

Canadian Chestnut Council

. . . on the Chestnut Trail

1332 Suncrest Road
Kingsville, Ontario N9Y 3H3

NEWSLETTER #18
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Editor's Comments

The Canadian Chestnut Council (CCC) Newsletter is published twice a year and available to all who make an annual membership contribution. A Regular Membership fee costs \$10.00 and is payable to the secretary-treasurer any time. The CCC invites you to qualify for a Contributing Membership by donating \$25.00 or more.

Spring and fall issues of the newsletter touch upon timely matters relating to the growth and care of chestnut seedlings and young trees.

Progress on the goal of regenerating the native chestnut in Southern Ontario is reported. Less than ten years ago we learned about trial plantings of the American Chestnut in Nova Scotia. Then about two years ago we heard about the existence of a few older chestnut trees there. These are all blight-free. In the future, we shall try to keep you informed about the chestnut in both Ontario and Nova Scotia.

Newsletters also provide information about what is new in bio-control of the chestnut bark fungus. As briefly as possible, our news covers at least some of the many important developments of the large restoration program underway in the U.S.A.

Announcements of the CCC annual meeting and other public meetings that might challenge the interests of chestnut growers are included. Letters to the editor and other articles are welcome.

The CCC is a growing organization which profits from your interest and help. If we are not serving your needs, we want to know. Individually we can do much, collectively we can do much more.

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CCC TENTH ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Canadian Chestnut Council is being held at the Horticultural Research Station, Blue Line Road, Simcoe, Ontario, on Saturday , October 31,1998, 1:00 - 4:00 P.M.

The Research Station is located just north of #3 highway about 4 -5 km east of Simcoe, Ont.

The guest speaker will be Dr. Fred Hebard, plant breeder for the American Chestnut Foundation, Meadowview, VA., U.S.A. His talk and slide presentation will give us the progress being made in breeding a blight-resistant chestnut.

Doug Campbell will speak about the nutritional requirements of chestnut. Doug is a CCC director and operates a nursery at Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON.

The program will feature other interesting items.

Chestnut growers and enthusiasts will not want to miss this afternoon of learning and enlightenment.

MEMORIES OF THE SWEET CHESTNUT IN THE STRATHROY AREA AND IN CARADOC TOWNSHIP, MIDDLESEX COUNTY, ONTARIO.

Mona (Berdan) McKeen, now a octogenarian resident in London, grew up on a farm on the 16th Sideroad of Caradoc township only two or three km north and west of Mount Brydges. She remembers chestnut trees growing abundantly in the neighbouring woodlots and along the fence rows. During summer electrical storms the trees were frequently struck by lightning. Being straight-grained the tree trunks were often split from top to the ground by the lightning bolt. When the blight arrived in the late twenties, it was little understood. Some of the sudden death of limbs and branches of the chestnut was attributed to lightning strikes.

Mona recalls the following incident: " One fine October day a car parked on the shoulder of #16 Sideroad across from the Berdan property. Occupants left the car carrying 6 qt. baskets to the chestnut trees in the nearby woodlot. Fallen burrs and nuts were hurriedly picked up. When several baskets of nuts were gathered, her father took the big horn from the phonograph, stepped out on to the doorstep and hollered 'get out of there'. Unable to recognize where the voice came from and being fearful of being apprehended the intruders left their baskets and took off for the car, and sped away. Dad gave them time to get out of sight, then the Berdans went to the trees and retrieved the chestnuts. That was an easy harvest! Being always welcome by the farm owners the Berdan family gathered many harvests of nuts at that site. We always enjoyed roasting chestnuts - we used to roast them on the top of the cookstove back near the water reservoir. Indeed they were delicious!"

The editor's first knowledge of chestnuts came in 1928 when his education started at Strathroy Collegiate Institute in first form (now the equivalent of grade nine). My chum, Bill (Tubby) Jay rode his bike from the southwest part of the town to the school on Quality Hill. At the end of lunch hour during late September and early October he returned with pockets full of chestnuts. He shared some of his bounty with his pals who munched on them during the afternoon class sessions. I don't recall any of us being reprimanded for eating nuts in class. Perhaps it was done less conspicuously than gum-chewing which was a no-no.

