



## The American Chestnut Collection – Featuring Maine’s Rarest Tree

The American Chestnut Collection was originally established in 1998 through a partnership with the American Chestnut Foundation and a grant from the Maine Forest Service.

The chestnut had been a dominant tree in the forests of the eastern part of North America until the beginning of the last century. The tree provided food for wildlife and people harvested the nutritious nuts in fall in great quantities. It was the chestnut that was roasted in early America and eaten during Christmas. Wood from the tree is rot resistant and was used in almost every conceivable building application - from railroad ties and fences to building frames and fine furniture. In an ecological disaster that began in 1905, a fungus inadvertently introduced from Asia wiped out the trees across their US range, from Georgia to Maine. By 1950, nearly every tree had succumbed.

The purpose of this collection is two-fold. First, this native species, now extremely rare due to an imported fungus, is one of the most beautiful tree species found in Maine. This collection provides visitors an opportunity to experience through the seasons the outstanding visual cycles this species presents. The early July flowering is the most spectacular display of any tree found in Maine. Seed design and abundance ranks as the most remarkable of any native Maine species. Leaf size, appearance and symmetry rival all others and its fall bronze and yellow colors add beauty to any foliage presentation.



*Tristan Evans Fargione hand pollinates chestnut flowers at the arboretum.*

1983, the Foundation conducts breeding at its research farms in Virginia, and coordinates satellite breeding programs in 16 state chapters to ensure genetic diversity and local adaptability. The Viles Arboretum collection represents one of these satellite efforts. Our collection is the largest assemblage of Maine sourced trees and it plays an essential role in the overall breeding effort to develop and propagate a blight-resistant variety of chestnut. Eric Evans, Breeding Coordinator and Vice President of the Maine Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation states, “The collection of native-Maine American chestnut trees at the Viles Arboretum is our best opportunity to preserve the genes of the remnants of the original chestnut populations in Maine. This genetic diversity is necessary to ensure the success of TACF’s breeding program and will give the new restoration chestnut populations their best chance to adapt and evolve in Maine’s forests in the coming decades and centuries.”

Each year, the Arboretum celebrates this species with an early July event. Watch our calendar for announcement of the date. We try to coincide with the flowering which is without doubt the most amazing flowering of any tree species found in Maine. It is an experience you will never forget and it challenges every sense you have. The photographs

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*Seed set - American Chestnut, 2011*

Second, this collection plays a scientific, research and conservation role in keeping with the American Chestnut Foundation’s goal of restoring this species to its native range within the woodlands of the eastern United States. Through a scientific research and breeding program developed by its founders in



*American Chestnut in flower*

## LOOKING BACK.....LOOKING FORWARD

— Mark DesMeules, Executive Director

Reflecting on where we have been and where we are headed is always a worthwhile exercise and in this case, it demonstrates just how many exciting and forward looking projects we have accomplished or have in the works.

All of the following projects contribute to building important and needed institutional components of the Viles Arboretum. They greatly enhance the visitor experience to the Arboretum and its botanical collections and trails. They provide a positive experience for existing and prospective members, and build overall regional support for the Arboretum.

- **Newsletter** — We redesigned the Arboretum newsletter to be more engaging, easier to read, informative and chock full of colorful pictures. It also incorporates a pull-out calendar of events. The newsletter not only communicates a positive message to our existing members but it serves as a very effective way to share with foundations, donors, prospective members, etc. the width and breadth of all we do in support of the Viles Arboretum mission.

- **Trail signs** — Nearly 100 new trail signs have been installed. These signs guide visitors through our nearly six miles of trails and significantly heighten the visitor experience. This effort is directly connected to our interpretive sign project and our “adventure” trail map both mentioned below.

- **Membership services** — We now have comprehensive and up-to-date membership services. With a Colby College grant, we purchased a state-of-the-art membership card machine and membership software which tracks our members and produces large scale mailings. We also have window decals and Arboretum note cards which are issued to new members.

- **Trail Map** - Through a small grant, we have contracted with a local artist to create not only a beautiful full color map of the Viles Arboretum but one which draws the visitor in to explore the many collections and other interesting natural and historic features which are part of our 224 acres. The completed map project will be unveiled in 2012.

