Hobart and William Smith Colleges

The Colleges were established with the principles of natural resource conservation through its founders, generations of faculty, and active programs and departments. Geneva nurseryman William Smith worked with conservation educator and scientific illustrator Anna Botsford Comstock and others to establish the coordinate education for women alongside Hobart College in 1908. After working for a Geneva nurseryman, William Smith and his two brothers started their own nursery raising and selling ornamental plants. Smith eventually focused his efforts on plant breeding and acquiring a large collection of natural history specimens. His profession allowed him to make a large contribution to the beautification of the campus landscape with over 1,500 trees from 42 genera and 73 species. In 1906, he donated nearly $500,000 to establish William Smith College for women.

Attention is given to these trees in HWS’s A Heritage of Trees brochure composed in the 1990s which outlines the descriptions and locations of 26 unique trees on campus, such as Kentucky coffee tree, Osage orange, and Chinese zelkova. At the start of William Smith Colleges, Elon Howard Eaton initiated the Hobart and William Smith Colleges’ Biology Department and remained teaching in the department until 1935 during which he authored “Birds of New York”, taught multiple courses, and conducted research in biology, ornithology, and limnology. Hobart alum Theodore T. Odell, a HWS biology professor, assisted with the 1927 New York State Biological Survey and shared an interest in the distribution of fishes in the Finger Lakes region with Elon Howard Eaton. The creation of the biology department was the foundation of how natural resource conservation and preservation influenced the curriculum which was later complemented by College programs and departments in environmental studies and geoscience. Today multiple staff, faculty, students, programs and departments influence the progress made toward developing a culture of environmental stewardship on campus.

Tree Campus USA 2012

The Tree Campus USA® designation recognizes college and university campuses that effectively manage their campus tree, develop connectivity with the community beyond campus borders to foster healthy urban forests and strive to engage their student population utilizing service learning opportunities centered on campus and community forestry efforts.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges was recognized as a Tree Campus USA®, and one of only six such campuses in the nation to be chosen for a 2012 Tree Campus USA tree planting event award. Over 90 volunteers from the campus and surrounding community planted 76 trees on the William Smith Hill on Saturday, April 14, 2012. In 2013, fifteen fruit trees were planted at the campus garden by HWS students.

HWS strives to remain a Tree Campus USA in the future as Arbor Day is recognized annually; we have an active Tree Campus Advisory Committee and approved Tree Care Plan; and we focus our urban forest programs on service learning. The 13-member HWS Tree Campus Advisory Committee includes representatives from HWS faculty, students, facility management, the Finger Lakes Institute and the Geneva community.

Among the campus natural resource conservation and stewardship initiatives are a 2:1 tree replacement policy; mulching of plantings to conserve moisture; and recycling of leaves and grass clippings from campus grounds to compost and later add to soil as an amendment for planting. Additionally, trees are moved whenever possible prior to construction.

The inventory of trees on campus began in 2009 and was revisited in 2012 by our HWS Urban Forest Inventory Intern, hired by the Finger Lakes Institute. Since fall 2012, Chelsea Piccone ’15 has conducted tree surveys near Houghton House (zone 1) and Zone 2, adding a total of approximately 300+ trees to the campus inventory. Chelsea uses a handheld GPS unit to locate and map each tree onto GIS in an effort to take inventory of tree location, type, condition, coverage, etc. In an effort to further our understanding of the carbon sequestration capabilities of campus trees, Chelsea has focused her investigation on the application of the US Forest Service iTree software as an analysis tool.