



A 400-year-old Valley Oak, transplanted in 1968 (left) was still living this summer (right) at its new location in Westlake Village, Calif.

IT'S STILL ALIVE!

By LOU SPEER

"It's amazing," says Bill Peterson, landscape architect, Westlake Village, Calif.

Peterson made headlines with his transplant of a 400-year-old, 60-ton Valley Oak in Westlake, March, 1968.

Planting of the 50-foot-tall tree, with no more than a 12-foot-diameter earth ball, also drew pessimistic predictions.

"If after the third year after transplanting you can run pictures of the tree showing foliage as good or better, then I believe you would be correct in terming it a successful transplant," challenged Lester Maxwell, president, Maxwell Tree Expert Co., Inc., Fort Wayne, Ind.

To meet Maxwell's challenge, I revisited Westlake July 1, 1970, and found the massive *Quercus Lobata* apparently doing fine.

"The tree has probably doubled the leaf area since transplant," says sandy-haired Peterson. "These are healthy, big leaves."

He and his staff have kept a close

watch on the tree since its transplanting. The main concern in the beginning was excessive water. With few leaves, the tree would not use all the water available to it they knew. A drain was installed to solve the water problem.

Various authorities were also consulted as to the best means of "bringing the tree along." Foliar feeding was the general advice here.

"But that was not what I wanted to do," says Peterson. "I wanted to prove a theory: That I could put a tree back into the same condition that it was by using what storage of food there was in the tree itself and the use of the feeder roots to sustain it without the babying that most tree men use."

He was taking a chance, he admits. He used regular fertilizing—"not a lot, just enough to nourish it."

He kept a close eye on the tree and watched its growth. "It has some growth," he says, "not a lot but some. But then it is an old tree and a lot is not expected."

He compares the tree to an older human being that has been injured. "It takes some time to heal after an injury."

Peterson's experimental philosophy, as evidenced in his handling of the giant oak, extends into the whole landscape program at Westlake. For one thing, no special back-fill material is used in the transplanting of their hundreds of trees there.

"If a tree is not going to grow in its native state," says Peterson, "you might as well put it in a pot, for the roots won't go out from the back-fill area where they are nourished, especially," he adds, "in the clay soil that we have here."

The massive transplant is still well guy-wired. Peterson expects to leave these wires in place at least another two years.

"At that time, we should be able to look at the top structure of the tree and the foilage," he says, "and know if it has enough root growth to anchor it firmly."