- **Interpretive Signs for Botanical Collections** — This is a project which was begun nearly one year ago. The goal here



is to provide handsome and informative information about each of our twenty collections with individual and permanent interpretive signs. Each will include the history behind the collection, the purpose of the collection and engaging information about its natural history. Signs will be installed in 2012.

- **Botanical Label Embosser** — Through a grant from the Cricket Foundation, we will be purchasing a botanical label machine like that used at arboretums such as the Arnold and Holden Arboretum. One of the major reasons visitors come to an arboretum is to learn about trees, shrubs and flowers they might like to establish in their own gardens or to test their botanical knowledge. Having easy to read and consistent labels throughout the Arboretum is essential.

- **Computer Technology** — Thanks to a Norcross Foundation technology grant, we are in the process of networking our Viles Arboretum computers and purchasing a server. This is an important step since networking allows various files to be shared and worked on as a team and the server automatically backs up our financials and membership data so that a system failure does not mean losing essential documents and information. In addition we will be purchasing a state-of-the-art fax/copier/scanner/printer which will allow us to cost-effectively produce brochures, posters and other public outreach products in house.

- **Arboretum Gift Shop** — Visitors from around Maine and the country always enjoy picking up unique gifts and memorabilia for themselves, friends, and family. Arboretum “special” gifts also help to spread our visibility. We officially opened the gift shop in 2011 with bird houses and hiking staffs

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AT VILES

by Dean Corner, President

The Viles Arboretum, like most nonprofits, has to juggle the day-to-day expenses necessary to keep the operation afloat with the long-term financial stability that will guarantee its existence in the future. The Arboretum Board and Executive Director have been identifying areas where we can reduce or eliminate costs to keep our budget lean. We now head into 2012 with a good understanding of what directions we’d like to take and which programs we want to offer. We know exactly what these will cost to accomplish.

Maintaining over 200 acres of green space with more than 20 plant collections is not inexpensive. It requires staff with specialized training and skills. Offering educational programs and events which further our mission takes staff and the appropriate equipment and tools.

The Arboretum does not receive any state or local funds. We rely solely on the generosity of members and friends like you to maintain the Arboretum. The Viles Arboretum will be making great strides to increase the funding needed to support all the activities mentioned above. Increasing the membership will be the first goal. New members and their dues are the foundation of a successful organization. New individual and business memberships will also bring new gifts for our annual appeal campaign.

We think that 2012 will be a very exciting year at the Arboretum and we look forward to your continued support along with the dozens of new members we will be inviting to Viles in the years to come.

made by Bernie Slofer, art work and note cards designed by Mary Oatway, bowls by Cam Weaver, botanical book marks and wildlife photos by David and Linda Gomeau and dozens more unique and quality gifts for purchase.

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## WITCH HAZEL

– Mary Oatway

It's mid winter! Most of our wildflowers and counterparts at the Arboretum have frozen or gone into dormancy. But witch hazel *hamamelis virginiana*, a native shrub of the woodland, still bears evidence of its November flowering. As our latest flowering plant, the careful observer can still find its golden ribbon-like petaled flowers showing through the bare branches like bright spots of sunlight on a grey day.

This autumn-flowering shrub or small tree thrives in moist woodland soil under the canopy of taller trees. Its multiple trunks rising from the same root spread their horizontal branches 10 – 12 feet. Lop-sided olive green leaves, uneven at the base, with straight, conspicuous veins, are edged with irregular teeth. As they turn to golden yellow in autumn, little round flower buds nestle in the axils. After the leaves have fallen in November, the feathery tufts show that each separate flower has four narrow curled and twisted yellow ribbon-like petals alternating with four fertile stamens. Tucked in the same axil, there may be two or three little brown

urn-shaped capsules that have been slowly ripening from the last year's flowers. In their own time they scatter their four hard, brown, bullet-shaped polished seeds to various distances up to 25 feet! They are distributed with great force and audible sound.

With their knowledge of a cousin of this species in Europe, early settlers soon found the liquid infused from the leaves and bark had a healing and soothing effect on cuts and bruises. A

commercial extraction is still used to soothe tender skin and aching muscles.

