

An Excerpt from "The Story of a Thousand Year Pine"

By Enos A. Mills

Copyright © Enos Mills Cabin. All Rights Reserved.

The peculiar charm and fascination that trees exert over many people I had always felt from childhood, but it was that great nature-lover, John Muir, who first showed me how and where to learn their language. Few trees, however, ever held for me such an attraction as did a gigantic and venerable yellow pine which I discovered one autumn day several years ago while exploring the Southern Rockies. It grew within sight of the Cliff-Dwellers' Mesa Verde, which stands at the corner of four States, and as I came upon it one evening just as the sun was setting over that mysterious tableland, its character and heroic proportions made an impression upon me that I shall never forget, and which familiar acquaintance only served to deepen while it yet lived and before the axeman came. Many a time I returned to build my campfire by it and have a day or night in its solitary and noble company. I learned afterwards that it had been given the name "Old Pine", and it certainly had an impressiveness quite compatible with the age and dignity which go with a thousand years of life.

When, one day, the sawmill-man at Mancos wrote, "Come, we are about to log your old pine." I started at once, regretting that a thing which seemed to me so human, as well as so noble, must be killed.

I went with the axemen who were to cut the old pine down. A grand and impressive tree he was. Never have I seen so much individuality, so much character, in a tree. Although lightning had given him a bald crown, he was still a healthy giant, and was waving evergreen banners more than one hundred and fifteen feet above the earth. His massive trunk, eight feet in diameter on a level with my breast,

was covered with a thick, rough, golden-brown bark which was broken into irregular plates. Several of his arms were bent and broken. Altogether, he presented a time-worn but heroic appearance.

It is almost a marvel that trees should live to become the oldest of living things. Fastened in one place, their struggle is incessant and severe. From the moment a baby tree is born—from the instant it casts its tiny shadow upon the ground—until death, it is in danger from insects and animals. It cannot move to avoid danger. It cannot run away to escape enemies. Fixed in one spot, almost helpless, it must endure flood and drought, fire and storm, insects and earthquakes, or die.

Trees, like people, struggle for existence, and an aged tree, like an aged person, has not only a striking appearance, but an interesting biography. I have read the autobiographies of many century-old trees, and have found their life-stories strange and impressive. The yearly growth, or annual ring of wood with which trees envelop themselves, is embossed with so many of their experiences that this annual ring of growth literally forms an autobiography diary of the tree's life.

I wanted to read Old Pine's autobiography. A veteran pine that had stood on the southern Rockies and struggled and triumphed through the changing seasons of hundreds of years must contain a rare life-story. From his stand between the Mesa and the pine-plumed mountain, he had seen the panorama of the seasons and many a strange pageant; he had beheld what scenes of animal and human strife, what storms and convulsions of nature! Many a wondrous secret he had locked within his tree soul. Yet, although he had not recorded what he had seen, I knew that he had kept a fairly accurate diary of his own personal experience. This I knew the saw would reveal and this I had determined to see.

Nature matures a million conifer seeds for each one she chooses for growth, so we can only speculate as to the selection of the seed from which sprung this

storied pine. It may be that the cone in which it matured was crushed into the earth by the hoof of a passing deer. It may have been hidden by a jay; or, as is more likely, it may have grown from one of the uneaten cones which a Fremont squirrel had buried for winter food. Fremont squirrels are the principal nurserymen for all the Western pineries. Each autumn they harvest a heavy percentage of the cone crop and bury it for winter. The seeds in the uneaten cones germinate, and each year countless thousands of conifers grow from the seeds planted by these squirrels. It may be that the seed from which Old Pine burst had been planted by an ancient ancestor of the protesting Fremont squirrel whom we found that day in apparent possession, or this seed may have been in a cone which simply bounded or blew into a hole, where the seed found sufficient mould and moisture to give it a start in life.

Purchase ["The Story of a Thousand Year Pine" in Paperback](#) or

["The Story of a Thousand Year Pine" for Kindle](#)

and read this great story and others at the Enos Mills Cabin!

www.enosmills.com