

# Chestnut Mast

Pollination 2002



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CAROLINAS CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION

MAST: nuts (acorns) accumulated on the forest floor and often serving as food for animals (as hogs). -Merriam-Webster Dictionary

## Message from the President Hugh Irwin

The Carolinas Chapter annual meeting is quickly approaching. We have an exciting program lined up. I hope everyone will be able to attend and meet both old friends and new. You should have received information on registering for the meeting in a separate mailing (if not, see the back page of this issue).

A recent decision by the TACF national board has far-reaching implications for the Carolinas Chapter. The organization's "germplasm agreement" has been the center of intense discussion, particularly over the past year. This agreement maps out the responsibilities and rights of TACF with partners and cooperators in the chestnut breeding program. The agreement is essential to assure that quality science remains the bedrock of our efforts and to guarantee that TACF can make decisions on deployment that are based on adequate testing and development. Balancing these needs with the needs of partners, cooperators, and state chapters has been no easy feat. However, intense discussion and

work over the last year has led to agreement on this issue. At a special meeting in February of this year the national board voted unanimously to adopt a revised germplasm agreement. There was general consensus that the revised agreement provides for protection of TACF's science and breeding efforts while providing the flexibility for chapters, partners, and cooperators to carry on their related activities. This was a landmark decision that will allow TACF to function to its full potential.

The Carolinas Chapter board has had a challenging year focused on development and strategic planning. During the year we held a day-long strategic planning session and several board meetings focused on long-range planning issues. This was not an easy process, but we accomplished some good long-range planning and are poised to start implementing some of these plans. Our web site is up and running now, thanks to **Paul Vonk** and **Don Myers**. Our mother tree program is progressing well under the leadership of **Paul Sisco**, with several local cooperators participating in our efforts. There are also mother trees, surviving flowering American chestnuts, that are remaining in our forests to be (continued on p.2)

## Hunting Giants: March 28, 2002 Forrest MacGregor

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The American Chestnut Foundation

What was the size of the largest American chestnut? Retired UNCA professor **Dr. Garrett Smathers** found a reference in Charlotte Hilton Green's book, *Trees Of The South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1939, page 120): "Perhaps the largest . . . was one in Francis Cove . . . which had a diameter of seventeen feet and a height of more than one hundred feet." Then **Paul Sisco** found mention in a 1915 publication, *American Forestry* (Vol. 21, Number 262, October) that "a tree with a diameter of 17 feet has been recorded from Francis Cove in North Carolina."

Turns out Garrett actually knew someone who knew where the stump of that old giant was. Paul and I decided to go on a pilgrimage to find some evidence of the perimeter of that tree. We had an ulterior motive.

We are hoping to install a demonstration chestnut planting at the WNC Nature Center in

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is the official newsletter of  
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### BECOME A CHARTER MEMBER

For a one-time donation of \$60 over the usual \$40 membership fee, you may become a CHARTER MEMBER of the Carolinas Chapter. The additional money will help defray chapter operating costs.

Welcome New Charter Members!  
Benemma Bentley Bailey  
Robert Eidus  
Gerrie Gilbert  
French Broad River Garden Club  
Valley Garden Club (Cashiers)



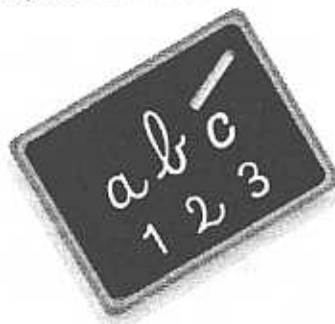
THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION

THE MISSION OF TACF IS  
SIMPLE: TO RESTORE THE  
AMERICAN CHESTNUT AS AN  
INTEGRAL PART OF THE  
EASTERN FOREST ECOSYSTEM  
THROUGH COOPERATIVE  
RESEARCH AND A SCIENTIFIC  
BREEDING PROGRAM.

(Irwin, continued from p.1)

discovered. The pollination season is approaching. There should be opportunities both locally and at the Meadowview farm. We would like to get more volunteers involved in our speakers program to make the chapter's and TACF's efforts more widely known. We would also like to have better membership recruitment and outreach.

However, to make many of these efforts work well, we need the involvement of our membership. Chances are that you have just the skills that are needed. Join us at the annual meeting to learn a new skill (grafting), hear some chestnut lore (Charlotte Ross), talk with fellow members, and hear about the Chapter's activities.



