

tree news

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Why trees?

Erin Mallea

When I first arrived in Green River, Utah (pop. $\approx$ 952), I wanted to learn about a historic grove of Fremont cottonwood trees. The grove is the anchor for the in-progress Pearl Baker Park, which in turn is the anchor of Canal Commons, Epicenter's non-profit affordable housing initiative. I visited the local museum, spent a day with the Curator & Collections Manager, and flipped through hand drawn and Sanborn Maps, binders of historic images, and recorded oral histories. I spent mornings and afternoons as one of the few pedestrians in town, joined a Pearl Baker Park community work day, spoke with the park's landscape architect and project managers, had lunch with the local town historian ("if anyone will know, it's her"), and struck up conversations with locals, Epicenter and community center staff, and young people at the teen center.

"Why trees?" I was asked. Trees expand outward. Conversations that began with the park immediately grew beyond the cottonwood grove. I was directed to better trees ("you'll know it when you see it"), "shit trees", trees of personal significance and the memories of those who planted them. No one that I spoke with could quite confirm the grove's age or whether they were volunteer or planted. Some claimed they were certainly historic ("they were old 50 years ago") while others claimed with certainty they weren't.



GREEN CROSSINGS - back -

(still standing) 1st school	Ferraro	1890
bible church	Chicago & Railroad	1893
- 1st big school - fruit festivals	Cambridge	1910
rrail	dep't 1002	1919
Uenideum		1920's
Melon's Days	1945	Bridge collapse 1946
		New Bridge 1950
1st airport	Tourist - Uranium	
CERMA - boat races	friendship cruise	1958
catholic mission	Highway 6 & 50 paved	1960's
1st fire truck	1st, Doctor, Clinic, launch complex, Boat & launch letter WHT/launch complex WHTS 1st truck stop modern turn - 1960's	1975
	New Elem school	
	Landings removed	1980's
	New High school	
	New ball pens	
city hall		1990's
new clinic (current city hall)		
golf course museum		





In Pearl Baker Park I learned about the complicated lives of the cottonwoods' neighbors – displaced thousands of miles to find new homes in Green River's sandy soil. I noticed a nest tucked within the grove's canopy, the relief of cottonwood shade on a summer day, and the stark contrast between Green River's street trees, naturally seeded trees, and the desert landscape. All the while, the cottonwoods' smell and rustling leaves transported me to the riverside flora of my adolescence.





12:37

Housing authority in Moen. Utah housing commission (rent to own) crown houses 50s - really cheaply built just built them and left. No one was managing it - sprinkler system froze / broke no one drained and caused damage - result of having an out of town manager privately owned now they're bankrupts Housing - less investment here by developers etc because can't make as much of profit if they're addressing need / building appropriately good, but often not building what people can afford

Recently to build financing together then crowd hit and lumber was unavailable but now it's as the price - financing secure the SJB - only 24 hours 2x4 \$2.49 to 2x4x8 \$10.77 What can we get for rent? Could get a lender to give them more money Debt coverage ratio Originally going to do the housing and then the park now the other way around

12:37

Dirty from the missile base

Sand from the beach

Russian olives

Glass from Bennett's lawn

Foil

Plastic

Milkweed

Cottonwood seed pods

Cottonwood leaves

Sagebrush

Fiberglass from missile base

Wrappers

Anna's petunias and pansies

Various Grasses

Dog food

Dash and Loyd's / Loyd's (leaves)

Twine

Alfalfa

Russian thistle

Kochia

Tamarisk

Little Caesar's, red, red pepper flakes

12:17

12:52

12:52

Fruitless mulberry - his dad planted it when he was one - tree is about 40 years old

Park conversation:
Jobs and working for USPS
College / education
Pay
EMT / volunteer in rural communities
Cost of living
Tourism
Airbnb
Affordable housing initiatives
The heat
The dust
The wind
Water, Gatorade
Artist types
Americorps

12:57

Slowly counted the number of old timers
Says there are probably - can think of 3 in their 90s, he's 79 - means they were born and raised here. He's just about a citizen - been here since 1967
Tourism is all we got - when he owned boys was worried he would starve to death but there was always something that would come thru; he owes a lot to river runners for spreading the word and supporting the restaurant. Raul and his family runs it now and that's the ones that keep it afloat and do a great job. Wouldn't survive without them - a town this size can't survive in tourism itself - need decent paying jobs lots of people work 2-3 jobs, not an owner operator or full time; only got 38 hours and minimum wage; Busing people out of price to work at the loves
McKerick will open July
good paying jobs (with salaries and benefits) school teachers or law enforcement

12:42

Comments by the community

Recommends the NYT Article "Are 1.8B Airbnbs Too Many in Joshua Tree?"

