The Boscawen Historical Society
Welcomes American Chestnut Trees – More than a Century After Fungal Devastation

Nearly 300 years ago when European Settlers travelled up the Merrimack River to what became Contoocook Plantation, (now Boscawen) they arrived to huge mixed deciduous hardwood forests, with American Chestnuts as one of the most dominant local species along the Appalachian Mountains in all of eastern North America.

From time immemorial these trees provided food and shelter for wildlife including deer, turkeys, and black bears – and food for humans. These majestic trees became a major contributor to our developing town. Fine grained, strong wood used for most hardwood purposes, building furniture, building and framing houses, musical instruments, nuts for eating, split rail fences, shade, as well as tanning leather for our developing leather industries; these trees became a mainstay of the town's economy, until devastation arrived.

In the 1870s a fungal disease accidentally arrived from Japan. In the next 50 and more years it is estimated that between three and four BILLION American Chestnut Trees were lost to this fungus in eastern North America. Even though original trees and chestnuts could sprout, they would never reach reproductive age because of the disease. In effect, this species became reproductively extinct.

Recent scientific and genetic research, including at the State University of New York and University of New Hampshire, developed what is hoped to be a strain of American Chestnuts that so far has proven to be disease resistant to this fungus. Trials are on-going throughout New Hampshire, including in our Weir Road Town Forest and at the NH Audubon Society on Silk Farm Road in Concord.

Jeff and Judi Abbe, intrepid Boscawen residents and volunteers, have devoted attention to nurturing this nearly extinct, native species and successfully propagated more than half a dozen of these precious seedlings. On July 15, 2025, Jeff planted two of these saplings in the former schoolyard at the Boscawen Historical Society in hopes of preservation of the species for future town residents.

Thank you very much, Jeff and Judi Abbe for not only this re-introduction of a species initiative, but also for your ongoing preservation and involvement with the Weir Road Town Forest, the Village Town Forest, and the Boscawen Community Garden. Let's hope some of the young people in our town will be able to play "Conkers" with chestnuts from these trees, sometime in their lifetime, as children did two hundred and more years ago.

Thank you, Jeff & Judi,

Elaine Clow, President
Boscawen Historical Society