### Board Work

The Chapter's Board of Directors met in December at Dupont State Park to finalize the budget for the upcoming year. It met again in March to plan for May's Annual Meeting and included discussion of the Chapter's election policy, the reimbursement policy, the Annual Meeting program, and to discuss fundraising and other projects. As a motion was made to amend the bylaws, a later vote was taken electronically and passed. It was a motion to gather nominations for Directors prior to the actual meeting and to elect them by a majority of members in good standing at the time of the election, rather than only those members attending the Annual Meeting, as will be the case this year. This procedure will allow for voting by mail next year. It will give the membership additional time to consider making nominations and to consider the nominees themselves. Nominees' experience can be printed and sent to members prior to the election.

(MacGregor, continued from p.1)

Asheville and thought we might show folks just how big these 'redwoods of the east' got by graphically placing our kiosk in the center of a gravel pad the size of this arboreal monster.

Francis Cove, near Waynesville, is an exceptionally picturesque setting, in a region famous for them. Gene and Doug Christopher run an orchard there that has been in family hands for several generations. They had played inside the stump as children. Doug directed us to where we should look. He also said that there had been two trees, and that in the old days you could turn a cart around inside the larger tree.

So up we went, stopping where the first stump was promised. Twenty minutes of woods walking yielded some briar cuts and not much else. But the earth had that unmistakable feel of a springy mattress, stuffed with centuries of humus and stumps, some chestnut, but none large.

On to the second site. This area had a lot of fallen chestnut timber and the ground, even in March, was beginning to sprout wildflowers. Gene told us later that this forest had been cut TWICE in his lifetime (of about 60 years). That would mean a lot of productivity for this site, and might be why the biggest chestnuts were found here.

However, we found no chestnut sprouts. Paul once heard that where you find chestnuts most readily today is where they grew most poorly in the past. Many trees have problems growing in the latter places, but where chestnut formerly grew best, any tree can grow, and its niche was quickly filled with other species. Some biologists feel chestnut blight was a biodiversity boon to our mountains, since more commercially valuable oak, poplar, and hickory colonized the empty chestnut stands. (These biologists don't get invited to my house much!)

When we went down to report that we had found nothing, we ran into Gene, who graciously accompanied us to the little rise and the flat upon which he recollected the stump had been. Paul and I trudged around, but no luck. Well, nothing lasts forever. But (continued on p.3)

## Getting Around

Paul Sisco has nearly managed to be in more places at once than anyone else. Nearing light speed, he receives the Dancing Shoes Award for his tireless efforts on behalf of the American chestnut, sharing education and lore wherever he goes:

Paul spoke to the League of Women Voters in Mars Hill on 14 November and then gave a seminar at the Forestry Department at NC State on 19 November. After the New Year, he gave a talk at the ETSU Biological Sciences and Health Sciences Department Seminar on 23 January, followed by a seminar, given with Joe James, at Clemson University on 14 February.

March also had Paul running at full speed. On 11 March, he spoke at Mars Hill College to the oral history class given by Dr. Katherine Newfont (the first time the course has been offered). On 13 March, he addressed the Raleigh Women's Club for their Arbor Day Celebration. Also in March, Paul gave a talk to the Black Mountain Rotary Club. One of the attendees, Bob Watts, Director of Public Works for the town of Black Mountain, NC, later showed Paul land on the Black Mountain Reservoir that "looked like a great place for chestnut plantings."

Moving right along, Paul spent a week in Porano, Italy, where he attended a workshop on chestnut genetics. He addressed the Istituto per Agroselvicoltura on 18

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### Other Happenings

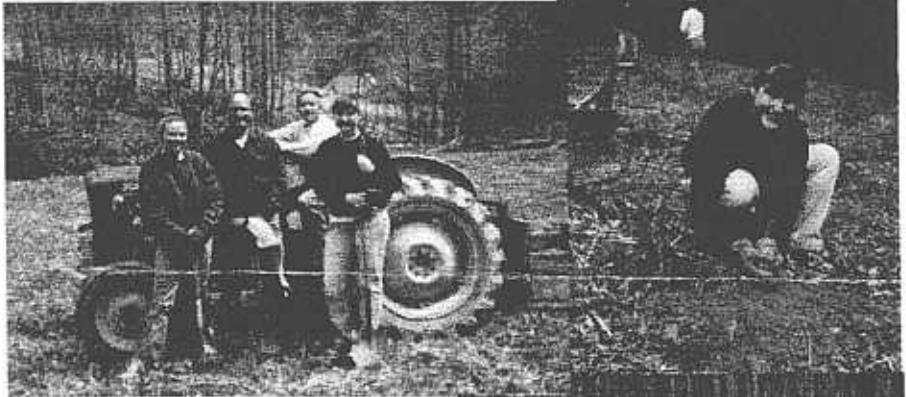
\* Sarah Smither, board member of The French Broad River Garden Club, organized a "Tree of Strength" planting at the South Asheville Fire Station on 8 March. Forrest MacGregor attended and helped them plant three American chestnut trees which were donated by the Asheville Office of TACF.

