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**Friends of the  
Saskatoon  
Afforestation  
Areas Inc.**



**City of  
Saskatoon**

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Special Collections, Richard St. Barbe Baker fonds, MG 71

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Land Acknowledgements

References:

1. Gridley, K. (1989). *Man of the Trees: Selected Writings of Richard St. Barbe Baker*. Willits, California: Ecology Action of the Midpeninsula.
2. Hanley, P. (2018). *Man of the Trees: Richard St. Barbe Baker - the First Global Conservationist*. Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press.

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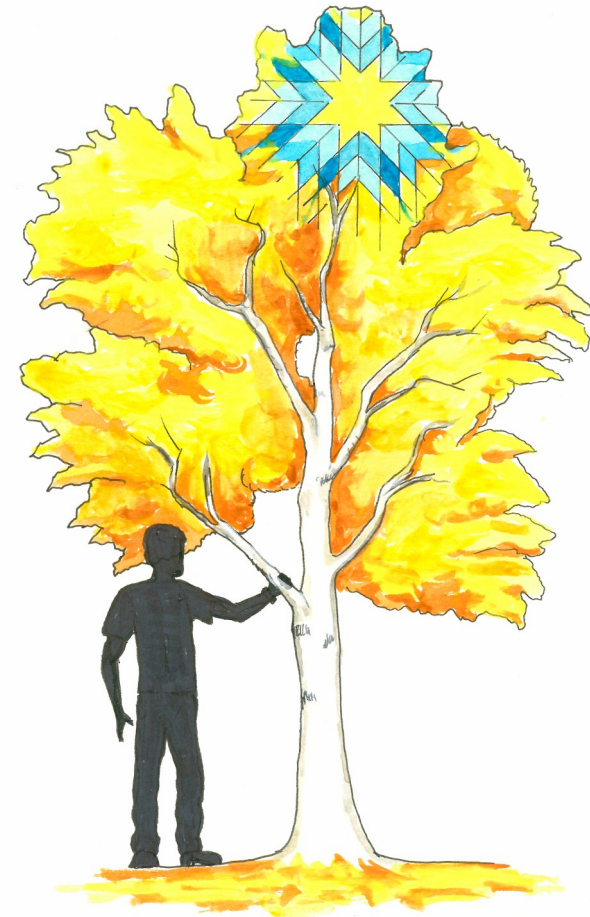
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## Booklet 6

### Dance of the Trees



*Trees create microclimates, reduce the speed of wind, lift  
the water table and increase the population of worms.  
~ Richard St. Barbe Baker<sup>[1]</sup>*

## Land Acknowledgement:

The afforestation areas are situated in the West Swale Yorath Island Glacial Spillway, a sacred site in Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. Those who entered into Treaty 6 are the Cree *Nêhiyawak* (neh-HEE-oh-wuk), Saulteaux *Nakawē*, and Nakota the *Yankton* and *Yanktonai* people.

May our relationships with the land, standing peoples, forests, and waters teach us to honour and respect the past and invite us to move forward in harmony. May we all come together as friends, to find inspiration and guidance from histories, languages, and cultures which broaden our understanding and community collaboration for the present and future.

Season: Winter

### Introduction:

Have you ever heard of the Man of the Trees? He was born on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1889, in England. He travelled the world, promoting tree

planting, good forestry practices and the protection of special forests like the redwoods. His greatest ambition was to reverse the growth of deserts and he worked out a plan to reclaim the world's biggest desert, the Sahara, through tree planting. He understood 100 years ago that trees and forests influenced climate, protected soils and by holding water, prevented flooding.

Why is he so important to Saskatchewan? He studied at the University of Saskatchewan, lived near Beaver Creek, spent time in the forest near Prince Albert, and planted his last tree on the U of S campus before passing away at the age of 92. The afforestation area we describe here was planted in 1972 and named in his honour in 1978.



1. Choose two different twigs to look at closely. Are their buds opposite or alternate?

Sketch them here:

2. Measure a bud on one of the twigs. Come back in 60 days to the same bud and measure again.

Growth: Day 1: \_\_\_\_\_ mm

Day 2: \_\_\_\_\_ mm

Date:

Date:

## On-site or Outdoor Activity:

Visit your tree in the neighbourhood or at the afforestation area.

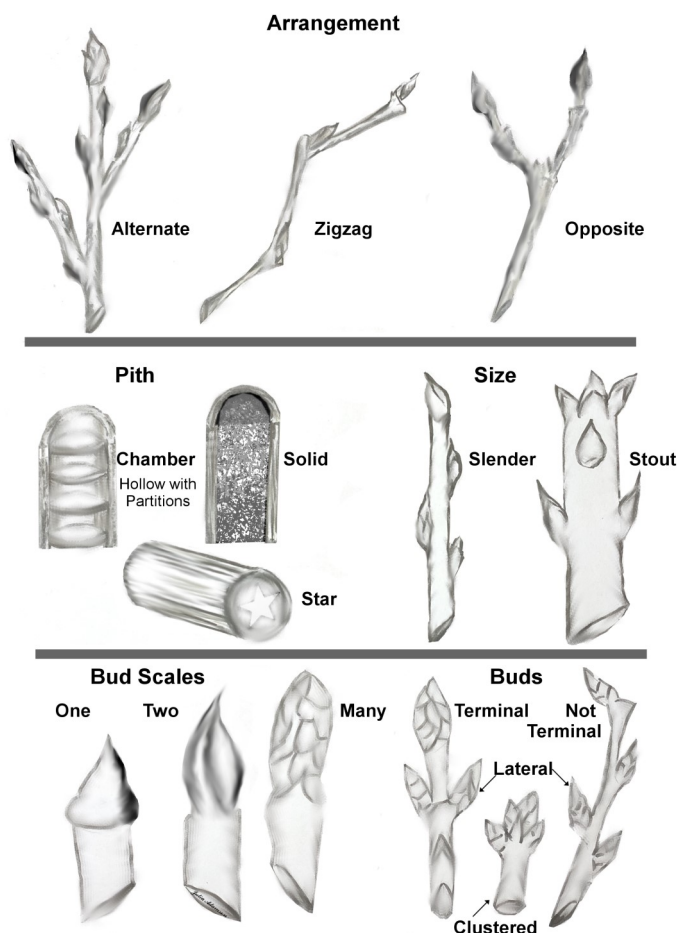
Look closely at the branches to see if they are different than at other times of year.

