



AMERICAN CHESTNUT

Not so long ago, the American chestnut was one of the most important trees in forests from Maine south to Georgia. In the heart of its range, only a few generations ago, a count of trees would have turned up one chestnut for every four oaks, birches, maples and other hardwoods.

And the trees could be giants. In forests throughout their range, mature chestnuts averaged up to five feet in diameter and up to one hundred feet tall. Many specimens of eight to ten feet in diameter were recorded, and there were rumors of trees bigger still. The tree was one of the best for timber. It grew straight and often branch-free for 50 feet. Loggers tell of loading entire railroad cars with boards cut from just one tree.

Then the chestnut blight struck.

First discovered in 1904 in New York City, the blight, an Asian fungus to which our native chestnuts had very little resistance, spread quickly. By 1950 approximately four billion trees on some nine million acres of eastern forests had disappeared. Today, scientists with The American Chestnut Foundation are breeding blight-resistant American chestnut trees in order to restore this keystone species to its native eastern forests.



SM&NC and TACF: A partnership for a tree

In the spring of 2004, the Stamford Museum & Nature Center and The American Chestnut Foundation came together to plant this small grove of American chestnut trees. By planting these trees, the hope is to promote the story of the American chestnut and begin the process of restoring these magnificent trees to their natural range. For more information on the American chestnut, contact The American Chestnut Foundation – www.acf.org.



Shenandoah National Park, Virginia



Dead chestnut trees in Shenandoah National Park. Courtesy of Shenandoah National Park Archives. Copy photo by Mike Rothman.