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## Lecture celebrates Endecott Pear Tree's historic living legacy

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DANVERS — Four generations of the Endicott family from around the country last night paid a visit to the place where their ancestor, Gov. John Endecott, is said to have planted a hardy pear tree with his own hands in 1632.

Nearly 380 years later, the tree is located down a steep embankment, surrounded by a black, wrought iron fence. Its trunk is staked up with wires and its leaves are about to bloom.

The Endecott Pear Tree is considered America's oldest fruit tree, having been planted by the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in his Danvers orchard.

Last night, the Endicotts and others listened to a lecture presented by the Essex National Heritage Commission on the tree's history and future. The lecture was given in conjunction with the Danvers Historical Society and the Mass General/North Shore Center for Outpatient Care, which hosted the event in its lobby and served pear-themed finger food. The tree is now on the property of the medical center, which opened two years ago.

The tree has more lives than a cat, having survived hurricanes — including nearly being wiped out in 1938 — countless snow storms, blizzards and ice storms, and even earthquakes.

In 1964, vandals cut off its limbs and left the trunk.

It has even managed to survive large-scale industrial development along Endicott Street.

According to Jeff Bourque, a plant health care manager and arborist with Mayer Tree Service of Essex, the tree should have been dead about 300 years ago.

"It should be dead by now," said Bourque. "It's on borrowed time already." Most pear trees produce for about a century.

Tree was here "before the country started"

However, the tree still puts out plenty of foliage and still produces fruit. Bourque said there's no telling how long the tree might live, but it's in a sheltered area, and that helps. Its biggest threat right now is humans, in the form of vandalism, and environmental stresses.

Last night, however, Endicotts from near and far came out to see the tree and celebrate its connection to the nation's first settlers.

The four generations of Endicotts in one family were made up of Doris White, 93, of East Boston, her daughter Jeanne McDonough, 70, of Winthrop, and the members of the Perrin family of Peabody: Michelle, who is in her mid-40s, and her children, Sarah, 15, and Austin, 12.

"If I had a yellow ribbon I would tie it around," said White, who traced her family's roots back to Gov. Endecott.

The local "Endicotts" were joined by William "Bill" Endicott from Bethesda, Md., John Endicott of Litchfield, Conn., and Gordon Harmon of Springfield, Mo., the president of the Endicott Family Association, who took an Amtrak train to Boston just to be at the lecture last night.

"I certainly knew who he was and I know he lived in this area," said William Endicott, an 11th generation descendent of John Endecott's who grew up in North Andover. Growing up, he had heard about the tree, but had only visited it once before.

"It's just like a tree of life, to think this thing was here before the country started and it's still here now," William Endicott said. "To have an association with a hospital, it's perfect symbolism."

"It's a living legacy for the heritage for this area and I think it's in an appropriate home right now with the ownership of Mass General," said Harmon, who noted that thousands of descendents of John Endecott are spread across the nation.

"It's certainly been something we are aware of in the family and we talk about it," said William Endicott, who is writing a book about the military history of the Endicott family.

The pear tree and a family burying ground are all that remain of John Endecott's Orchard Farm, which sits along Endicott Street in Danversport, just up the road from the Liberty Tree Mall.

Town Archivist Richard Trask said while some may feel publicizing the tree's location could open it up to more vandalism, he says history is not something to be hidden "under a bushel basket."

"It's an actual, living link with the first settlers in America," Trask said. It's a tree noted by presidents and poets, and it was considered significant even during the American Revolution 140 years later.

The tree was imported from England as a seed on the ship Abigail. The tree grew up in Endecott's garden in Salem before being transplanted to Danvers, according to notes from last night's lecture.

The tree is the lone survivor of what was a large orchard, Trask said.

The property remained within the Endicott family until the 1920s. In the 1940s, Town Meeting voted to buy the property, but the sale never happened.

The farm later became an industrial site occupied by CBS Hytron, a maker of electronic radio and TV tubes. Later, it was the site of light maker Sylvania and the tree sits behind the North American headquarters for Osram Sylvania, which was credited last night for caring for the tree over the years.

After the vandalism, for a time, the tree was surrounded by a chain link fence topped by barbed wire.

Several years ago, Partners Healthcare purchased the property.

Those gathered heard about how the Endicott family and Massachusetts General Hospital share a connection when Dr. David Torchiana, the chairman and CEO of Mass General, recognized Jack (Endicott) Lawrence and his family as Lawrence's father, brother-in-law and cousin served as the hospital's chairmen in the past.

Meanwhile, Trask is at a loss to explain the pear tree's hardiness.

"I like to think that it came from the stock of John Endecott, who was a flinty man" meaning he had a hard, unyielding character.

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