

# THE BUR

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Newsletter of the New York State Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, Inc.

Spring 1993

## How Serious Is It?

• The American chestnut in New York State is in serious trouble. All of the trees listed in the Large American Chestnut Tree Register of New York State were dead when we tried to find them.

• After three years of searching by plane in District 9 and a Supertree Contest, we came up with the following results: only nineteen trees larger than 14" DBH were found (the largest, measuring 20.1" DBH, died last year). Of these nineteen, two are healthy trees, seven have died, three will die in 1993, and the other seven will die within the next five years. This causes great difficulty in our harvesting and growing programs. A further problem is that we have searched in the best known areas as identified by Herman Forest and Roger Cook and the chances of finding better areas are slim. District 8, Rochester, probably holds the most hope.

• We must look for groups of American chestnuts so we do not have to pollinate them. And, further, we must find trees that we can get to with equipment to pick the burs before they open and the critters get to them. The best recent example is two trees located right next to each

other. We could climb one and not the other. We got all 238 nuts from the one we could climb, but after three trips to the second tree with an equal number of burs, we collected only 16 nuts. The loss to critters is tremendous.

Unless other districts have far different results, our program to raise large numbers of trees for breeding purposes is in big trouble.

It is a sad state of affairs and all districts are going to have to work diligently to make our program successful!

• On a brighter note, we have made progress in other areas. Several nurseries so assist in propagating seedlings from our existing seed supplies have been established throughout the state. Our research program at SUNY Syracuse has completed an important first step with the discovery of an anti-fungal compound. And some of our districts have expanded their member activities as they have grown. With all this forward momentum, we are looking toward a successful 1993.

Herbert F. Darling Jr.  
President ACFNY

## Report of 1992 Annual Meeting

A record number of people, more than 120, attended last year's Annual Meeting in Niagara Falls, New York on October 10-11. This was a combined meeting of the national ACF and the New York State Chapter, with the Chapter's annual business meeting being held on Saturday morning, October 10. This included reports on the Chapter's 1992 work, election of officers and board members, and presentation of two awards. Resident Darling was presented by Board Member John Spagnoli with a plaque made of chestnut wood in appreciation and recognition of his outstanding efforts in the preservation of the American chestnut tree and the development of the New York State Chapter of the ACF.

The Supertree award was accepted by Board Member Michael Fay for Henry Tomasi of Jamestown as the owner of the largest American chestnut tree reported in Region 9 (DBH 19.1").

Hosted by the New York State Chapter, the national meeting featured presentations focusing on new scientific developments and accounts by members of success and failure in their own efforts. The highlight of the weekend's events was a trip to Fort Niagara for a guided tour (including a stop at a building made of chestnut logs), an artillery demonstration... (continued on page 4)

# DISTRICT NEWS

District 3 Expands **Planting Sites** – The Lasdon Park and Arboretum in Westchester County has recently agreed to assist in District 3's **future** planting program, making available a 3.5-acre area. In making his request to the County Parks Department, Frank **Munzer**, District Director, cited the need for help in preserving the American chestnut gene pool for crossbreeding with the laboratory-developed resistant tree.

District 3 members will also be planting 200 American chestnut seeds this spring in the New York Botanical Garden nursery at the **Cary** Arboretum located in Millbrook, New York.

District 7 News – Last fall, Roy Hopke, District Director, along with **Tim Comer** and **Jerry Pedini**, visited several locations in search of mature American chestnuts, but to no avail. "Then we visited **Carlton Rockwell**," Hopke reports, "who has been propagating chestnuts for some years. Mr. Rockwell

has a plantation of about 23 trees, some of which are 5 feet tall down to seedling size. We looked at the parent trees, one of which had died. Jerry and I took some root collar sprouts from the dead tree to see if we could root them. I heeled mine into humus and Jerry will try to root his with growth hormone."

As for spring activities, Roy writes: "I hope our sprouts from 'dead' trees (will) sprout so they can be planted in temporary beds for later planting in our plantations. This may be the only way we can keep represented some of the outstanding single trees we have found, but cannot reproduce in any other fashion."

Roy also speaks of planting locally gathered seeds along with seeds supplied by ACFNY in temporary beds for permanent planting when sites are selected in cooperation with the DEC. He mentions the need to record local American chestnuts in the state data base.

## Historic Chestnut Stories

Do you remember stories from your childhood about chestnuts — or that your grandparents told you? We hope you will tell us about them for our new feature in The Bur and for our archives. For instance...

