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Tree History Updated. I was chatting this past Monday with David Wiesenberg of the Wooster Book Company, drinking Rising Star coffee from Cleveland by way of the Southern Hemisphere and eating the wonderful Scottish pastries of Templeton's in downtown Woo. Quite an international experience, really. But then we got to talking about something of more local reference, Edmund Secrest, the first state forester of Ohio. He was once director of what is now OSU's Agricultural Research and Development Center, a plantsman who arrived in 1908, surveyed the fields and treeless areas, and voila, among much else – Secrest Arboretum.

In 1920 Edmund Secrest also helped orchestrate the planting of hundreds of thousands of trees in America's first urban reforestation program at Mt. Airy Forest in Cincinnati. So, as we almost all do these days, and despite David's mild technophobia when it comes to anything not bookly, I googled Edmund. We found something that was worthy of David's curiosity: mention of a **book** involving Edmund Secrest. Thanks to Clevnet and interlibrary loan and the wondrous Orrville Library, by this Wednesday "Forest Trees of Ohio" was in my hands.



Edmund Secrest photo from the web

This "Forest Trees of Ohio" by Joseph S. Illick, "in cooperation with Edmund Secrest" was written in 1927 for use by the "Schools of Ohio". It teaches us some charming perspectives. To begin is a reminder for all time to girls and boys of all ages, an almost hundred-year old guide to preventing nature deficit disorder:

"To know trees is to love them and protect them. In teaching boys and girls about trees we will place in their possession an unafraid attitude towards the out-of-doors...Fortunate are the boys and girls who can tell the names of trees, know the quality of their fruit, the fragrance of their flowers, the form of their leaves, the flavor of the twigs, the color of the bark, and the properties of their wood."



American chestnut foliage (JC)

Among the tree profiles in the book is one of wistful sadness. For American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) there is: "The deadly chestnut blight is destroying it rapidly. No remedy is known to control this disease." Alas, this came to pass, and American chestnuts are largely absent from our woods, though not quite, as the American Chestnut Foundation would remind us. Resistance, in the form of hybridization with non-native *Castanea* and the use of more

blight resistant survivors continues. Though it will not likely bring



American chestnut renewal project sign at US Forest Service in Maryland (JC)

chestnuts back to their former reign in Eastern hardwood forests, there will be at least the ghost of chestnuts for present and future generations.



The beauty of elm buds (JC)

Of American elm (*Ulmus americana*), here is a paean to another major woodland and urban tree: “As a forest tree, American Elm stands in the front rank. Its wide range, good wood, rapid growth and adaptation to a wide range of soils, suggest good care and protections for this tree... Of all trees planted in North America the American Elm, also known as the White Elm and the Water Elm is probably the best known and most admired. For beauty, grace and stateliness this tree has few, if any, superiors. It is planted widely as a shade and ornamental tree.”

Of course, we know how that, mostly, ended, Dutch elm disease and elm yellows, and all that. Although, in this case truly there are major developments in recent years. Hybrid elms (American elms crossed with Chinese elms, *Ulmus parvifolia*) and selected American elms are legion today, in some cases replacing many of the roles of – North American ashes.

Which brings us to ashes, the genus *Fraxinus*: From the book: “The White Ash is the most beautiful and useful of the native Ashes. It stands among the most important forest trees... The Green Ash helped change the treeless

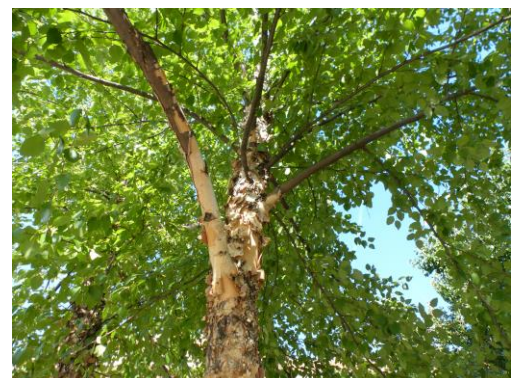
prairies in to a land of shaded roads, protected homesteads, and beautifully bordered streams.” Well, we are undergoing another of these bitter seasons for a tree of such major forest relevance back in 1927 and until the last two decades here in Ohio with emerald ash borer arriving with devastating effect.



