

# Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson  
Pocahontas County Naturalist



January 3, 2018

Happy New Year from Conservation! We trust everyone's year is off to a rousing start. As we look forward to 2018, I wonder what exciting breakthroughs, sightings, and encounters in the world of nature lie in wait for those of us living here in Pocahontas County.

We'll begin the new year with yet another look at a threatened keystone species of our state's woodlands as well as an important member of our communities and farmsteads, the ash tree. Iowa is home to four ash species –white, green, blue, and black. The USDA Forest Service has estimated there are 52 million rural and 3.1 million urban ash trees in the Hawkeye State, 2 million of which grow right here in our county. How many ash trees call your place home?

Late last fall, Conservation cleaned up a large ash tree on the Courthouse grounds that had been damaged by lightning last summer. The large stump with its many rings pleaded to be counted. The total – 140 years! Time to pull out Flickinger's 1904 *History of Pocahontas County*.

As you may know, Pocahontas County was officially organized in 1859 with the first county seat being located at Old Rolfe in Des Moines Township. In November of 1870, Warrick Price arranged to survey the new village of Pocahontas Center. Indulging the hope it would become the location of the county seat, he donated a large square in the center of the plat for a public park and courthouse. As Flickinger writes, "There was not a resident, tree or sign of any improvement in the township at the time this was done."

Warrick's planning paid off, and in 1876 the county government moved into a new courthouse building erected in Pocahontas Center. In the spring of 1879, the Board of Supervisors approved the planting of the following trees on the courthouse grounds: 50 evergreens, 50 basswoods, 100 elms, 100 cottonwoods, 200 box-elders, 400 ash, and 700 soft maples. I don't know how many of them grew into mature trees or survived the construction of the third and current Courthouse in 1923, but I'm pretty sure the dozen or so mature ash trees still standing date to this early planting.

Will 2018 be the last stand of those hardy survivors, the year the deadly Emerald Ash Borer is confirmed in Pocahontas County? First detected in Michigan in 2002, EAB is now found in 2 Canadian provinces and 31 states. Here in Iowa, officials have confirmed the presence of EAB in 53 counties, including our neighbor to the west, Buena Vista.

As we continue the wait for the onslaught, many area residents are fighting back by renovating their windbreaks and groves, some which also date to the late 1800's. Sounds like a good New Year's Resolution. Remember, PCCB's 2018 Spring Tree & Shrub Sale is now open. Call or stop in soon to place your order. Who knows, maybe the tree you plant this spring will also live to the ripe old age of 140.

