

Field Museum News

Published Monthly by Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

Vol. 7

DECEMBER, 1936

No. 12

THE GRACEFUL AMERICAN ELM, A TREE WHICH HAS WON A NATION'S AFFECTION

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The American elm is known to more people, and has a deeper hold on their affection, than any other tree of the western hemisphere. Its natural range includes the entire eastern half of the United States, extending from the Great Plains to the Atlantic, and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Though a tree of the primeval forest, it did not disappear with the clearing of the land for agriculture; rather it remained or emerged to cast its massive shadow on farmsteads, pastures and country roads, or to form cathedral-like arches over village streets. It has been planted and cherished from earliest colonial days, commanding respect for its stature and pliant strength, and stirring admiration for its graceful beauty—qualities rarely found in such harmonious combination.

Many important events and personages are associated with individual trees. It was in the shade of the "Cambridge Elm" that General George Washington took command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775; the tree survived until 1923, and cuttings from it are growing in such widely separated places as Boston and Seattle. At Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, there is still standing a great elm tree, twenty-one feet in circumference, which was planted in 1747 by Washington, then a young surveyor, to mark a corner of the estate of the Right Honorable Thomas Lord Fairfax. Other elms associated with the "Father of his Country" are to be found on the grounds of the Capitol at Washington, D.C., at Palmer, Massachusetts, and near the army

headquarters at Valley Forge. The first constitution of the state of Indiana was framed in the shade of a big elm near Corydon in June, 1816. And there is the "Liberty Elm" in Pennsylvania; the "Logan Elm" at Circleville, Ohio; "Lafayette Elms" at Ware, Massachusetts, and Kennebunk, Maine; the "Whittier Elm" at Haverhill, Massachusetts; and many others, serving as monuments to a nation's heroes.



Mural of American Elm in Hall of Plant Life

Most recent addition to the series of paintings of botanical subjects by Staff Artist Charles A. Corwin shows a fine specimen of America's most loved tree in a typical New Hampshire scene. The painting is based upon an excellent photograph which appeared some years ago in the magazine *Garden and Forest*.

Were the American elm to meet the fate of the chestnut and gradually succumb to the attack of a foreign disease, the injury to the timber trade would be substantial, but it would seem small compared to the greater loss to the country in the passing of a stately and charming tree. The sentimental value of the American elm far outweighs the economic. And so, because a few shipments of diseased logs with knotty and contorted grain were brought from

Europe to supply fancy veneers, a costly fight is being waged to stop the spread of the infection. The outcome is still in doubt.

Unlike the black walnut and the white oak, two other cherished relics of the virgin forest, the elm has no appeal to the makers of fine furniture. There is little of beauty beneath the bark, and the very qualities that make the wood so serviceable to the living tree unfit it for most of the wants

of man. The secret of the elm's liteness and grace resides in the toughness of its timber. A thin cross section, when highly magnified, suggests a piece of lacework, with alternating layers and festoons of coarse and fine meshes. These finer parts are veritable thongs of sinewy fiber rendered flexible by the porous layers between.

The pliable nature of the wood adapts it for bent work, and its strength and toughness fit it for articles that must withstand rough usage. These are qualities sought for in the cooperage industry, more especially the general utility class of barrels for which elm supplies not only staves and heading but also the hoops. Other woods may serve well enough for the splints of baskets, but for the more durable types there is no satisfactory

substitute for elm for rims and handles. There are innumerable instances where it serves, always humbly and inconspicuously, to provide a framework or reinforcement for various other weaker but more attractive materials.

As a living tree the American elm has been called "the most beautiful plant of the temperate zone"; but in respect to its timber it is unquestionably one of "the Marthas of the wood world."

BOTANICAL-ORNITHOLOGICAL MYSTERY DEFIES SOLUTION

By PAUL C. STANDLEY

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In October, 1935, Mrs. H. I. Steffa, of Chicago, while dressing a duck shot in southern Wisconsin, found in its stomach four white seeds. Out of curiosity she planted them in a flower pot, and all germinated. Last spring she forwarded to Field Museum a leaf of one of the seedlings, but, because of the primitive form of

the leaf, it was impossible to determine the plant it represented.

The young plants have continued to grow, and further material was forwarded this fall by Mrs. Steffa. From the new material it was recognized that they are the tropical papaya (*Carica Papaya*). One of them has been placed in Garfield Park Conservatory.

It is almost incredible that seeds of this plant, which grows out of doors no nearer than southern Florida, should be found in the stomach of a duck killed in the north in autumn when presumably the birds are

traveling southward. Papaya fruits, considered a great delicacy in tropical regions where they grow, reach northern markets, very rarely, and it is hard to believe that a fruit shipped north could have been thrown in some place where it might have been eaten by a wild duck. It has, indeed, been quite impossible to offer a plausible explanation of the manner in which the papaya seeds reached this Wisconsin bluebill.

Give Museum Memberships for Christmas—see page 2.



Record, Samuel J. 1936. "The Graceful American Elm, a Tree Which has Won a Nation's Affection." *Field Museum news* 7(12), 1-1.

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