice this red oak a significant feature of the surrounding landscape.

Northern Red Oaks are known for their rich contributions to the forest as a habitat for wildlife. The acorns, although bitter, are an important winter food for many wild animals that still abound in West Newbury. Because red oak acorns do not sprout until the second season, the rich nutritional value of the acorn remains intact throughout the winter and into the following spring. The plethora of wild turkeys that emerge from seclusion in the autumn and winter can be seen scratching the forest floor in red oak groves searching for the acorns that lay underneath the leaf litter or, perhaps, that have been buried by squirrels as food for the future. The trees themselves are known to host more than a thousand species of insects, including moth caterpillars, leaf miners, June beetles, and walking sticks (Fergus, *Trees of New England*).

The red oak is a hardy and versatile species found in various habitats, ranging from the dry uplands to the moist bottom lands that it prefers. In fact, the red oak is used as one of the indicator species for wetland delineation. It is the most northerly situated of all the oaks (along with the Burr Oak) and can be regarded as a fundamental species of the mixed Oak-Hickory hardwood forest that characterizes much of Massachusetts. Further north, the red oaks give way to the birch-maple-spruce-fir forests of Maine and northern New Hampshire and Vermont. Further south, the Northern Red Oak yields to its cousin, the Southern Red Oak (different species), that grows southward from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. (Fergus, *Trees of New England*).

Of particular interest and perhaps frustration, the leaves of the Northern Red Oak are very variable, making easy identification a challenge. Not only do red oaks often hybridize with black oaks and produce intermediate leaf forms, but the leaves of the Northern Red Oak vary from the sunlit top portions of the canopy (sinuses indented almost to the midrib) to the broader leaves from shaded or vigorously growing portions of the tree. However, when acorns are present, the "fairly distinctive" large acorn can be helpful in identifying a red oak with its "shallow cup enclosing only the base of the nut." (Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*).

Photo(s)



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