Only a few (maybe 3?) in green river but a few is still a lot when there's a housing shortage / crisis. People sometimes exaggerate the number but the need is not exaggerated; those three houses are needed.

12:16

"Not historic I have to say. Who says they're historic? The sign? I wasn't consulted on that one."
Probably from the 1930s-40s, not historic enough? Maybe they seeded naturally? But don't quote me on that
Though they're all about the same age so maybe planted?
It had been on an informal city park briefly in the early 1900s
Joanne reminiscing with dowers at the west winds names, places, references I don't know. They're married to so and so's so's son and so's cousin and lives near X
"I'd never tell you the story of my grandfather saying, 'I lost their farm 1936. Sticky fingers.' Truth is what they believed, not what was true."



The topic of trees shifted to Canal Commons, Epicenter's affordable housing initiative, and its larger context: housing insecurity, affordable housing models for rural communities, economic migration, housing bubbles, airbnb, tourism and gentrification, and COVID and inflation waylaid construction plans. We discussed the region's booms and busts^{***}, and its impact on cheap, short-term housing, unhealthy building materials, and related entanglements with chemicals. Trees led me to vernacular architecture, developers, profit margins, and debt ratios.

Tree conversation expanded into stories of regional star-crossed lovers and outlaws both romanticized and vilified. We spoke of legendary windstorms, conflation of truth and belief, good ideas gone bad, stunning sunsets, critiques of power, the heat, gas prices, and yet another "once in a generation" bust^{****}.



