

## THE AMERICAN LIBERTY TREE<sup>1</sup>

Plant an *Ulmus Americana* in the United States of America wherever you can. Suggest that your village, town, suburb, or city do the same. But do not plant it only physically. Plant it in your minds! Plant it in your hearts! Plant it in your souls! This is what the early American patriots did. If there is no *Ulmus Americana* at hand, plant any species of tree and tie a ribbon around it with a sign, or place a sign in front of it on which it says MY LIBERTY TREE. The symbol of the Second American Revolution.

The American Elm has historical significance in the history of the American Colonies and their revolution for independence from Great Britain. The tree is commonly known in American history as the Liberty Tree. The original Liberty Tree lived from 1646-1775.

I remember that in my high school American history book there was a caricature of some Boston Colonials preparing to lynch a British tax collector on one of the strong branches of an American Elm that grew at the corner of Essex Street and Orange Street near Hanover Square, Boston. On the tree was a sign with the words LIBERTY TREE. Thus from the very beginning of the days when in 1765 the British government imposed a law requiring all commercial contracts, legal documents, newspapers, pamphlets, permits, and playing cards in the American Colonies to carry an official British government stamp, liberty was the call to counter-action. Since these taxations applied to practically all written publications, the Colonists regarded the Stamp Act as a means of censorship on the rights of the American Colonials to exercise their liberties of freedom of communication: the freedom to write and to read. As the story was related by my history book, a group of Boston Colonials assembled on August 14, 1765 under the large American Elm and protested against the Stamp Act. There they hung two British tax collectors in effigy. Beginning with that day the elm tree became known as the American Liberty Tree or simply, Liberty Tree. The Colonial protesters often lighted the tree. They raised a flagstaff within the tree's branches and when a yellow ensign was raised, it was a sign that the Sons of Liberty were to gather there for a protest. The practice soon spread to other New England villages. Each town had its American Elm Liberty Tree. If there was no American Elm available, another tree was used. Eventually every village planted an American Elm or a substitute tree as a sign of their support for the Sons of Liberty and their protests against the Stamp Act and British tyranny. Indeed, throughout the Thirteen Colonies many towns formed their own Sons of Liberty. These groups, the Sons of Liberty, usually meet spontaneously, for an organized meeting could result in imprisonment or death for those who partook of the meetings.

The British soldiers stationed in Boston often ridiculed the Liberty Tree by tarring and feathering some of their captives and making them march in front of the tree. Near the end of August in 1775 a group of British Loyalists led by Job Williams (no dates) cut the Liberty Tree down and used the tree for firewood as an act of spiting the Sons of Liberty and those Colonials who were against the

British government. Soon flags were made and were flown from Liberty Masts or Liberty Flagpoles throughout the Colonies. They later became common battle flags in the American Revolutionary War.

Only the Liberty Tree stump remained into the nineteenth century. Eventually it gave way to a street. Beginning in October of 1966, the newspaper, *Boston Herald* began a series of stories on the famous Liberty Tree that had become lost. No one knew about the Liberty Tree, except me and my high school history book. The *Boston Herald* found a plaque covered with bird droppings and affixed to a building at the corner of Washington and Boylston Streets. It was hidden behind a KEMP HAMBURGERS sign. Eventually, the Boston Redevelopment Authority placed a bronze relief plaque with the Liberty Tree on it. The plaque has the inscription *Sons of Liberty, 1776; Independence of the Country, 1776*. Liberty Trees still grow and stand in some of the major historical places on the Eastern Coast of the United States of America.

Sometimes *Ulmus Americana*, the Liberty Tree, is also known as the Freedom Tree.

The *Ulmus Americana* is a symbol of the highest goal of the American Revolution: LIBERTY. The fact that the original Liberty Tree no longer stands nevertheless causes its symbolization to be important for three reasons:

Ø There is the fact of history that liberty is never absolutely clear, for liberty must be continually fought for!

Ø There is the fact that at some point Americans almost lost sight of this Liberty Tree and with the grassroots movements today, patriotic Americans are marching and demonstrating for the cause of restoring American traditions and values – in short, they want their Liberties back!

Ø There is the fact that when reflecting upon many stages in history, Americans do not have a clear picture of the ideals for which America's forefathers stood and through their writings still stand!

We should figuratively understand that the roots of the Liberty Tree are the lifelines of American character identity as they give life to the Liberty Tree and are expressed in the *Constitution for the United States of America*. They are pervasive throughout American history. It should be emphasized that the Supreme Law of the Land is a constitution from the people for the United States of America. It is not a constitution of the United States of America for the United States of America. The source is **We the People!**

Patriotic Americans should place emphasis on a poem written by Thomas Paine (1737-1809), the greatest of all Colonial pamphleteers. (Non-patriotic Americans should do this as well. They might learn what freedom is!) The poem was texted in the early days of the American Revolution and was sung to the melody *The Gods of Greece*. The Goddess of Liberty in the poem is a reference to the Roman goddess *Libertas*. A temple was erected in her honor on the

Aventine Hill in Rome during the Second Punic War (218-201 BC). There is a story in American history that during the terribly cold Winter of 1777, the Goddess *Libertas* appeared to General George Washington (1732-1799) in a dream and soothed his worries about the outcome of the revolutionary war with Great Britain. The Goddess *Libertas* told General Washington that his Army of the Potomac would be victorious over the British Forces led by General Charles Marquis Cornwallis (1738-1805).

It did no harm to me in my school days to have to memorize the poem. It surely would do no harm to present-day American school pupils to memorize it.

### **Liberty Tree<sup>2</sup>**

In a chariot of light from the regions of day,  
The Goddess of Liberty came;  
Ten thousand celestials directed the way,  
And thither conducted the dame,  
This fair budding branch, from the garden above,  
Where millions with millions agree;  
She bro't in her hand, as a pledge of her love,  
The plant she call'd *Liberty Tree*.

This celestial exotic struck deep in the ground,  
Like a native it flourish'd and bore;  
The fame of its fruit, drew the nations around,  
To seek out its peaceable shore.  
Unmindful of names or distinction they came,  
For freemen like brothers agree:  
With one sprit endow'd, they one friendship pursued,  
And their temple was *Liberty Tree*.

Beneath this fair branch, like the patriarchs of old,  
Their bread, in contentment they eat;  
Unwearied with trouble, of silver or gold,  
Or the cares of the grand and the great.  
With timber and tar, they old England supplied,  
Supported her power on the seas;  
Her battles they fought, without having a groat,  
For the honor of *Liberty Tree*.

But hear, O ye swains, ('tis a tale the most profane)  
How all they tyrannical powers,

King, Commons, and Lords are uniting amain,  
    To cut down this guardian of ours;  
From the east to the west, blow the trumpet to arms,  
    Thro' the land let the sound of it flee,  
Let the far and the near, – all unite with a cheer,  
    In defense of our *Liberty Tree*.

The American way of life, although somewhat a colloquialism, is a never-ending quest for the moral uprightness that is necessary to maintain LIBERTY. Every day is important for all Americans to exercise their responsibility in achieving the never-ending goal of maintaining their liberty. They do this by the observance of the legal guarantees of the Supreme Law of the Land, *The Constitution for the United States of America*. When these guarantees are usurped by an imposter, or a group of politicians who consider themselves no longer responsible to the people, American citizens will lose their freedoms, all of them! PLANT A LIBERTY TREE as a constant reminder of this danger!

Frederick William Dame  
Patriotic, Steadfast and True  
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1 One of the best and most recent books on The Liberty Tree is Alfred Young's. *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution*. New York University Press. New York, NY: 2006.

2 <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/paine02.html>.