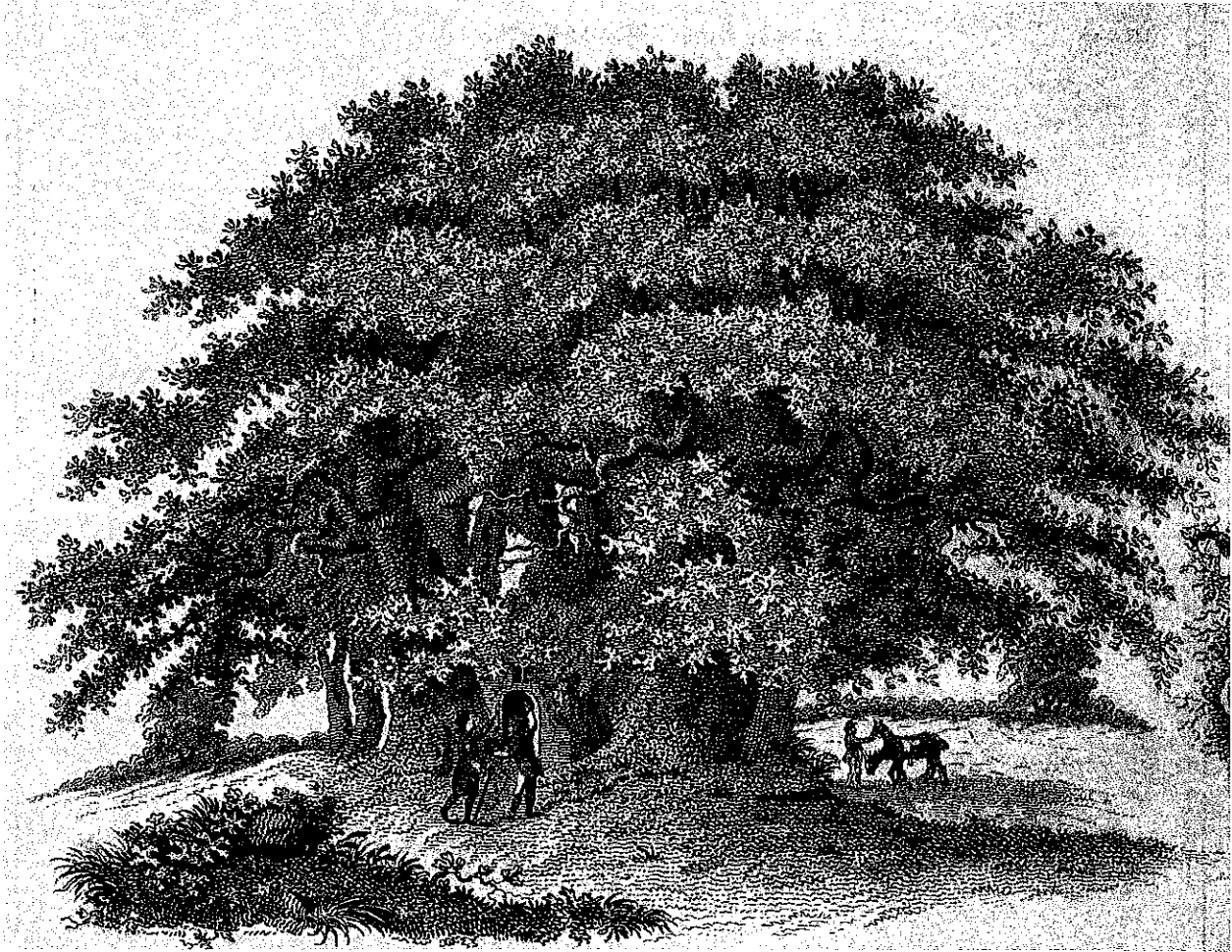


LOVELY AS A TREE

A Guide to Uncommon Trees in the Brandon Village Park



TREES
By Joyce Kilmer

**I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.**

**A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;**

**A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;**

**A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;**

**Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.**

**Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.**

The trees described in this booklet are tagged with name markers and can be found in the northeast section of the Brandon Village Park, both in the area north of the volleyball courts and in the area to the north, east and south of the Veterans' Memorial.