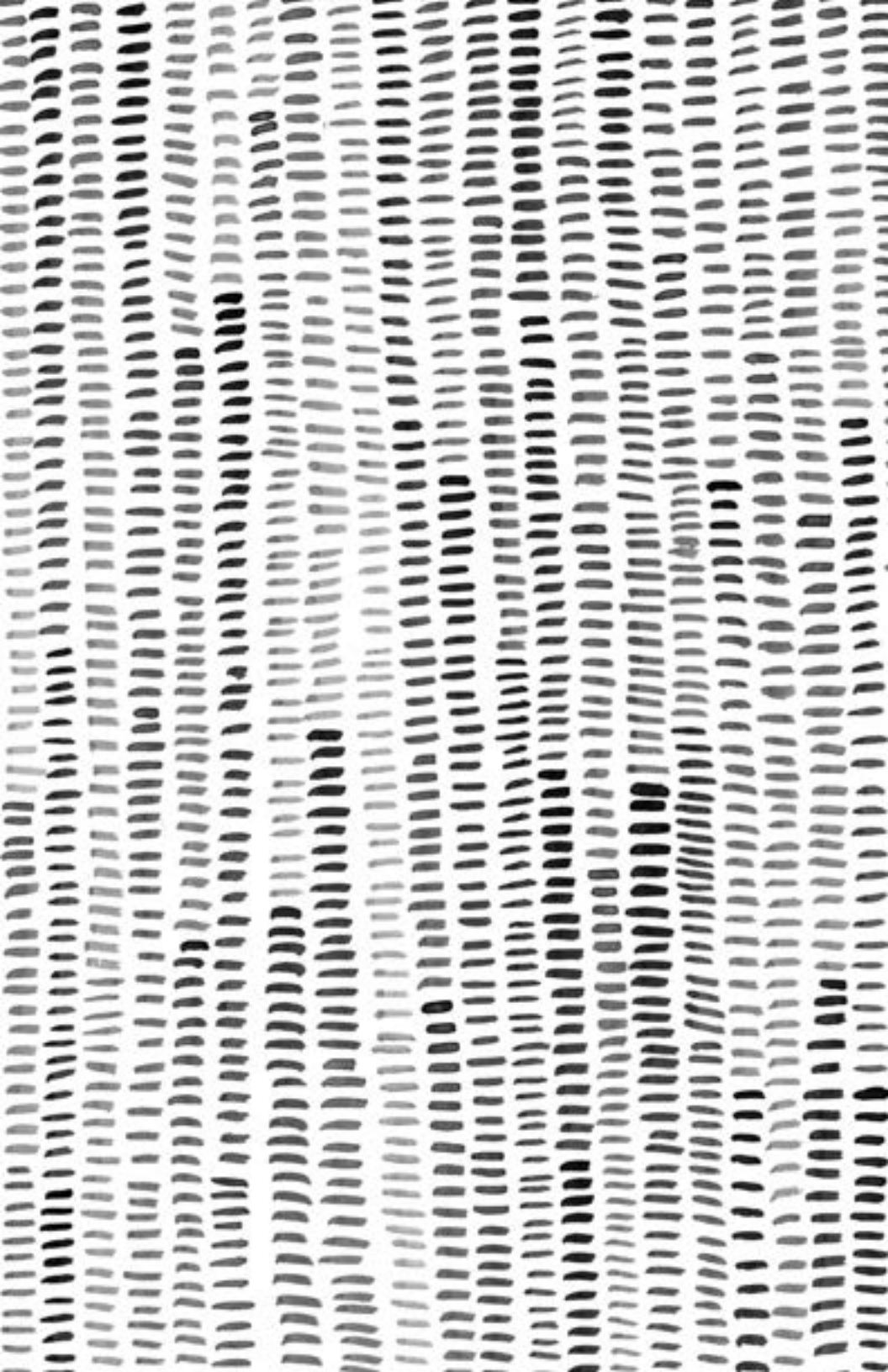
Quick

Quick

Quick

Quick

**Fair
Price
Quick
Sale**





I learned about webs of local relations: family ties, neighbors, who is related to who, who is indebted to who, who keeps things afloat, and how long or what it takes to become an accepted community member.

We reflected on scale: the desert expanse, the expansive sky, the distance to the nearest hospital and Costco, and the incomprehensible age and process of the region's geologic formations. While walking under the cluster of cottonwoods, a group of young people shared their experiences in town, what kind of TikTok videos they like and make ("anything that pops off"), and stories of their relatives in California, Mexico, and Texas.

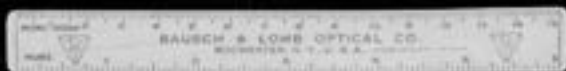






University of Colorado Museum
Herbarium "COLO"