A member from Youngstown, New York, Mr. Ed Clarke, remembers with nostalgia and pleasure the stories his grandfather and father told about the family going into the woods in the fall and working for days raking up chestnuts. There were thousands of trees in the grove on their farm. Since there were so many, they were able to wait for the spiny husks to drop off after the frost and not worry about the number the wildlife took, as Ed does now.

The nuts were raked into windrows and then put into burlap bags which were placed in a wagon and taken to the farmhouse. His grandparents prepared for this by removing all the furniture on the second floor and arranging for the whole family to sleep downstairs. The chestnuts then were brought in and spread on the upstairs floors for drying.

His grandmother then used a small-tined pitchfork to turn daily the six-inch deep chestnuts that completely covered the floors. The chestnuts were ready when they were thoroughly dried so they wouldn't mold. This could take 3 to 4 weeks. They were then re-bagged and taken to the rail station at Randolph, New York and sold.

Many farmers also brought their crops of chestnuts, and boxcar after boxcar left for the city markets. Grandfather Clarke said that around 1917-1918 he received about \$1 800 for his crop, which was a major part of the family income at that time. They made more on the chestnuts than on all the rest of the farm crops together. At about five cents per pound, that was around 18 tons of chestnuts! They always looked forward to this harvest time return for their work — and also to the return of their bedrooms.

Please tell us your stories. We don't want to lose New York's American chestnut history. Write to the NYS Chapter ACF, 1020 Humboldt Parkway, Buffalo, N. Y. 14211

## Western New York "Supertree" Award Winners

For his efforts in locating a 19.1 inch DBM (diameter at breast height) American chestnut, Henry Tomasi of Jamestown was declared the winner of the 2992 "Supertree" Award. He was presented with a laser- engraved plaque made of American chestnut wood. The winning tree was located in Cattaraugus County. The runner-up was Calvin DeGolyer, who located an '18.9 inch DBH in Castile, New York. Third and fourth places were tied with 18.7 inch DBH trees located by Robert Herberger of Wappinger Falls and Mike Ventre of Colden, New York.

## If You Get It, You Can Flaunt It

Chestnut T-shirts, decals and buttons were introduced at the Annual Meeting and some are still available. If you wish to order any of the following, send a check made payable to ACFNY for the appropriate amount and then enjoy telling people about your involvement in bringing back the American chestnut tree.

___ Chestnut T-Shirts (S, M, L, Xl) @ \$10.00	\$ _____
___ Chestnut Decal @ \$2.00	\$ _____
___ Chestnut Button @ \$1.00	\$ _____
Plus Shipping	\$ 1.00
TOTAL	\$ _____

## 1993 Chapter Goals

- I. Promote Enlarged Field Program  
Locate, Preserve, Harvest, Plant  
To prepare for the re-introduction of a pure American timber-type tree into the forest when we succeed in finding a blight-resistant strain.
  - II. Increase Membership  
Objective: 20% increase
  - III. Develop State-wide Education Program  
School material; slide presentations.
- WHERE CAN YOU HELP?

# How You Can Help Locate American Chestnut Trees

In a progress report of the long-range planning by the ACFNY Scientific Committee chaired by Stan Wirsig, the ultimate goal was succinctly stated as follows: "Once we have cooperatively restored 100 million trees to the (former growing) range we can say that we have preserved the American chestnut gene pool."

The report went on to say that the target of 100 million trees is "a staggering job unless we have lots of large mothers, each able to produce 1000 nuts each year as soon as the laboratory trees produce pollen; or unless we have thousands of younger propagated American trees ready."

The report cautions that the road to achieving many large mothers and propagated trees is paved with problems. We're losing large trees which are needed to hasten the breeding program to the blight. We're losing sprouts which have sprung from still-living root systems of otherwise deceased trees. And we're losing the ability to identify pure American chestnuts because hybrids are entering the American chestnut range, thus making it more difficult for lay members to locate pure American chestnuts.

Yet despite the problems, the need for ACFNY members to actively participate in locating remnant trees is a priority. For without "lots of large mothers," as the report has stated, the restoration program will be longer and more expensive.

## Location Tips

Often the first indication of a chestnut is finding burs on the ground under the tree. Burs are frilly with long spines which stiffen as they dry. The American chestnut bur measures about three inches across. You can widen your bur search by spreading the word among

people who hunt or hike or among forest owners and timbermen.

Another good chestnut indicator occurs during flowering season in late June and early July. By that time most other trees have already bloomed. You may search for them from back roads on the hillsides. Or, again, spread the word among your friends and professional lumber people. If you have access to an airplane, this too is a good method to spot flowering trees.