Twigs and bark of this shrub furnish food for deer and rabbits; seeds are food for squirrels, partridges, and quail.

Elizabeth O. Sargent sums it up like this,

“Last year's seed pods keep company with this year's flowers and at maturity bombard the world with shining pellets.

Its juices make a soothing extract for the skin,

Its limber branches good divining rods.”



## FARMERS MARKET PLANNING UNDERWAY, SEEKING ADDITIONAL VENDORS

The Arboretum Farmers Market is seeking to add farmers and other local food-related producers to our market. By increasing the diversity of products offered, we will enhance the sales for everyone involved by creating a market experience where one can make several purchases. A successful Viles Farmers Market will succeed in providing a market for quality and healthy food that is locally grown.



*The 2012 farmers' market will be bigger and better.*

### Looking Back...

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• **Education Education Education** – A Savage Foundation grant has enabled the purchase of a projection microscope, wildlife cameras and several other educational tools which benefit our educational program offerings popular with schools and students from all over Maine.

• **Enhanced Events Schedule** – During the past year, we have tested the waters with a variety of public outreach programs and events. Events and program planning require us to be nimble and willing to drop things that do not work and focus on things that work. Some we have conducted and some planned for this year include: Christmas at Viles, Halloween at Viles, Maple Sugar Sunday, Dinner in the Forest, A 5K Cross Country run, Farmer's Market, Easter Egg Hunt, and the Community Supported Agriculture Fair.

• **Visitors Center** – We have redesigned our visitors center to include several new educational exhibits, all part of our on-going plan to make the center an exciting and educational starting point for all visitors. More interesting exhibits are arriving all the time.



*Elsie Viles (seated) gathered with friends, staff and board members to present Bernie Slofer with a black walnut bowl (made by Cameron Weaver) in thanks for his outstanding volunteer service.*

# We Bid Farewell to Steve Oliveri – Former Executive Director and Recent Operations Manager

Steve Oliveri ended his 14 year tenure with Viles Arboretum this past fall. We asked Steve to submit an article capturing some of his history here. We wish him well in his future endeavors. These are his words.

*“Whoever invented the word ‘grace’ must have seen the wing-folding of the plover.”*

*- Aldo Leopold*

That was how one of the finest observers of nature described the delicate landing ritual of the upland sandpiper. In Leopold’s day, it was called the upland plover and it was re-establishing its presence in the prairie grasslands of his beloved “Sand County” in Wisconsin. His essay, “Back From the Argentine” describes his delight in the birds and their return from the brink of extirpation in that part of the country.

It was this same bird that first drew me to what would one day become the Viles Arboretum. It was 1979. I was a fledgling biologist working as a seasonal

employee for the Maine Department of Conservation. I had completed my degree in Wildlife Management at the University of Maine only a few years earlier and the Arboretum had not yet hatched from what had been the AMHI farm.

In the spring of 1981 I finally landed a “real” job with the Maine Forest Service and began what would become a thirty-year association with the Viles Arboretum. The transition from grassland to arboretum was well underway. There were still sandpipers to be found, but they were much scarcer than the other grassland birds; bobolinks, meadowlarks, redwings, and savannah sparrows.

I led field trips, planted a handful of trees, prepared a wildlife management

plan, erected the first bluebird boxes, and served on the Advisory Board. In 1988 I moved from the Maine Forest service to the Bureau of Public Lands.

In 1997 I left my job at Public Lands to become the arboretum’s director. It was a labor of love and a tremendously rewarding experience. I could fill an entire newsletter with the names of people who helped me during my tenure. Their dedication to the Arboretum and kindness to me went far beyond what I could have ever hoped for. To all of them, I extend very sincere thanks and an apology that I could not acknowledge them individually in this brief essay.

*By 1983, the last upland sandpiper had disappeared as a breeding bird from the Arboretum. The habitat had changed and the farming practices that had held them here were history. That same year the eastern bluebird returned, for the first time in decades, to nest in one of our boxes. The Arboretum today is undoubtedly one of the best places in all of Maine to see bluebirds, but you will have to venture elsewhere to watch the upland sandpiper fold its wings. The one inevitable fact of nature, of life itself, is change.*



*Colby students come to the rescue of our prized Magnolia, blown over by Irene winds.*



## American Chestnut

*continued from page 1*



*2011 flowering of American Chestnuts*

accompanying this article give you just a sampling of what is in store! Hope you will join us.