Bill was a bit of a scamp and I was never certain of his source of chestnuts. Strathroy was at the northern limit of at least an 80 square mile expanse of fine sandy soil on which chestnuts grew. Chestnuts grew in the town particularly on the properties south of the CN railway tracks.

I also vividly remember a grocery owner displaying bushel baskets of chestnuts and apples on the sidewalk at his store front at the corner of Front and Frank Streets.

In 1938 and 1939 I recall vendors at the corner of Bloor St. and Avenue Rd. in Toronto selling roasted chestnuts. After spending a chilly Saturday afternoon at Varsity Stadium watching a football game a few native 'Hotta, roasta' chestnuts were delectable!

THE 1998 GROWING AND HARVEST SEASON

While 1997 may be remembered as an unusually late and cool growing season, 1998 will long be remembered as one of the hottest and driest of the century. Several areas of the Carolinian Zone in southern Ontario saw little to no rain during July, August and September.

It is expected that the total harvest of American chestnuts may be larger than in previous years. While a few older nut-bearing trees have succumbed from the blight, some of the younger ones have started to bear fruit.

Individual trees show variation in the time of nut-drop. There is sometimes nearly three weeks difference in the time of average nut-drop shown by trees. Nut size and nut-drop time are often individual tree characteristics.

THE GROWTH OF C.dentata IN NOVA SCOTIA

During early June, Colin and Beatrice McKeen enjoyed a car trip through parts of Nova Scotia. In 1986, plantings of C.dentata were made by the Bowater Mersey Paper Company at several areas throughout the province. Three of the plantings were observed in the Liverpool area and the pair of trees at each of the three sites examined was showing good to excellent growth. These trees showed an abundance of immature staminate catkins on well shaped trees. A few nuts have been harvested from these trees in previous years.

The Southeast coastal areas of Nova Scotia are in the same plant hardiness zone as the Niagara peninsula. This environment should bode well for chestnut growth.

In cooler areas of the province chestnut trees showed a considerable amount of twig dieback (probably a type of winter injury).

Cryphonectria parasitica is not known in Nova Scotia.

Will Nova Scotia become a chestnut-growing area? Time will tell.

A ONE-DAY SURVEY OF C. dentata TREES IN SOUTH-CENTRAL MIDDLESEX COUNTY

On October 5, chestnut enthusiasts including John R. Trott (County Forester), Keith Wilton, Clem Fisher, Don Fick, Colin and Beatrice McKeen observed the growth and health of chestnut trees in the Caradoc, Byron, Komoka and Lambeth areas. In the Dingman Creek Conservation, Don Fick led us along an interesting trail (crossing the creek was an experience) to a fine healthy specimen with a dbh of 19.5" (50cm). This was a recent find.

Two trees in another woodlot have been under observation since 1983. Both are growing on dry sandy bluffs about 30 m apart. They showed an annual dbh increase of 1 cm over the last 15 years. These two trees had diameters of 24"(75 cm) and 16.5"(52 cm) respectively. The larger tree carried a large crop of burrs, some containing plump nuts.

Another Caradoc tree growing close to the roadside had a dbh of 22"(69 cm). Two other healthy trees near the 16th Sideroad had dbh's of 13.4"(34 cm) and 10"(26 cm). In one woodlot about a km away, the survey team looked at an old stump site producing a growth of suckers, some dead and some dying. This represented a typical virulent infection by *Cryphonectria parasitica*. Several other similar sites were reported to exist in this woodlot.

In Caradoc township four plantings of *C. dentata* have been made on individual farms since 1990. Although the tree growth has been variable, all are doing quite well. The most vigorous specimens have attained a height of 4 to 5 m and are now starting to fruit. These plantings do not exceed 12 -15 trees each.