## Verification Important

After you have located an American chestnut prospect, there is a need to verify your find as a pure American chestnut and not a Chinese, European or Japanese variety...or one of their hybrids. In addition to your own sources, ACFNY has developed an "Identification Bulletin" (revised 2-93) which is available from your District Director or from ACFNY headquarters. But even with your guides and keys, absolute verification is best left to the experts. Included with the "Identification Bulletin" is a questionnaire which can be submitted with leaves from both the end of a branch and toward the trunk as well as about a foot of twig from the branch end. These are to be sent to Dr. Richard Zander of the Buffalo Museum of Science who will help you with verification. (The address is listed on the questionnaire.) Obviously there is no benefit in propagating an "off brand."

Location and verification, again, are the vital first steps before tree care, pollination, harvesting, seed storage and planting can begin. Incidentally, all these subjects are treated in separate ACFNY "How To" Bulletins which are available for the asking. Good luck in your chestnut hunt. If you have questions or problems, please contact your District Director or write to ACFNY headquarters.

## Interested Friends

Please send us the names of any individuals who you believe might be interested in becoming a part of the team to implement the ACFNY program. They might be forest or other property owners who would plant chestnuts for future propagation...volunteers for the many activities and committees necessary to make the ACFNY function...or simply friends of the environment who will contribute financially to the key research ACFNY is funding.

## Volunteers

The ACFNY program is created and executed solely by volunteers. There is no paid staff...only you and me. If you would like to participate in the work of any of the committees, please contact your District Director or Herbert F. Darling, Jr., President, ACFNY (address on page 4). These committees are: Location and Harvesting, Scientific, Membership, Planting, and Education.

## Nominations Sought

Do you know someone in your area who is an enthusiastic, out-going leader — especially one enthusiastic about preserving the American Chestnut? We particularly need coverage in District 1 (Long Island area), District 2 (New York City area), and District 8 (Rochester area). This would be a Board position where development of local membership would be a prime responsibility as well as promoting the propagation program. Or, how about you? Please send your recommendations with background or call Herb Darling (716) 632-1125.

## Seedling for Your Property Available

A limited number of one-year-old American chestnut seedlings for planting on your property may be ordered from the Western New York District 9. Since chestnuts are self-sterile, the seedlings are being offered in pairs with a pair of protective tubes for a donation of \$10. You may order by writing or phoning John Gordon, Jr., Gordon Nursery, 1385 Campbell Boulevard, Amherst, NY 14228, (716) 691-9371. Pick-up can be arranged at the nursery or at the Chestnut Day planting site. (See column "Join Us on Planting Day"...)

## Join Us On Planting Day April 24th

All ACFNY members are invited to participate in the 3rd annual American Chestnut Day, Saturday, April 24. Members will plant 100 American chestnut seedlings alongside the 300 planted in previous years. In addition, there will be a variety of field seminars and distribution of pre-ordered seedlings for planting on your own property. (See column "Seedlings for...available".)

The planting will be at the New York State Zoar Valley Multiple Use Area, Town of Collins, Erie County, approximately three miles East of Gowanda. For complete details, see the **slinger** enclosed.

## New Policy for Membership Renewals

To streamline administrative tasks, it was decided at a recent meeting of the ACFNY Executive Committee to send out all membership renewals at the beginning of each new calendar year regardless of the anniversary date. However, those who become new members during October through December of any given year will be considered members for the ensuing year.

## REMINDER.

All 1993 renewals were mailed in January. If you have not responded, please do so soon.

## Annual Meeting (continued from page 1)

at lakeside, and a magnificent banquet befitting the castle in which it was held. Songs of the eighteenth century by the Rainbow Singers provided a perfect accompaniment to the dinner.

Prior to the tour and dinner everyone gathered at Fort Niagara State Park to watch the planting of an American chestnut tree donated by John Gordon, New York State Chapter board member.

Special thanks go to Northwest Chestnuts for providing recipes and chestnuts for the dinner (people are still talking about the chestnut dressing and the chestnut savoury provided by New York board member Doug Campbell to go with the apple crumb pie); and much appreciation goes to all the New York Chapter members who helped make the meeting such a success.



*Herb Darling (left) and Glen Gelinas inspect a blight canker on a large American chestnut in the 9th District.*



*Scaffolding has been erected alongside this 80 foot high American chestnut so it can more easily be pollinated by catkins brought from other pure American chestnuts as far as 25 miles away.*