NO 505090



PLANTS OF WYOMING

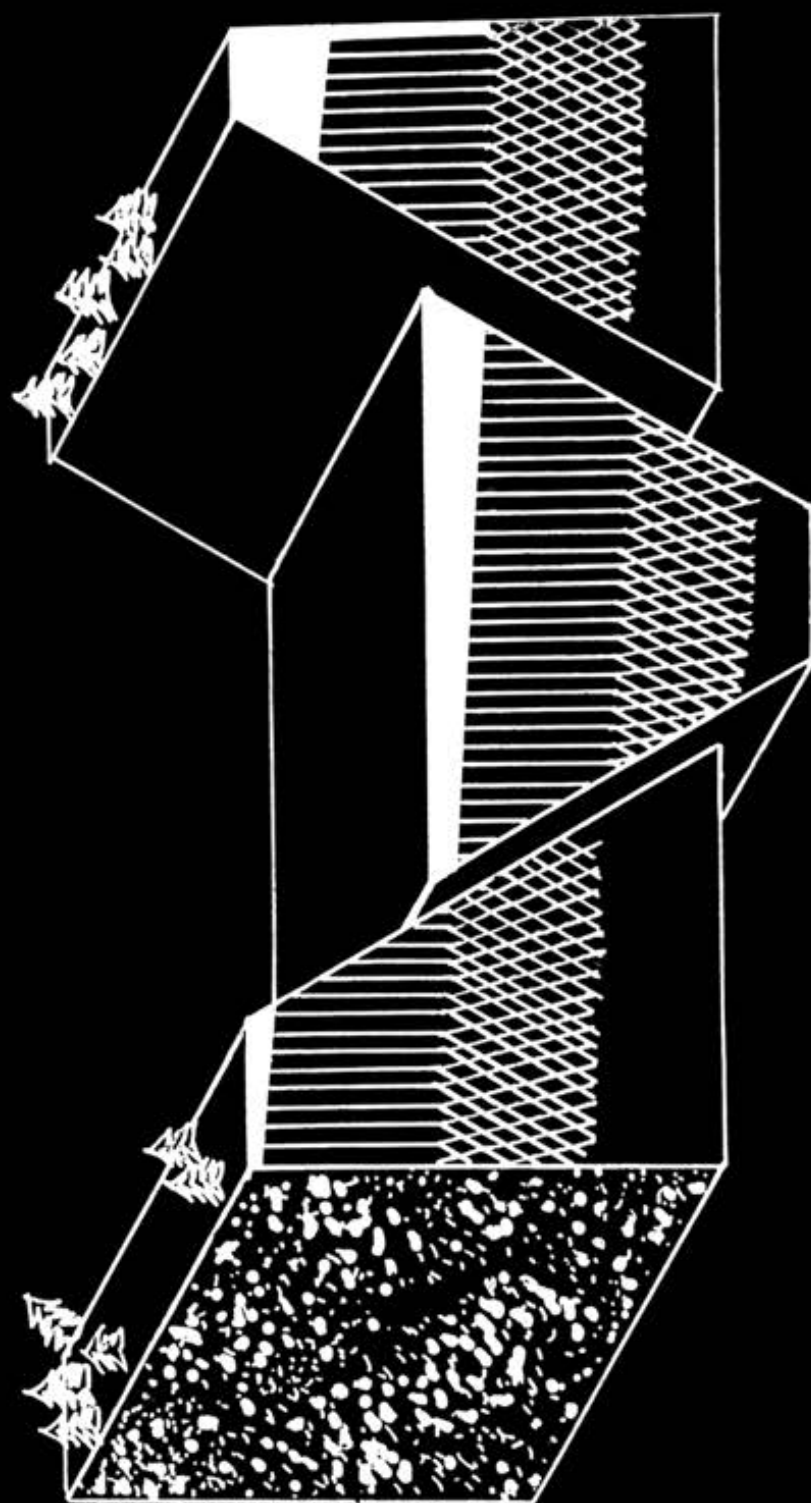
Herbarium of the University of Illinois

Populus fremontii Nutt.

along the Green River at Green River, Esmer Co.,
alt. 4000 feet.