POTENTIAL FOR THE EXTENSION OF C. dentata INTO AREAS NORTH AND EAST OF THE ' OLD CHESTNUT BELT'

TWO EXAMPLES MAY GUIDE US

A. Ottawa.

A planting of 17 chestnut trees was made in a forestry trial at the east end of Ottawa in 1976. Because the Forestry Institute was moved from Ottawa a short time later, the planting soon fell into neglect. Despite lack of care, eight trees have survived. In mid June of this year the survivals were observed by the editor to be in a fair to good state of health. A few light crops of nuts have been harvested from these trees over the last few years.

B. Orangeville.

Chestnut seeds were included with those of other nut-bearing species by the Society of Ontario Nut Growers (SONG) at the Island Lake Conservation planting in 1979. Despite extraordinary planting conditions there was a considerable good winter survival of the planted nuts, and many of the species have subsequently produced fair to good stands. In recent years this planting has also suffered from neglect.

A few of the chestnut trees now range up to 10 m. high. This fall some of the *C. dentata*, and *C. dentata* hybrid trees have produced an amazing number of nuts. The original planting plan is being studied to determine what germplasm has survived.

The Ottawa and Orangeville plantings are in the 5A Cold Hardiness Zone. Survival of *C. dentata* and hybrids in these two areas offers promise for extension of the American chestnut in Ontario well beyond the 'Old Belt', provided soil conditions are suitable.

WINTER PROTECTION OF YOUNG TREES

Because of the long growing season like the current one, the hardening-off process seems to be well advanced. Young saplings growing in plastic tubes, or other protectors, should be carefully checked to ensure that mice and other rodents are being kept out of the protectors. Large unprotected stems may be sprayed with 'Skoot' or other similar repellents to discourage deer, rabbits and rodents from feeding on the bark and tender growth.

Weak stems may have to be firmly staked. This gives the young tree protection against wind and ice storm damage.

OVERWINTERING OF NUTS AND FALL PLANTING

The fall planting of nuts is not generally recommended unless one has experienced good success in the past. Planting beds should be well protected against deep penetration of frost. A few shallowly buried chestnuts may survive the winter, but most do not.

Excellent success has been obtained by overwintering nuts in plastic bags in a refrigerator at 2 to 3 C. A small amount of slightly moist sphagnum or peat moss in the container will ensure that desiccation of the nuts does not occur.

Some nuts may begin to germinate in March. If satisfactory facilities for indoor growth are available, the germinating nuts may be planted in sandy soil in 1 or 2 litre milk cartons. Otherwise, germinating nuts may be retained in winter storage until it is safe to plant them outside in April or May.

A UNIQUE THRUST TOWARD RESTORATION OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) in co-operation with the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), and in partnership with a number of farm organization has initiated a plan for restoration of the American chestnut in Ontario. This is a co-operative approach to the recovery of a threatened hardwood species. The project has received a substantial amount of government funding.

An informative, coloured brochure has been published. The literature explains the purpose of the project, how it is to be set in motion and the follow-up plans. Undoubtedly, the brochure will receive wide circulation and publicity in the next few months.

CCC has given technical advise and has been invited to provide assistance on scientific matters that might influence the success of the project.

CHESTNUT MUSEUM

A small log building located at the nursery of the Grand Valley Conservation Authority, four or five km west of Burford has attracted considerable interest in recent years. Bruce Graham, superintendent of the nursery, was instrumental in establishing it and stocking it with chestnut artefacts. The door and floor are made of reclaimed chestnut.

If touring the area you are invited to stop in to take a look around.

MEMBERSHIP DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Annual membership in the CCC is \$10.00. Many members contribute more than this amount and for that the council is most grateful. As the CCC expands its activities with the evaluation of hypovirulence and blight resistant progeny, addition sources of revenue will be sought. Help the organization by being a good publicity person. Your little bit may mean a lot someday.

We hope to see you at the Annual Meeting. A desk for membership renewal will be found near the registration desk.

The Canadian Chestnut Council

Membership: Regular \$ 10.00 _____, Contributing \$25.00+ _____.

Make the cheque payable to:
Canadian Chestnut Council, 1332 Suncrest Road, Kingsville, Ontario N9Y 3H3

Name _____

Do you know of unrecorded chestnut trees? _____. If yes, please give location, size and condition.

Address _____

Telephone _____

Other comments and suggestions _____