\* Bill O'Connor shared his chestnut lore and experience with the Leicester Garden Club at the Leicester Fire Department on 23 February (seen at right). Bill showed his famous slides of chestnuts, discussed the origin of the blight, and the present state of the reforestation effort. Susan Wilson, your newsletter editor, also attended and shared copies of the

April. No sooner back from that, he spoke to the workshop of the USDA Forest Service Geneticists in Georgia on 23 April, and at the Southern Hardwoods Group at Bent Creek Experiment Station in Asheville on the 25th.

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Photos below taken at the Pat and Bob Momich farm on NC Route 208 near the Tennessee border. Pat is an interpretive specialist with the US Forest Service in Asheville. Paul notes, "We put in 50 Graves BC2 trees that had been grown up at the Morganton nursery by the NC Forest Service. The genotype is GR252 x Rick Wilson American. Rick Wilson's tree is in the Cane Creek Valley south of Burnsville, NC. Amanda Richardson, student at Mars Hill College, helped us out, as did Bob and Pat's daughter, Allison."



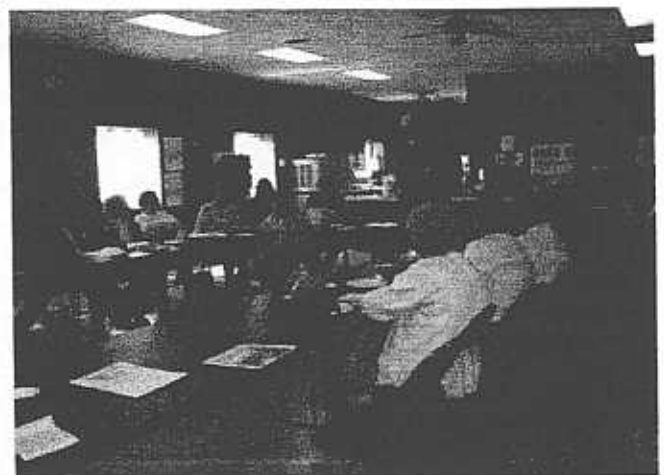
newsletter and TACF brochures. The Garden Club served a delightful assortment of refreshments and welcomed us, wholeheartedly. When the group later saw the announcement on television of the French Broad Garden Club planting of an American Chestnut Tree as a memorial, they asked Susan about it. Susan asked Forrest MacGregor about more trees. Forrest had additional trees to share. On April 4th, the group meet at the Leicester Community Center and planted their seedlings that came from Greg Miller in Ohio and were about four feet tall and two years old. June Williams, their President and newsletter editor, summed up the feeling of this momentous event for the group, "They seem almost sacred."

(MacGregor, continued from p.2)

the earth that supported those big trees can support the chestnut again. All that's missing in the equation is the chestnut, and we're working on that. I'm planning a return visit in 700 years to see the replacement trees. Unfortunately, Paul will be too old by then to go with me, but I promised to take some pictures for him.

And the site did yield something for me--a rusted lucky horseshoe, complete with a nail or two. Maybe off a horse and cart that used to turn around in the old stump? I'd like to think that, anyway.

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**BE SURE TO VISIT THE CHAPTER'S NEW WEBSITE!**

**www.carolinas-TACF.org**

A BIG thanks to **Paul Vonk** for creating our new website. Once fully implemented, it will carry our newsletter. Please send Leah Florence your email address at [asheville@acf.org](mailto:asheville@acf.org) if you wish to receive notice of a new posting with a direct link to the webpage to see the newsletter. We would continue to handmail the newsletter to all other members.



## ***The Chestnut in Literature***

**Susan Wilson**, one of your newsletter editors, has been reading *Anna Karenina*, a novel by Leo Tolstoy. At the end of part two, when the Russian family Shcherbatsky has been vacationing "abroad" in Germany, we find these lines of interest:

"On coming back with Kitty from the wells, the prince who had asked the colonel and Marya Yevgenyevna and Varenka all to come and have coffee with them, gave orders for a table and chairs to be taken into the garden under the chestnut tree, and lunch to be laid there. The landlord and the servants, too, grew brisker under the influence of his high spirits. They knew his generous nature; and half an hour later the invalid doctor from Hamburg, who lived on the top floor, looked enviously out of the window at the merry party of healthy Russians assembled under the chestnut tree. In the trembling circles of shadow cast by the leaves, at a table covered with a white cloth and set with coffee pot, bread and butter, cheese, and cold game, sat the princess in a high cap with lilac ribbons, distributing cups of coffee and sandwiches."

