Jack London’s mighty oak won’t be chopped
Kurtis Alexander
Updated 9:13 pm, Wednesday, December 25, 2013

This 350- to 400-year-old oak tree, which provided Jack London with shade and inspiration at his Glen Ellen cottage, has been spared its scheduled removal. Photo: Jason Henry, Special To The Chronicle

The centuries-old Sonoma County oak tree made famous for the shade and inspiration it provided writer Jack London is dying of a fungal disease. Arborists have deemed the end near, while schoolchildren and American Indians have bid final goodbyes.

But in what some are calling a holiday miracle, the oak was given an improved bill of health from a team of UC Berkeley researchers this month, and the tree has been spared its scheduled removal.

"We couldn't be more thrilled," said Tjiska Van Wyk, executive director of Jack London Park Partners, which manages the Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen where the tree is located. "In the season of joy, we consider this a great gift."

Researchers with UC Berkeley’s Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management reported that the base of the old oak is not experiencing the decay that its
upper reaches are seeing.

Earlier this year, three arborists advised that the tree be felled as a safety precaution after noting dead branches and falling limbs. A storm late last year sent a 30-inch-diameter piece of wood through a fence, raising concerns that a park visitor could be hurt.

But after reviewing the comprehensive UC Berkeley report, park managers said the tree won't be removed anytime soon. Instead, they may simply do a little pruning and expand the area around the tree that's closed to the public.

The tree has another two to 10 years of healthy living, said Professor Matteo Garbelotto, who led the research team. He confirmed, though, that the presence of deadly fungi will ultimately be more than the 350- to 400-year-old tree can handle.

"We're not out of the woods. We're in a gray area where the risk needs to be assessed," Garbelotto said.

The 50-foot-tall tree, which has survived Sonoma Valley’s historic logging efforts and its push for farmland, overshadows the rest of the oaks on the eastern slopes of Sonoma Mountain.

Coastal Miwok once collected acorns in the area, and American novelist London bought the acreage around the tree as a retreat from city living in 1905, according to E. Breck Parkman, senior archaeologist for California State Parks.

The property helped London forge a spiritual connection with the land, which manifested itself in his later works, Parkman said. London's cottage, where he could view the tree from the window of his desk, still stands next to the old oak.

"I think everyone is going to be pleased that this tree has a little more time," Parkman said.

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“We’re not out of the woods.”
Love the cliche. lol

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Chindi  Rank 2

"350- to 400-year-old oak tree". Man, if someone misjudged MY age by 50 years, I'd be pissed.

11 days ago  2 Likes

ID_ZERO  Rank 5

Martin Eden is my favorite Jack London novel... it concerns a guy who wants to impress a girl through the attainment of knowledge garnered at the Oakland Public Library, back when libraries actually had a preeminent place in the sphere of intellectualism for the common man...Thank you, Mr. Carnegie

11 days ago  8 Likes

Rat_Bastard  Rank 17

What? You mean we don't have enough home grown children that could be adopted? Damn straight we do and these kids deserve to be first up for adoption before allowing people to import kids.

11 days ago  2 Likes

Rat_Bastard  Rank 17

@Rat_Bastard lol thought I had the other story open lol. To much Christmas "cheer"

11 days ago  5 Likes

avocadogreen  Rank 471

@Rat_Bastard

I know you posted in the wrong place but I'm going to answer anyway. It is usually for difficult to adopt a child here and other countries often have relaxed rules in the hopes of finding homes for children who don't have a family. I adopted a child here who I had helped raise from birth, I had the permission of the birth mother (who was retaining her rights), who was already living with me in a no contest adoption and it still took years and a ton of money to finalize.