4. MODESTO ASH TREE
Sierra & 3RD Streets (planted before 1911)

Landmark Preservation Commission Resolution: October 16, 1989
Designated by City Council: October 9, 1990

Cultural Significance: The tree was discovered in 1927 by L. S. Brooks and identified as a new kind of tree a variant of the original ash. The Modesto Ash was one of a group of Arizona Ashes planted by Modesto’s first superintendent of Parks, L.A. Rose, who said the tree came from the Francher Creek Nursery. The tree was planted sometime after a visit to Modesto by John McClaren, the founder of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, who at one time supervised the planting of trees in Modesto Parks. Nearing 90 years of age and well past the expected life span for an ash tree, the tree stands in West Side Park, just a few feet from the Maddux Youth Center at Third and F Streets. Nine steel props support its lower limbs and it rises 80 feet at its highest point the tree has endured hardhitting storms, a near-fatal "heart attack," a concrete implant, and installation of various ingenious man-made support systems. The Modesto Ash was heavily propagated from the 1930s through the 1960s. At one time, Modesto's street and park plantings boasted 15,000 Modesto ash trees. The Modesto Ash was known as one of the best trees available from 1945 to 1960 and in the 1950s was designated as one of the ten special feature trees on the west coast by a major San Francisco bay area horticulture group. Unfortunately, popularity began to fade as the fungus disease known as anthracoose hit hard, turning leaves prematurely brown and dry in the spring. In addition, roots were more invasive than expected as the trees aged, cracking sidewalks and driveways. Still, many neighborhoods in Modesto are grateful each summer for the shade provided by "our" trees.

Update 9/7/2023 - City staff determined that in order to preserve the safety of those within the park as well as visitors to the adjacent Maddux Youth Center, the tree must be removed. On December 20, 2019, Old Granddad was removed. Prior to removal City Forestry staff took cuttings from the tree so that it could be cloned with the original DNA and someday possibly be replaced by one of its own descendants. Due to
a safety assessment, it was inevitable that the tree would be removed as an emergency measure, without prior consultation with the Landmark Preservation Commission.