

Patriarch to Live Anew

Seeds to Extend Life of Famous Tree



St. Peter, near Water Works Tower, in Gladwin Park.

Once upon a time, or so the story goes, there was a very old Jesuit priest, who came with other Jesuits to this section of the uncharted wilderness that was then America. He longed for the means to evangelize the savage inhabitants, but for a long time the prayers he sent to Heaven and the petitions he sent to his French fatherland went unanswered.

He sat one day on the shore of the Detroit River, gazing moodily out toward the widening expanse that is Lake St. Clair. A footfall behind him warned him of the approach of a stranger. He turned and saw a young man from France, who bore greetings and help from the sovereign King. But the young man's face was sad and it developed that his mission to America had separated him from his sweetheart.

But she had given him a token. It was a cutting of pear blossoms from a tree in some far-off Norman orchard.

THE FLOWERING WILDERNESS

"Son, look upon this needy land," said the old priest. "In that little pear blossom lies dormant Nature's power to make fruitful this great wilderness. Bury this seed for a noble resurrection and you shall find healing for your torment. Many a prayer will go up for you under the trees you will have planted. And peace and rest will be the fruits the tree will bring to thee."

The young man did as he was bidden and lo, it was not many years before the land was rich with the fruits of his simple deed. Pear trees grew in abundance along the river front and far into the inland wherever the trails of the questioning voyageurs of Old France led.

In what is now Gladwin Park (which most Detroiters know as Water Works Park) were planted 12 French pear trees and they grew to a great height and their presence was so commanding and their appearance so majestic that the people called them the 12 Apostles and the grove became a shrine for worship. And now only one is left of the

day not far from the Water Works Tower, which he rivals in sheer height, his topmost branches waving to the breeze a full 185 feet above the ground. There he has

stood two centuries and more and many generations of Detroit children have been grateful for his bounteous shade and thousands have eaten of the small round russet fruit, with its peculiar sweetness, and they have looked upon this food as something of a benediction, almost like holy people when they eat the bread and drink the wine of the Risen Lord.

St. Peter is old and gnarled and weatherbeaten and he no longer yields fruit. The patriarch of the pear trees and one of the very last of his hardy race, St. Peter is about to die.

It occurred to members of the Department of Parks and Recreation that something ought to be done to preserve at least the spirit of St. Peter. So cuttings were taken from his branches and these cuttings have been planted and lo, they have taken root, even as the cuttings brought by that young man from Old Normandy so many years ago.

CEREMONY THURSDAY

The new trees will be dedicated in a ceremony at Gladwin Park Thursday at 3 p. m., with George W. Stark, the Old Timer of The Detroit News, as master of ceremonies. Stark will call for brief speeches from Fr. Charles H. Cloud, S. J., president of the University of Detroit; Fred G. Nagle, president of the Department of Parks and Recreation Orla B. Taylor, president of the Detroit Historical Society, and others. Following the ceremonies at Gladwin Park, cuttings will be set out at Gabriel Richard Park.

To this ceremony will come all who have the traditions of old Detroit in their hearts. The public generally is invited.

Thus will St. Peter be honored in the fullness of his years. Thus will his memory be enshrined in the hearts of future generations. Thus will the dear tradition of our founding fathers be revitalized and its lesson read and reread in the billowing blossoms of each recurring Spring.