"To really feel a forest canopy one must use different senses, and often the most useful one is the sense of imagination." — Joan Maloof

"The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."
— Nelson Henderson

"Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky." — Kahlil Gibran

With special thanks to Maynard Respalje, a Brandon native, who suggested the idea for this project.

American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*): The most populous tree in the eastern third of the U.S. in the latter half of the 19th century, the American chestnut was wiped out in its original territory by 1950, due to a disease introduced by an imported Asian chestnut. Immortalized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Village Blacksmith" and in the carol "The Christmas Song," only isolated stands of true American chestnuts survive today, brought westward by pioneers before the onset of the disease, and isolated from infection. During its heyday in the late 1800s, the nuts were shipped by the train carload into major eastern seaboard cities during the end-of-the-year holiday season.

American chestnut was economically valuable as a food source for people, livestock and wildlife. Its wood was prized for its strength, straight grain, ease of splitting and sawing, and resistance to decay.

Unlike many other nut-bearing trees, the American chestnut begins to produce nuts within 5-10 years, as compared to, for example, hickories, which may take 25-30 years to begin bearing nuts. It also reliably produces ample nut yields each year, in contrast to other nut trees, such as oaks and hickories, which generally produce well only every other year. The nuts develop inside a very spiny "burr" that normally contains three nuts. Handling the burrs requires substantial protective gloves. The nuts are prepared for roasting by cutting a small "x" through the shell on one side of the nut. As the nuts roast, the "x" prevents the nuts from exploding as the points of the cut curl back and also simplifies removal of the shell.

There are no other known American chestnut trees growing within the Village of Brandon. However, there is at least one other chestnut (tentatively identified as the sweet, or Spanish, chestnut, *Castanea sativa*) growing within the Village of Brandon. It does not produce mature nuts because trees of the *Castanea* family are not self-pollinating, and therefore depend on another nearby (within 100 feet) *Castanea* tree to cross-pollinate them.

American Elm (*Ulmus Americana*): With their arching branches, American elms were the shade tree of choice for town squares and city streets, and they have figured into many historic American events. Elms can live for hundreds of years, so it has been traumatic for Americans to lose trees that were essentially historical markers. Around 1930, a fungus was imported to North America on logs shipped from Europe. This so-called Dutch Elm disease spread quickly, killing off nearly all the majestic old elms that graced nearly every town. However, the species survives because even young trees can produce viable seed. However, as new trees grow, they eventually succumb to the disease and die before they get very big. Disease-resistant strains are being developed, and individual trees can be treated with fungicide injections every three years.

In its natural state, the American elm is a solitary tree, which almost never grows in pure stands. With the coming of European settlement of the American continent, elms were planted in great numbers in close proximity, thus leaving the species susceptible to a pandemic of some kind sweeping through the man-made elm forest. The ubiquity of the elm was its downfall; the tree was loved to death.

There is at least one tentatively identified young American elm growing within the Village of Brandon.

American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*): Also known as planetree, buttonball tree or buttonwood, the American sycamore is distinctive for several reasons: a) Its leaves are the largest single-bladed leaf native to the American forest, being four to ten inches long and equally broad; b) The female blooms develop into closely packed, ball-like heads attached to a long, slender, thread-like stem. By October these develop into a dense ball or compound fruit dangling from a long slender stem, which, after hanging through the winter, break up into many hairy, one-seeded nutlets. These seed balls give rise to the common name buttonwood or buttonball; and, c) Young or moderately old sycamores are easily recognized by the bark, in which large, thin plates peel off the trunk, exposing conspicuous areas of whitish, yellowish or greenish inner bark. This is probably caused by the inability of the bark to stretch as the limbs and trunk expand.

Although sycamore fruits abundantly every year, the vitality is low and the seeds are slow to germinate. The seeds require exceedingly moist surroundings in which to grow. However, sycamore sprouts readily from the stump and reproduces itself by this means, as well as from seeds.