GEORGE ENGELMANN JOURNAL 45208

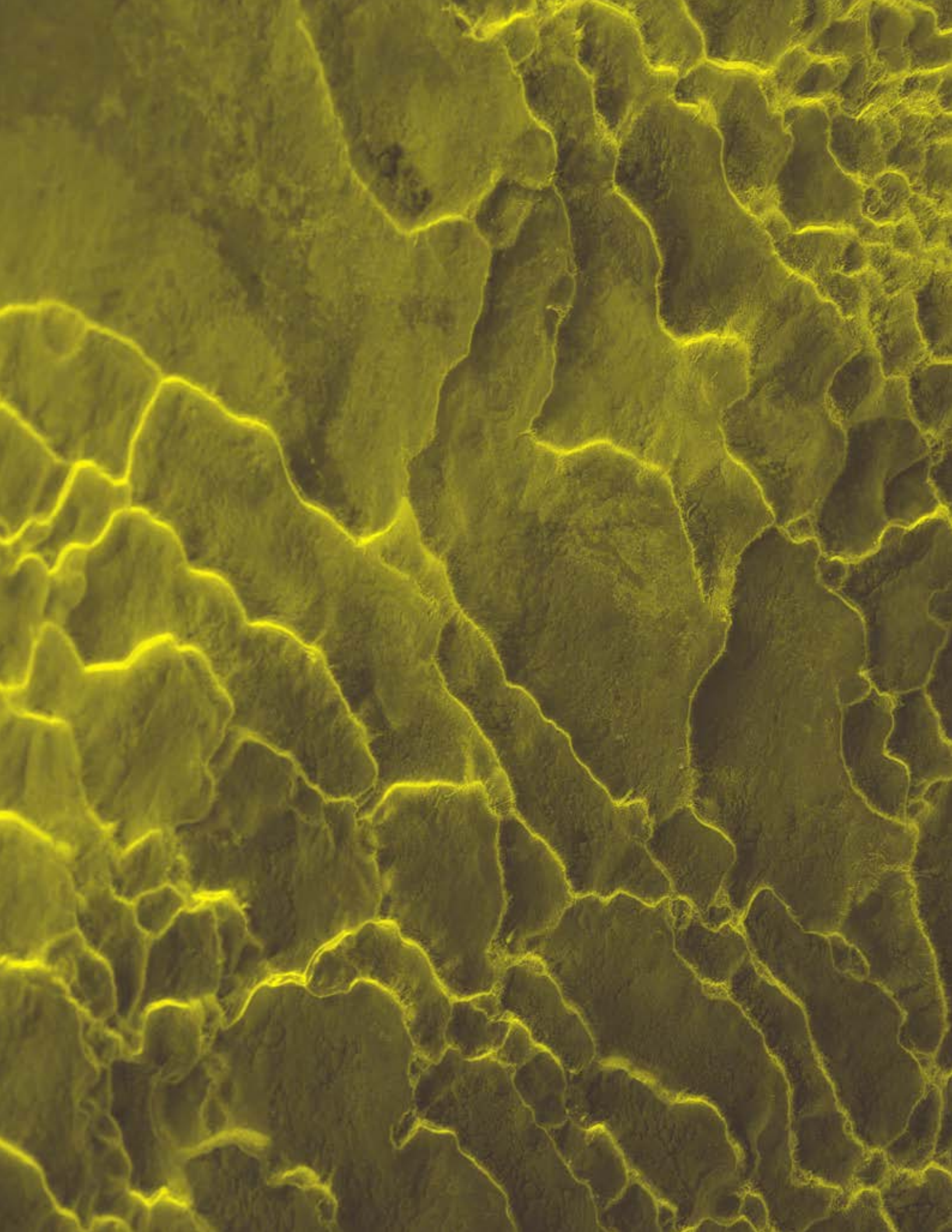
June 18, 1907





West Winds
RESTAURANT





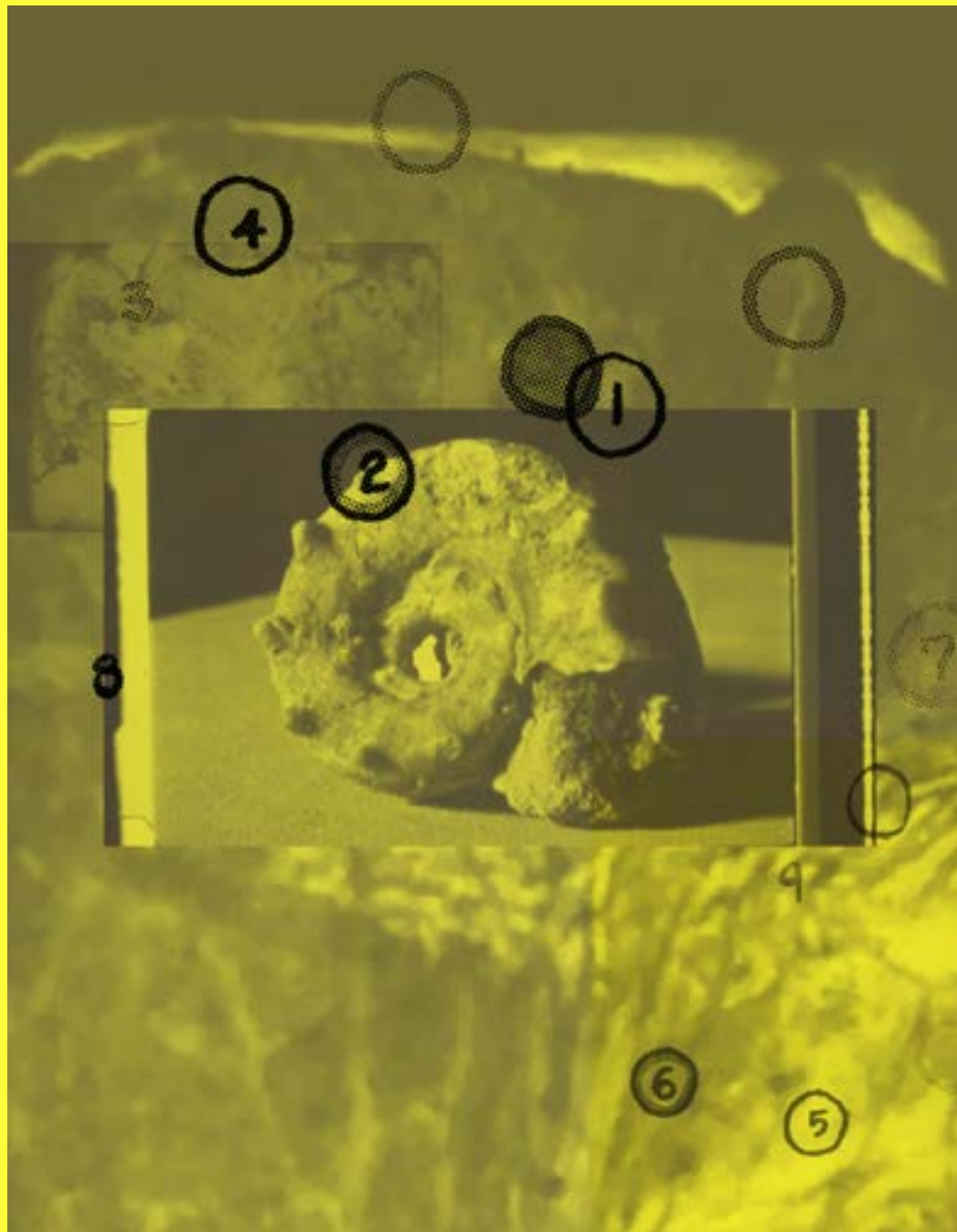
Cottonwoods are a sign of ground-water, seeding adjacent to rivers and streams. Throughout the southwestern US and northern Mexico, Fremont cottonwoods are a foundation species: they create the necessary conditions for the survival of many other species and stabilize essential riparian ecosystem processes. Cottonwoods' habitat has decreased by 97% in the last 100 years due to land use and climate change induced drought and changing river flows****. Riparian habitats face ongoing stress as the southwest becomes hotter and drier*****.

