



EL PALO ALTO
As it stands today

For centuries, the coast redwood tree has functioned as the primary sentinel and gateway to this region. The oldest living California Historical Landmark No.2 has been central to the City of Palo Alto since its incorporation in 1894 and Stanford University for over a century. In 1955, an increment boring of the tree rings was taken and the tree's age was accurately determined to be 1,015 years, and in 2004 was 1,064 years old. The tree stands anchored to the San Francisquito Creek bank with a trunk size of over eight feet in diameter. In 1951 its height was 134.6-feet, in 1977 its height was reduced to 126-feet to remove the dead top, and again in 1999 where it still stands at nearly 110-feet in height.

From 1865-1955, the tree was in serious decline with alarmingly sparse branching and foliage. Implicating factors of decline were (1) the foliage was coated with coal-burning train soot which passed beneath the tree's canopy on a daily basis and, (2) the increasing reduction of the aquifer (available water table) from wells in the thriving orchards of the 'blossom valley', including the 1912 Tower Well only two blocks away. It is surmised that by 1955, the disappearing orchards and county water district program to cap wells helped to recharge the aquifer in the region back to a level that the El Palo Alto redwood had historically grown accustomed. In spite of an eroding top, aerial termites and an associated decay column on the west side of the top (left side), the tree today has a much greater volume of foliage and biomass and is healthier today than nearly a century ago.

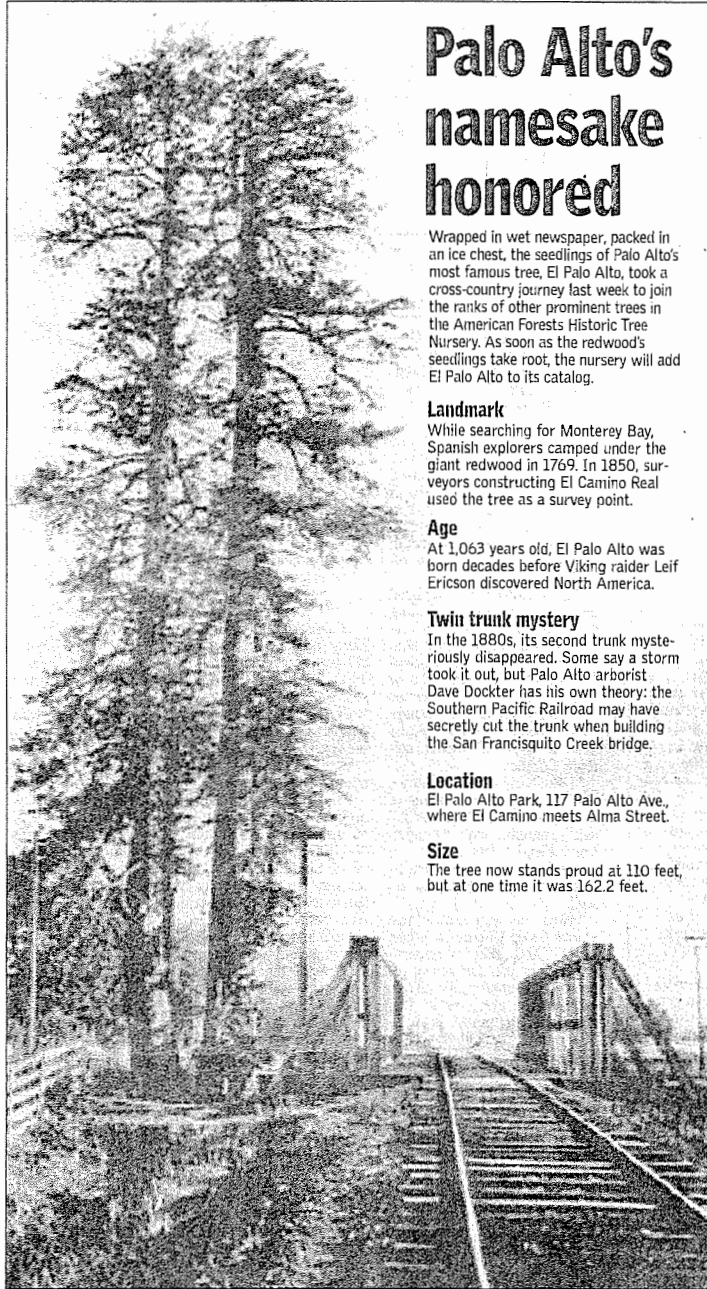
Excepting a catastrophic disaster, the ***life expectancy and prognosis for the El Palo Alto redwood is that it will continue to overlook the region for at least 300 more years.***

The Peninsula

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Palo Alto's namesake honored

Wrapped in wet newspaper, packed in an ice chest, the seedlings of Palo Alto's most famous tree, El Palo Alto, took a cross-country journey last week to join the ranks of other prominent trees in the American Forests Historic Tree Nursery. As soon as the redwood's seedlings take root, the nursery will add El Palo Alto to its catalog.

Landmark

While searching for Monterey Bay, Spanish explorers camped under the giant redwood in 1769. In 1850, surveyors constructing El Camino Real used the tree as a survey point.

Age

At 1,063 years old, El Palo Alto was born decades before Viking raider Leif Ericson discovered North America.

Twin trunk mystery

In the 1880s, its second trunk mysteriously disappeared. Some say a storm took it out, but Palo Alto arborist Dave Dockter has his own theory: the Southern Pacific Railroad may have secretly cut the trunk when building the San Francisquito Creek bridge.

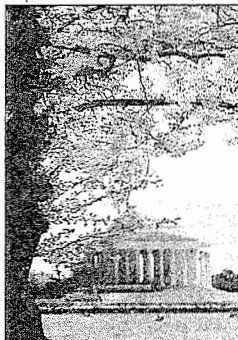
Location

El Palo Alto Park, 117 Palo Alto Ave., where El Camino meets Alma Street.

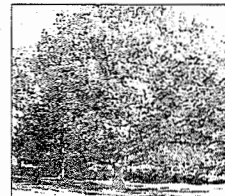
Size

The tree now stands proud at 110 feet, but at one time it was 162.2 feet.

Other trees in the American Forests Historic Tree Nursery



El Palo Alto has made it into the big leagues. Palo Alto's namesake tree will join the ranks of Mount Vernon red maple, below right, overcup oak, below center, and the U.S. capital's Japanese cherry, left, in the American Forests Historic Tree Nursery. The Florida non-profit collects seeds from about 135 historic trees nationwide and sells seedlings (for \$35 and up) to anyone wanting to plant a bit of history.



Japanese cherry: Washington D.C. Overcup oak: Lincoln's birthplace Red maple: Mount Vernon

Sources: City of Palo Alto, American Forests Historic Tree Nursery

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