Sycamores can grow to massive proportions. In 1744, a Shenandoah Valley settler named Joseph Hampton and two sons lived for most of the year in a hollow sycamore in what is now Clarke County, Virginia. In 1770, at Point Pleasant, Virginia, (now in West Virginia) near the junction of the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers, George Washington recorded in his journal a sycamore measuring 13.67 m (44 ft 10 in) in circumference at 91 cm (3 ft) from the ground.

There are no other known American sycamore trees growing within the Village of Brandon.

Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*): Butternut, also known as white walnut, is a slow-growing species, and rarely lives longer than 40 years. Like other members of the *Juglans* family, butternut's leaf-out in spring is tied to photoperiod rather than air temperature and occurs when daylight length reaches 14 hours. This leaf-out stage can vary by up to a month in the northern and southernmost extents of its range. Leaf drop in fall is early and is initiated when daylight drops to 11 hours. Butternut favors a cooler climate than black walnut and its range does not extend into the Deep South. Its northern range extends into Wisconsin and Minnesota, where the growing season is too short for black walnut.

The nut is oblong-ovoid, enclosed in a green husk. The flavor of the nut is mild and buttery; hence its popular name. Butternut wood is light and highly rot-resistant, but not as hard as black walnut. It is often used to make furniture and for woodcarving. In the past, Wisconsin has been a leading producer of butternut lumber.

Butternut decline, or butternut canker, is the most serious disease of this tree, and has been spreading rapidly in Wisconsin in recent decades. Free-standing trees seem to resist the disease better than those growing in dense stands or forests. In some areas, 90% of butternut trees have been killed.

Native Americans processed the butternuts into a butter-like oil used for various purposes, including as an ointment. The butternut bark and nut rinds were once used to dye cloth to colors between light yellow and dark brown. Although normally a short-lived tree, a butternut planted by settler George Bush (1845) in Tumwater, Washington (brought from

Missouri) was still alive in 2019. Crushed butternut fruits can be used to poison fish, though the practice is generally illegal. In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men* (1871) the two youngest boys, Rob and Teddy, have an amusing running battle with the squirrels over collecting the butternuts:

There are at least four other butternut trees growing in the Village of Brandon, outside of the village park.

Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa* [northern catalpa]): This tree is also known as "catawba," and as "bean tree," referring to its bean-like seed pod, which may grow up to 20 inches in length. The large, heart-shaped leaves resemble the ears of an elephant. Large showy, white bell-shaped flowers with yellow strips and purple spots on the inner side of the petals appear in mid to late June. The blooms are quite fragrant and attract bees, butterflies and caterpillars. Catalpas are fast growers and may grow to a height of 20 feet within ten years. Most trees begin flowering after about three years, and develop seed pods after five years. Heartwood of catalpa was used in the manufacture of railroad ties in the past. Today, catalpa is used for the manufacture of fence posts, beams, furniture and millwork.

This tree is the sole source of food for the catalpa sphinx moth, and the caterpillars may defoliate entire trees. Because the caterpillars are an excellent live bait for fishing, some dedicated anglers plant catalpa mini-orchards for their own private source of "catawba-worms," particularly in the southern states.

The one mature catalpa tree growing within the Village of Brandon, outside of the village park, was removed in 2024.

Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*): Although the horse chestnut is in the same genus as the Ohio buckeye, it is not native to North America; rather, it is native to a small area of Balkan mixed forests in South East Europe. Its leaves are larger and coarser than the buckeye leaf, with seven leaflets on mature leaves, as opposed to the five on buckeye leaves. Horse chestnut leaflets are also larger and more rounded at the tip than the smaller, more pointed buckeye leaflets. Likewise, the horse chestnut nuts are larger (and less shiny) than buckeye nuts.