Fremont cottonwoods are sacred or important trees for multiple Tribes throughout the southwestern US and northern Mexico*****. However, they also became an indicator of settlers and displacement: popping up near irrigation canals and farms, used for fence posts, stockyards, and homes. The trees are woven within both a violent past and a precarious present.



Why trees? Trees expand outward.

With the development of Pearl Baker Park and adjacent Canal Commons, the grove of cottonwoods will be preserved. Yet, the grove will become more than "historic". It is part of a vision for Green River's future. Its branches intertwined with time, change, and uncertainty as community members consider shifting realities. What should change, what shouldn't, what changes must be adapted to, and how to actively shape the community's future.





Endnotes

* Learn more at ruralandproud.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Pearl-Baker-Park.pdf

** “Canal Commons is a non-profit housing development by Epicenter Properties, LLC., in Green River, Utah. This critical project, scaled specifically for local contractor and development team capacity, focuses on design, affordability, efficiency, and accessibility. The demand for rental housing is incredibly high in Green River, where there hasn't been an affordable housing development under construction since the 1970's. ... in a recent survey of employers in the community, 70% of respondents have employees that are struggling to find housing that is of sufficient quality for their families. According to Green River's 2014 Housing Plan (James Wood, Kem Gardner Policy Institute): The average age of a house in town is 56 years old. 46% of the housing stock is in need of repairs. 14% of homes sit vacant and in need of rehabilitation (or demolition). One-third of the population lives in mobile homes which make up 14% of the homes in town (compared to a 6% national average). 69% of mobile homes in town were manufactured prior to the 1976 adoption of the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards, making them no longer suitable for occupancy. 12% of the housing stock is rental units; only eight housing units are considered “affordable.” None of the apartment units in town are ADA accessible or appropriate for those able to age-in-place.” Epicenter, 2020. For more information visit canalcommons.ruralandproud.org and ruralandproud.org/housing

*** Land speculation boom, railroad boom, peach boom, melon boom, cattle boom, vanadium boom, uranium boom, missile base boom, real estate speculation boom.

**** While I was in Green River (June 2022), gas prices and inflation fears continued to rise, supply chain shortages worsened, cryptocurrencies crashed, and the US stock market officially fell into a “bear market”.

***** Kevin R. Hultine et al., [Adaptive capacity in the foundation tree species *Populus fremontii*: implications for resilience to climate change and non-native species invasion in the American Southwest](#), *Conservation Physiology*, Volume 8, Issue 1, July 2020.

***** Greg Garfin et al., [Assessment of climate change in the Southwest United States: a report prepared for the National Climatic Assessment](#). A report by the Southwest Climate Alliance. Island Press, Washington, 2013.

***** [USDA Plant Guide, *Populus fremontii*](#)



Photographs and artwork by Erin Mallea. Historic images courtesy of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum, the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah, and the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History Herbarium Vascular Plant Collection.

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