The evergreens will be similar to your last visit. The deciduous trees, the ones that drop their leaves, look quite a bit different than in summer or fall. They are dormant, but still very much alive.

The branches of trees are more fragile in winter because any water left in the tree is between the cells rather than in them. Like icicles, the branches may snap in the cold, even if they would have bent in the warmth of the growing season.

The buds will become the leaves of next spring, they start developing in mid-summer, underneath the stem (petiole) of the mature leaves.

### Winter Key: Twig and Bud characteristics



## Story: Dance of the Trees

*Note: Anything written in italics was written by Richard himself and quoted directly from his texts.*

In previous stories, we learned how Richard was influenced to become a silviculturist (tree doctor) by spending time in the forest north of Prince Albert. After graduating from forestry school, Richard applied for the position of assistant conservator of forests in Kenya, Africa. He studied Swahili (one of the many African languages) on the way, arriving in Mombasa in 1920 with the ability to communicate simple phrases. He soon became fluent.

Richard spent most of his time in Muguga, 27 kilometers from the capital city of Nairobi. The land in this area was treeless and dry.

*The Romans had created a dust bowl in almost two million square miles of North Africa... wheat mining to satisfy the demands for free bread and circuses.*<sup>[2]</sup>

The Kikuyu people were now the inhabitants of the area. They were traditionally hunter-gatherers that, because of colonization, had to transition to agriculture. This was done by clearing an area of forest and burning it to release nutrients to the soil. However, the soils are quickly depleted because organic matter decomposes rapidly in the tropical climate and nutrients are easily leached out by the high rainfall. New areas must be cleared every few years.

Richard could see that soon the land would become desert where no crops could grow. He knew that they had to replant the indigenous forests and grow food in a way that mimics nature, as other traditional Indigenous farmers had. They used polycultures with different species of tree crops and ground crops intermixed. This diversity increases stability and resilience of the whole system and is more efficient in capturing the available sunlight and rainfall.

*In two hours we had passed from an arid waste to a rich agricultural*

*region where groundnuts were a staple crop. They were not grown in great fields but among large forest trees, in little clearings... At nighttime their leaves would fold up like butterfly wings at rest. When the hot air from the surrounding forest passes over the cooler patch of groundnuts, it condenses and in the morning there is a heavy dew equivalent to as much as a quarter of an inch of rain.*<sup>[1]</sup>

Richard determined that the first thing to do would be to replace the trees around the farms in the dry areas where they had been removed. He started a tree nursery with this vision in mind.

He knew that the help of the Kikuyu people in undertaking a large tree-planting project would be beneficial, if not essential. The long term success and survival of the trees would depend on the care, stewardship, and vision of the local people.

Richard knew that the Kikuyu had ceremonial dances for important events, so why not engage everyone in a dance for the trees? He approached the chiefs and elders of the community with this idea and they advised him to gain the support of the warriors (morans). He approached Thongo Thongo, senior captain of the dances, and pleaded for his help.

*“Thongo,” I said, “you have dances for the bean planting and dances for the harvest. Your lands need more trees; your crops will be better, and trees will safeguard your land for your sons. I want you to make a dance of the trees...”*

*Thongo shook his head doubtfully. “Miti (trees); shauriyaMungu, Trees are God’s business, trees just grow!” “Yes,” I replied, “But you are cutting the mother trees and you do not give God a chance. Here is my idea!” I told him that in three weeks time I should hold a big dance at my camp. This was an ideal place, for it was situated at Muguga. All that remained of the forest in that area, which had been cut down and burned, was one sacred Mugumu tree, left to collect the spirits of the trees that had been felled.*<sup>[2]</sup>

Three thousand warriors and thousands of spectators came to that first *Dance of the Trees* held on July 22, 1922.

*Slowly the dance began, their feet stamping rhythmically to the beat of the drums... They advanced, retreated, lifted their spears to shoulder height and lowered them again. A low murmur came from the watching people. It swelled and faded with the beat of the drums, the drums that had often called them to war. But this was for peace! Drums for the planting of trees! I watched them evolve the dance before me, a dance that in the future would take place only when their tree-planting ceremonies had been fulfilled, a peaceful dance to a peaceful drum.*<sup>[2]</sup>

Many of the warriors made a promise that day that they would do one good deed each day, plant 10 trees each year, and to take care of trees everywhere.

## Reflection:

1. If you and your class were going to join in on a huge tree planting project, what kind of tree celebration would you want to have? A dance, feast, concert, festival, or something else?

2. To find out the way your class would most want to celebrate trees, ask 10 classmates what they answered and choose the most common choice to know the cultural preference in your classroom.