Ailanthus seedling as an urban survivor in Cuyahoga Falls (JC)

One last tree from the subtitled “Field Guide to Common Trees of Ohio”, and that is ailanthus (*Ailanthus altissima*). “The Ailanthus, also called Tree of Heaven, Chinese Sumac, and Paradise Tree came to this country from China about 150 years ago... The Ailanthus has been planted in all parts of Ohio. In many places it has escaped cultivation and now forms dense thickets.”

Indeed, this developing problem came to pass. “The Tree That Grows in Brooklyn” is now a problem invasive in our forests with management plans underway now for some years. Oh, alright once last tree, to finish on a brighter note. For our native River Birch (*Betula nigra*) the verdict: “It is of inestimable value as a protector of river and stream banks, and is well adapted for ornamental planting.” River birch has become steadily more popular as a landscape and cityscape tree, especially with cultivars with intense cinnamon bark, such as ‘Heritage and ‘Dura-Heat’.



The beauty of river birch (JC)

So, advice to us boys and girls: “List the trees you have met on your hikes, about the camp or along the roadside... To know 25 trees means that you are acquainted with about one-third of all the common trees of Ohio... Today is the best time to begin your tree record.”

One More Historical Tree Story. I was recently in New York City, 15 years after the 9/11 tragedy, and was reminded of that day. We were on our Buckeye Yard and Garden Line (BYGL electronic newsletter) call back here in Ohio and Dave Dyke of OSU Extension, Hamilton County broke into a plant report with news that a plane, possibly a small plane had flown into the World Trade Center. We took it in and continued our reports.



Swamp white oaks in the Plaza (JC)

Minutes later he burst in that another plane had hit the other tower and that these were large passenger planes. Now we knew something was terribly wrong and yet, like many people, we tried to continue with our scheduled activities for a while. As reports from New York City continued, we realized that BYGL would have to fade into background for that week – change was upon us all.

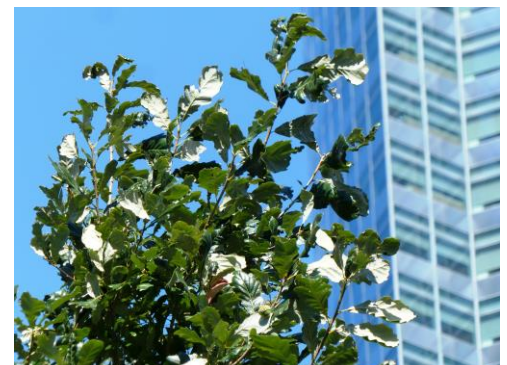


Swamp white oaks and the Memorial Plaza at Ground Zero in NYC (JC)

So, at Ground Zero a few weeks ago. In the Memorial plaza now are mighty oaks. Hundreds of mighty swamp white oaks (*Quercus bicolor*). Landscape architects Peter Walker and Partners intended for these oaks to be living and growing reminders to match the loss in the “Reflecting Absence” design of the recessed pools on the footprints of the Twin Towers. The cascading flow of water in the pools, the names of those lost inscribed along the edges, the immensity of what these images reflect - and the oaks.

People walk in the plaza on pavement that is placed on concrete tables underground that support troughs of loosened soil to sustain growth of the oak tree roots. These trees show good health: with

lustrous green upper leaf surfaces, white on the lower leaves – bicolored. Swamp white oaks are a major native forest tree, growing to 60 feet, popular now in landscaping for its adaptability, its ease of transplanting among oaks, and its environmental canopy services.



The bicolored leaves of swamp white oaks in NYC (JC)



Swamp white oaks and the Freedom Tower (JC)

As noted on the 9/11 Memorial site: “*The trees will never be identical, growing at different heights and changing leaves at different times [fall color], a physical reminder that they are living individuals.*” *Parvis e glandibus quercus*. Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.

To close: From: “Forest Trees of Ohio”:

“I have written many verses, but the best poems I have produced are the trees I planted on the hillside.”
– Oliver Wendell Holmes.