Horse chestnut trees have spring-flowering white-pinkish flowers that grow in upright triangular panicles (clusters) at the ends of branches. Each individual flower has four or five fused white petals with a distinctive pink or orange base. When in bloom during late spring or early summer, the upward-growing flowering horse chestnut clusters look like candles on the tree. After they fade, the flowers develop into the horse chestnut fruit, a spiny hull enclosing one, and occasionally two, nuts, also known as conkers. The fruit is similar to the buckeye fruit, but with tougher spikes on the hull. Like the buckeye, horse chestnuts are toxic to humans, dogs and horses when eaten in large quantities.

In Germany, horse chestnuts are commonly planted in beer gardens, particularly in Bavaria. Prior to the advent of mechanical refrigeration, brewers would dig cellars for lagering (secondary aging of beer at cold temperatures hovering above freezing). To further protect the cellars from the summer heat, they would plant chestnut trees, which have spreading, dense

canopies but shallow roots which would not intrude on the caverns. The practice of serving beer at these sites evolved into the modern beer garden.

Japanese Walnut (*Juglans ailantifolia*): The Japanese walnut is closely related to the native American butternut; however, it is resistant to the canker which has caused widespread decline among the butternut population. Unlike the black walnut and the Persian walnut, the nutmeat of the Japanese walnut has no bitter aftertaste. Due to its disease resistance and flavorful taste, it has often been planted as a replacement for butternuts in America. The two species of walnut hybridize readily, resulting in a variety known as the "butnut." This cultivar is distinguished by its heart-shaped nutmeat; hence, the nickname "heartnut." The shell of the heartnut is very hard and, when crushed, yields sharp fragments, which have in the past been used as a material for snow tires (studless tires). Unlike the butternut, the Japanese walnut is round, not oval, and features a nipple-like protrusion at each end of the nut hull.

In Brandon, there is at least one mature Japanese walnut producing a bountiful yearly crop of nuts. It is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Washington and Prairie Streets. Coincidentally, this tree is right across the street from two mature butternut trees growing in the serviceway on the south side of Washington Street.

Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*): The ginkgo is the oldest cultivated nut tree. It is unique among trees, not being closely related to any living family or group in the whole vegetable kingdom and is the sole survivor of a family, rich in species, which was distributed over the temperate regions of both the northern and southern hemispheres when the dinosaurs roamed the earth. It seems probable that glaciers caused its extinction in North America, Europe and western Siberia, but in the milder climate of the Orient, which the glaciers did not reach, it survived.

The ginkgo was introduced into Europe in 1730 and into England in 1754, from whence, thirty years later, it was brought to the United States. Its fan-shaped leaves, found in no other flowering plant, have no midrib but numerous branching parallel veins. The orange-yellow plum-like fruit borne on the female trees consists of a thin, outer fleshy layer which covers a pointed, oval nut with a smooth white shell enclosing a soft kernel. Upon or soon after falling to the ground, the fleshy covering bursts and emits an offensive odor. Because of this, male trees are preferred for ornamental planting. However, once cleaned of the pulp, the nuts are pure white, and historically were sold as food in China and Japan, and eaten at banquets, weddings and social gatherings.

The ginkgo tree is well adapted to survive for centuries and overcome hardships. Six ginkgo trees less than two miles from the 1945 atomic bomb explosion at Hiroshima were among the few organisms to survive that blast. The six trees are still alive.

There are at least two other ginkgo trees growing within the Village of Brandon outside of the village park.

North American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*): Wisconsin is at the western edge of the native range of the North American beech tree, which is found in the eastern United States. It is very shade tolerant, but thrives best in full sun. Beech buds are distinctive – long and slender, resembling small cigars. A very thirsty tree, the beech has a dense shallow root system, from which new trees may sprout, in addition to normal seed dispersion as a means of reproduction.

The American beech does not produce significant quantities of nuts until about 40 years of age. The nuts are edible for wildlife and humans, either raw or roasted. They have provided food for numerous species of animals, including the now-extinct passenger pigeon. The clearing of beech and oak forests is pointed to as one of the major factors that may have contributed to the bird's extinction.

