



*Young Hemlock* —Jim Nies



*Older Hemlock* —American Forest

I've spent many hours looking at old-growth eastern hemlock trees: their tiny needles and cones under a microscope, their haggard growth in response to browsing deer, their occasional vibrant reproduction in one small area amidst an otherwise desert-like forest floor, and the dark curtain they draw over a forest community during even the brightest of days.

Hemlocks' needles express the deepest green among the color wheel of greens in a forest. A spring hemlock-hardwood forest dresses itself in more shades than an artist could describe, but at first, most come in a softness that contrasts with the dark hemlocks, a dayscape next to a nightscape. The hemlock's very darkness connotes a brooding, an antiquity, a grandfatherly mossiness. Yet, the leader stem always dangles in an arc, in a sort of persistent humble bow or wave, a comfortable ease, unlike their frequent neighbor the balsam firs, who choose ramrod attention, a stiff salute to every hour of every day, a fastidious military air.

Everything about hemlocks is worth paying attention to. I've listened to hemlocks' needles interpret the wind and to the birds that flit among them for cover or food or sing from skytop perches. I've smelled the tannin-rich bark. I've even enjoyed a resinous cup of tea from the steeped needles, after, of course, researching with certainty that Socrates died from the European poison hemlock flower, *Conium maculatum*, and not the eastern hemlock tree! In all of these ways, I've come to revere hemlocks. I'm drawn to these forests because they emanate a spirit of place, as indefinable and individual as that may be.

*Our Living Ancestors*, John Bates

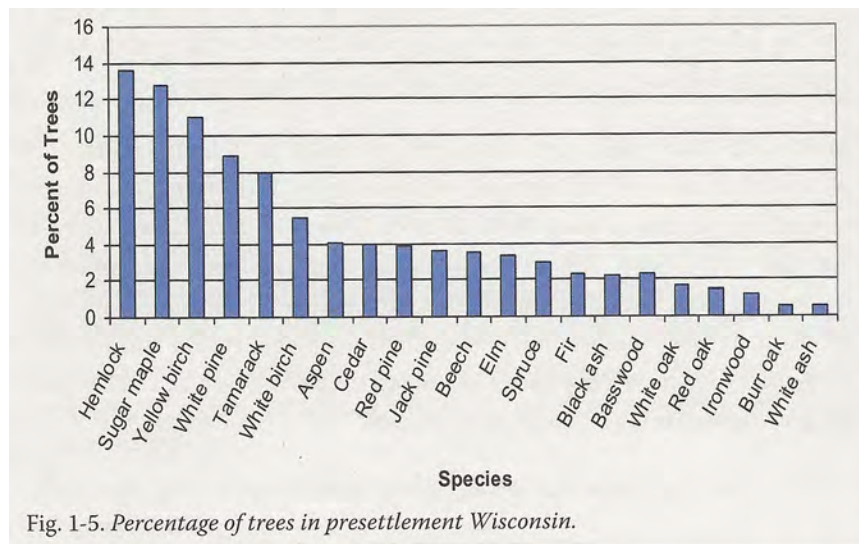


Fig. 1-5. Percentage of trees in presettlement Wisconsin.