This, of course, would not be the American chestnut Tolstoy is referring to, but was, perhaps, a tree just as beloved in nineteenth century Europe as our American chestnut was to us in the twentieth century.

**Dr. Hill Craddock** comments that "Tolstoy's chestnuts were probably *Aesculus hippocastanum*, the European horsechestnut. Horsechestnuts are very popular urban garden, park and street trees in cities throughout Europe (including Torino - site of the next Winter Olympics). They're planted as ornamentals here in the USA, too, mostly for their beautiful flowers and handsome palmately compound leaves. Longfellow's "spreading chestnut tree" was also a European horsechestnut growing on Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts (see the link, below). Our native North American species of *Aesculus* are called buckeyes. The seeds (called conkers in England) are poisonous."

Under a spreading chestnut tree,  
The village smithy stands;  
The smith, a mighty man is he,  
With large and sinewy hands;  
And the muscles of his brawny arms  
Are strong as iron bands.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,  
"The Village Blacksmith,"  
published 1841 in  
*Ballads and Other Poems*.  
<http://www.anvilmag.com/comment/109d2.htm>



## Field Notes

Submitted by Ron Myers

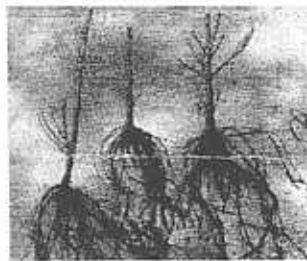
The third week in March, **Dr. Paul Sisco**, myself, and a five person Bridge crew of young offenders from Avery county spent the better part of 2 days conducting a cleaning or timber stand improvement (TSI) near the Busick work center. Special thanks to Camp Director **Keith Suttles** for helping us coordinate the work project. Currently this forested area contains a mixture of large Chinese and Japanese chestnuts that were planted in 1936. This was one of the Asiatic chestnut plantings that Diller put in along the Appalachian range and it still remains as one of the largest still surviving. It is really a treat to see these old stalwarts trying to fit in among the other native hardwoods. Paul and I were also able to collect scion wood or genetic material that we could use from the best candidates to do some grafting work. The goal is to try to introduce some new Chinese sources of resistance into future breeding work. The fact that these planted trees were still surviving after 60 years and have some degree of resistance is very encouraging. When we left the site, I was left wondering if some future chestnut enthusiast will stumble upon my hybrid planting in 50 years that was planted in 2001 and be just as amazed or curious.

## Tree Planting

### Northwest Region

Several tree planting projects were completed this year and included both BC2F2 and BC3F2 seedlings. Approximately 45 BC2F2 bare-root seedlings of opCL40 source were planted together with 30 American seedlings from 2 different sources at the Gill State Forest located in Crossnore, NC. This demonstration planting now has roughly 125 seedlings from 4 different BC2F2 sources and 3 different American sources. All seedlings were planted using a power-auger and shovel to fill in the holes. Now if **Ron Myers** can only keep the rabbits from eating them!

One-year-old BC2F2 seedlings grown at the Morganton nursery. Pictures at right show the size and root systems of the chestnut seedlings. Josh Sherril holds up 2 seedlings that Ron and Josh planted out of 45.



A second site on the Gill State Forest was the happy recipient of approximately 45 BC3F2 seedlings from the WayahB x WV131 source. A mixture of both 1-0 bare-root and containerized stock was used for planting, although the containerized stock was still dormant. On this site, the BC3F2 chestnut seedlings were planted together with an equal number of large 1-0 Northern red oak seedlings. This was done to create a more productive forest stand for wildlife and to give a direct comparison of the growth rates between the two species. We want to see how the early growth & development of these hybrid chestnuts compare to oaks following planting with the native competition working on both. I'm excited to see what type of stand develops and how well the chestnuts will compete.

Ron Myers in the black shirt with the BC3F2 seedlings at Gill State Forest and Josh Sherril, student from NCSU working with the NC Forest Service this year.



# Nominees for Board of Directors

## New Candidates

### **PAUL SISCO** Asheville, NC

Paul Sisco holds a Ph.D. in Plant Breeding and Genetics (Cornell 1982) and was USDA/ARS Professor of Crop Science at North Carolina State University, 1983-97. He chaired an International Maize Genetics Conference in March, 1997. He was TACF Staff Geneticist from 1998 to 2002, and is currently TACF Southern Regional Science Coordinator. He served on the board of directors of Bent Creek Townhomes (Raleigh, NC) from 1986 through 1989 and was its board president, 1988-89 (Bent Creek had over 350 townhomes and an annual budget of over \$250,000).