**\*The American Chestnut Foundation** (TACF) is a nonprofit [American](http://www.acf.org/) organization dedicated to breeding a blight-resistant American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) tree and the reintroduction of this tree to the forests of the Eastern United States. <http://www.acf.org/>.

## NEW TRAIL SIGNS AT VILES ARBORETUM

Thanks to a generous grant from Project Canopy and the Maine Forest Service and the volunteer efforts of Board member Bernie Slofer, visitors to the Arboretum will have a much easier time exploring our many points of interest.

Last year, our Operations Committee took a comprehensive look at our public access facilities and identified several significant changes aimed at making the visitor experience fun, easy and informative. The first major change occurred last year with the restoration of our wetland boardwalk. As the second longest boardwalk in Maine designed for bird watching and nature viewing, it is one of the most popular destinations here at the Arboretum where everything from herons, rails, waterfowl, amphibians, turtles, and muskrats can be viewed and photographed up close.

Another one of the significant components of our trail revamp included simplifying the system with an outer loop, an inner loop and connecting trails between the two. In time, our blazing colors will be reduced to three colors identifying the three trail categories.

The trail signs that have just been installed are a key step of the overall trail initiative and we are extremely fortunate to have the financial support of Project Canopy and the exceptional volunteer involvement of Bernie Slofer who made these public access plans a reality. Jan Santere, Project Canopy Coordinator commented, "The Maine Forest Service is happy to support the trail sign development for the Viles Arboretum. The Arboretum's

gardens and tree collections provide visitors with an excellent educational resource, and the trail signs will greatly enhance that experience."

All are invited to walk our trails any time. There is no admission fee although we always encourage visitors to consider becoming members since it is membership that financially supports us as a private non-profit organization. Members also gets involved in our many projects, programs, events and educational offerings throughout the year.

We invite you to visit the Arboretum and to view our many collections and to see first-hand the transformation that is taking place in virtually every corner of this wonderful resource. Remember, there is always something new to see or experience and nature is always playing on a trail at the Arboretum.



*Bernie Slofer displays new trail signs*



*Field School for Naturalists participants learning about Aquatic Ecosystems*

## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Business sponsors and other organizations are a tremendous help to the work we do. We list them here so that you will patronize their businesses, support their organizations and mention that their support of the Arboretum is appreciated.

Maineline Wild Seeds  
of Whiting, Maine

Home Depot of Augusta

LaPointe Lumber

Longfellows

Subway – Bangor Street &  
Western Ave.

Rebecca's Place – Augusta

Goggins IGA

Isamax Snacks

Colortyme

Wreaths of Maine

Lowes of Augusta

Tom Doak's Christmas Tree Farm

Kennebec Performing Arts

Old Fort Western

Dept. of Conservation

## GOLF CART TOURS BY APPOINTMENT

Please call ahead.

## MEMBERSHIP IS THE ARBORETUM'S FUTURE

The Arboretum is focusing on membership and you can help. Introduce a friend or your family to the Arboretum, to our lands, trails, collections, programs, events, and the fun of learning about trees and everything that lives in, on, under and around them.

## Super Bowl Sunday Table Tour Enjoyed by Many

The 8<sup>th</sup> annual Table Tour took place on Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup> and the weather couldn't have been better. With bright sun, no wind, groomed trails and food.....lots of delicious food, everyone had a fun and exercise filled day.

"This is one of our biggest fund raising events and it couldn't be a success without the host of volunteers, financial sponsors, and numerous area restaurants and businesses. From start to finish, I've never seen as many smiles and contented eaters as on Sunday", said Mark DesMeules, the Arboretum's Executive Director.