The American beech tree bark is smooth and uniform, making it an attraction for people to carve names, dates and decorative designs on its surface. There was a beech tree on the old stage road between Blountville and Jonesborough, Tennessee that had an inscription carved into the trunk that read "D. Boone Cilled A Bar On Tree In Year 1760." The tree fell in 1916 and had a girth of 28-1/2 feet. The Forest Service estimated the tree's age to be 365 years, making it fully two centuries old before Daniel Boone inscribed on it.

Although beech wood is difficult to split, it is an important tree in forestry. One of its most notable uses is in making bentwood furniture, since the wood bends easily when steamed. It also makes high-quality, long-burning firewood.

There are no other known North American beeches growing in the Village of Brandon.

Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*): Native to the Midwestern and lower Great Plains regions of the United States, the Ohio Buckeye is the state tree of Ohio. The compound leaves consist of five long and broad leaflets. The light yellow-green flowers produce a round fruit with a knobby, leathery husk that usually contains a single brown nut with a whitish basal scar. The nuts contain tannic acid, which makes them poisonous to humans and cattle; however, squirrels consume them readily with no apparent ill effects. It is reported that native Americans would boil the nuts to extract the tannin, which made the nuts consumable with no ill effects. The tannic acid was then used to make leather. Once dried, the nuts are often strung into decorative necklaces. The ground-up nuts have also been used to poison fish in streams.

Leaves of the buckeye are quite prone to scorching, discoloration and foliar diseases by mid-summer, so the foliage canopy may have a brown, fall-like appearance by mid-summer and become defoliated by late summer. The Ohio buckeye is primarily an understory tree, but in the open it may reach heights of 60 ft. tall and 30 ft. wide. In the understory setting, the tree is normally only half that size. The Kentucky and National champion tree, located in Casey County, is nearly 150 ft. tall.

The wood of Ohio buckeye is light, weak and soft. It has been used for artificial limbs because it does not split easily. Buckeye logs were once hollowed out and made into troughs to catch maple sap. Buckeye logs were also hollowed out to make cradles in pioneer days, and settlers made hats from buckeye shavings.

The term "buckeye" allegedly comes from the nut's resemblance to a deer's eye. Buckeyes (the nuts) are a recurring theme in Bill Watterson's comic, Calvin and Hobbes, often as one of Calvin's tools of torment.

There is at least one other Ohio buckeye growing in the Village of Brandon. Several years ago a violent storm took down two other mature buckeyes within the Village, both of which produced prolific nut crops.

Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*): Hickory nuts have been a staple of the native American diet for thousands of years. During colonial times, a quart of hickory milk (known by its native American name "pawcohiccora") could be traded for 15 pounds of bacon. Hickory wood, besides being a premium heat source, was also preferred for making wagon wheels, rifle ramrods, tool handles, and barrel hoops. The green husks of the hickory nut are reported to be temporarily toxic to some fish, and there are stories of native Americans throwing quantities of the husks into still, shallow backwaters to stun the fish for easy taking.

While hickory is a long-lived tree, it is slow to bear nuts, usually taking 25-30 years to begin producing. The early years of the tree are concentrated on developing the deep taproot characteristic of many nut trees. During the Civil War, the nation's supply of hickory was so depleted by the demand for hickory for gunstocks and ramrods, as well as tool handles and supply wagon parts, that the hickory nut and wood market did not recover until the beginning of the 20th century.

Hickory trees produce a bountiful crop of nuts every other year, with few or no nuts produced in the "off" years. Curiously, nearly all of the hickory trees in a given area seem to synchronize their "on" and "off" years once they begin bearing nuts.

There are two varieties of hickory trees native to Wisconsin – the shagbark hickory and the bitternut hickory (which is inedible due to the nut's bitter taste). Shagbark compound leaves have five (and rarely seven) leaflets. The thick outer husk of the nut splits into four sections when ripe and reveals a single, white, thin-shelled (but very hard) nut whose sweet kernel is edible. The shell is so hard that it can be ground up and used as a commercial abrasive.

There are at least eight other shagbark hickories growing within the Village of Brandon, four of which are in the village park.