

THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT'S of NOVA SCOTIA
The Sweet Chestnut - *Castanea Dentata*
By Les Corkum - 1998

In 1977, Ralph Johnson, a forester employed by Bowater Mersey of Liverpool, wrote an article on the American Chestnuts of Nova Scotia. After reading a copy of this article a few years ago, it aroused my interest as to the current status of these trees. Perhaps it is time to summarize my notes taken over the past two years before they are lost or I do not have time to finish them. Hopefully they may be of some value to interested parties in future years.

THE HISTORICAL TREES:

Mr. Johnson reported the presence of only four American Chestnut trees plus a record of three that were no longer living. The four old living trees were located at Mount Uniacke House, Bridgewater, Ashdale and Carleton. The Bridgewater tree has since died or has been destroyed, the Ashdale and Mount Uniacke trees are still living. I have not been able to determine the current status of the Carleton tree.

The most majestic Chestnut Tree in the province, in my opinion, is located at the Mount Uniacke Museum Estate. John Uniacke commenced building his estate in 1815 and died in 1830. Undoubtedly this was one of his imported exotic trees, therefore it is approximately one hundred and seventy years old. At least two were planted originally as there is currently a small coppice growth tree growing from a large rotting stump adjacent to the large tree. Some attempt has been made to reduce this trees' competition and allow more sunlight but it is insufficient. The large tree has a straight clean stem and is probably sixty feet tall. This tree was first reported by G. Swain.

The largest known tree in the province is located at Ashdale, Hants Co., and was first reported by C.R.K. Allen in 1965. Perhaps because it has grown in the open, it developed a large spreading crown and is relatively low in height. It is believed that this tree may be nearly as old as the Uniacke tree.

During 1997, Tracey (Webb) Abou reported that she located an American Chestnut Tree growing at Swallow Point, Chester Basin. This tree is quite old and large and showing some signs of decay but should live for many more years. I have not been able to confirm the existence of the tree reported by R. Johnston to be at Carleton, Yarmouth County.

SWAIN'S TREES

George Swain was a horticulturist at the Canada Department of Agriculture Research Station at Kentville, During 1965 he cross pollinated the Ashdale and Bridgewater trees and produced viable nuts that grew fifteen seedlings. Two were planted in the Halifax Public Gardens, four were planted at the Research Station and two at Lower Cunard. The Cunard trees have not been located to date.

THE BOWATER MERSEY TREES:

According to Bill Journey, Manager of Silviculture, Bowater Mersey, the company purchased 300 American Chestnut bare root seedlings from Cascade Forestry Services in Iowa, U. S. A., between 1982 and 1986. These trees were grown in their nursery before being distributed. The trees were primarily planted in public places as a public relations project and were probably subjected to above normal traffic and vandalism. According to their planting records, and my notes, pairs of trees were planted at twenty four sites but I have only noted five living pairs to date and they are all at Liverpool. The Bowater Mersey Seed Orchard at Melvern Square contains an impressive stand of over sixty trees. There appears to have been very little mortality, which indicates that they will grow if protected and cared for. This site appears to have inadequate drainage for chestnuts and there is evidence of frost damage. Perhaps the seed source is not quite hardy enough for all parts of the province, however they appear to be growing quite well in the Liverpool area. Bowater Mersey is to be congratulated for their support and funding of this project.

During 1997, Gordon Millard, Milton, collected a small quantity of nuts from one of the Liverpool pair of trees. Unfortunately, none were viable, possibly a storage problem. Gordon has collected some nuts from two pairs of Liverpool trees in 1999. Let's hope that they are viable next spring.

During 1997, I collected a few nuts from a pair of Chestnut (*possible chinese x american*) trees growing at Wolfville, which provided me with over twenty seedlings. During 1998, I collected over 100 nuts from the Wolfville trees and three nuts from the Kentville Research Station trees. With some luck, I should have a nice supply of seedlings next year. During 1997 I received 10 nuts from Dr. Gregg Boland, University of Guelph. Due to mice, rats, shrews, etc., and probably growing errors, they did not produce a single tree - this was a real disappointment. During 1998, I purchased 25 seedlings from a New Brunswick nursery, the seeds were brought from a disease free area of Maine. These are now lined out at Falmouth along with over 20 from my Wolfville source.

It is my objective to replace some of the Bowater Mersey trees that died and consequently provide pairs of trees for a future supply of nuts. I also hope to plant in other selected sites. I wish to thank Gordon Mannered, Bowater Mersey, and Marshall and Barb Conley for their assistance in providing nuts for this project.