Thanks goes to the following restaurants and businesses for providing food - **Bagel Maine, China Dine-ah, Panera Bread, Rebecca's, Applebee's of Augusta, Ruby Tuesday of Augusta, Canton Express, Longhorn Steakhouse, Lisa's, KFC of Augusta, China King, Slates, Subway of Gardiner, Damon's, Red Robin of Augusta, Hattie's Chowder House, Sam's of Augusta, Liberal Cup, Red Barn, Maple Hill Farm, Wings Hill Inn, Tim Horton's of Bangor Street, Cakes by Sharon Brunette, Fuller's Market, Emery's Meat Market, and Ballard's Meats and Seafood.** We also extend a sincere thanks to Ameriprise Financial - Office of Joel Davis and Hannaford Supermarkets and the Abnaki Ski and Outing Club for their generous financial support of this event.



*A large crowd of hungry hikers, skiers and snow shoers line up for the best Super Bowl Sunday Table Tour food.*

All our volunteers for Table Tour are many and all will be invited to the traditional Arboretum barbeque for all volunteers who donate gifts of time and energy in support of what we do. A couple of special thank-you's are in order for a few folks who went far beyond the call of duty. Bernie Slofer put in hundreds of hours building our Table Tour tables, signs, a sled for hauling equipment with our snow mobile, wind

breaks for stoves, and bagged kindling for starting our warming fires at each station. David Smith and Maggie Wood spent the better part of Saturday helping prepare food and then getting up bright and early Sunday morning to drive all over Augusta to pick up donated food before taking their trail station to serve food for the rest of the day. Cathy Burnham for travelling all around Augusta on Saturday afternoon with her husband to pick up food donations. Dave, Ian and Linda Simard for putting on the most amazing spread of food at their station along the trail and a special note to Dave and Ian for helping all week long hauling out signs, grills, firewood, etc. to our trail side sites.

Remember that events like this are not only fun but help to diversify the sources of income which support your arboretum. Everyone's participation makes them work and makes these events enjoyable for all.



*Linda, Ian and Dave Simard put on a fabulous spread of food for Table Tour 2012.*

### CONFERENCES, WEDDINGS, RECEPTIONS

The Arboretum grounds and buildings are available for nominal fees. Our newly renovated conference room seats 100 and has a full kitchen and wireless. Other rooms are also available. Call anytime for details or visit our web page.

*Leave A  
Lasting Legacy*

Name the Arboretum in your will or help us build our endowment. To find out how, call 207 626-7989.



*Cirrus cloud formations over the Arboretum*



*Santa listens*



*History at Viles*

### WISH LIST

- Taxidermy Mounts
- Minnow Traps
- Restaurant Style Warming Trays (sterno type)
- Wooden beams/railroad ties for constructing raised beds
- A clean 55 gallon drum
- Plant pots of all sizes - in good condition
- Roto Tiller



*Valerie Leung, volunteer working on designing a nursery for the Arboretum*



*Kents Hill School annual volunteer outing with Arboretum volunteer Philippa Solomon standing on left.*



## Viles Arboretum

### OUR MISSION

To promote the knowledge, appreciation and conservation of Maine's trees and plants, including everything that lives in, on, under, and around them.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Dean Corner, *President*
- David Auclair, *Vice President*
- Jerry Nault, *Treasurer*
- Bernie Slofer, *Secretary*
- Hillary Schultz
- Linda Williams
- Mike Smith
- David Gomeau
- Cliff West
- Mary Oatway

### DIRECTORS EMERITI

- Elsie Viles
- Lila Segal
- Marilyn Mollicone

### STAFF

- Mark DesMeules, *Executive Director*
- Andrea Paquin, *Office Staff*



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**VOLUNTEERS  
WANTED**

Yes we need your help.  
You can make the  
Arboretum everything it  
is meant to be.  
Give us a call,  
626-7989



## COMMUNITY GARDENS COMING TO VILES ARBORETUM

Our first community gardens begin this spring at Viles. If you are interested in a plot or getting involved in this new activity and program, contact us. Mare Lemay is our volunteer coordinator and there is much to do before the growing season arrives. We want to offer plots for gardening and related support activities aimed at helping participants raise healthy produce for themselves.

Participants can share experiences in raising different crops and preparing them for use and storage, and simply have fun gardening. We are working with the City of Augusta who is discontinuing their community gardens in favor of our much improved location. Mare can be contacted through e-mail [mlemay05@gmail.com](mailto:mlemay05@gmail.com) or by phone 207.423.1103



*There's gold in our forests – tamarack gold.*