### **GENE SPEARS** Banner Elk, NC

Gene Spears is professor of biology and head of the science/math department at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Florida, and has a professional background in plant reproductive ecology and pollination biology. His hobby interest is in fruit and nut tree growing and home mini-orchards. He has been a member of NAFEX (N.A. fruit explorers) for ten years and of TACF for 3 years.

### **KENNETH O. SUMMERVILLE** Gamer, NC

Kenneth Summerville holds a BS in Forest Management (NCSU 1959) and retired from the NC Division of Forest Resources after 36 years. He helped develop a genetic tree improvement program in loblolly, longleaf, and other pines and firs; conducted research on vegetative propagation of various commercial hardwood tree species; conducted seed orchard management studies of several pine and fir trees; and established silvicultural studies with longleaf pine and Atlantic white cedar. A member of the Society of American Foresters (Triangle Chapter Treasurer, 1987-90; NC Division Chair, 1995), he currently serves as NC Division Natural Areas Committee Chair.

### **ROBERT M. WILSON** Asheville, NC

Robert Wilson is an environmental science educator. He taught at the College of Morris (New Jersey) and currently at Asheville High School. He was present at the "birth" of The Carolinas Chapter and was the creator of the Charter Member program. He is past chairman (2 terms) of Wenoca Sierra Club and serves currently on its executive committee. He is also principal researcher of the Carolina Kestrel Project. He will be retiring from teaching in July 2002, which will enable him to take an active role in the work of the Carolinas Chapter.

## Running for Re-election

### **ROBERT EIDUS** Marshall, NC

Robert Eidus is president of North Carolina Ginseng and Goldenseal Co. ( a medicinal herb company) and Indigo Bunting Properties (a real estate development company). He has founded several environmental nonprofit organizations in NC and FL since the 1970s. He has been on the steering committee of the Carolinas Chapter of TACF since its inception and was a member of the first executive committee as treasurer. He assisted the chapter in gaining its 501(c)3 nonprofit designation from the IRS. He is now Board liaison to the fund-raising committee and, if elected, will pursue having a Chestnut Ball in Asheville in January 2004.

### **HUGH IRWIN** Black Mountain, NC

Hugh Irwin is conservation planner for The Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition. He served on the steering committee during the formation of the Carolinas Chapter, spearheading its effort to become incorporated and accepted as a full chapter by national TACF. He has served as a board member and president since the chapter was incorporated in 2000. He currently serves as Vice President for Science on the TACF Board of Directors. His interest is in the species recovery and restoration of American chestnut using strategies that capture as much diversity of our native trees as possible.

### **RON MYERS** Clayton, NC

Ron Myers is a forester specializing in hardwood silviculture. He has served the Carolinas Chapter since its formation, as a member of the steering committee and as a director. He was coordinator of the chapter's Mother Tree Project, 1999-2000, and has served as vice president from 2001 to the present. He is currently chair elect of his professional Society of American Foresters and has served as both treasurer and VP of the SE Hardwood Forestry Group. He is involved in many field-related activities, workshops, and projects that include chestnut and other Appalachian hardwoods.



**SPRING GATHERING IN BANNER ELK  
SATURDAY, 18 MAY, 9:30 am - 3:30pm  
on the campus of Lees-McRae College  
Cannon Student Center  
Banner Elk, NC**

**--This is for prospective members, too, so  
please bring interested friend(s)--  
Highlights include:  
Grafting Workshop  
Speaker Charlotte Ross  
Elections to Board of Directors  
Post-meeting tour of Eseeola Lodge**



Contact the Asheville Office to pre-register for the Annual Meeting. If you did not receive the registration form in the mail, call Leah Florence at 281-0047 on May 13th.

Dr. Ross explains why chestnut blight had such a great influence on Appalachia in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in combination with two other strong forces, the Great Depression and World War II. She examines the social, economic, cultural, and environmental roles of this tree from frontier days to 1940. Dr. Ross, a folklorist specializing in Appalachian regional culture, is Adjunct Professor in the Communications Department of Appalachian State University. Her presentation, which is made possible by a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council, should be very enjoyable and educational.

### **Upcoming Election News**

*Submitted by Ron Myers*

Our chapter board of directors has made it a priority to have a clear set of policy and procedures that will serve as a guide for all future nominations and elections. I had the honor to serve as Chair of this new committee to develop the framework that will be in place prior to this election at our upcoming annual meeting. It is a work in progress and please be patient; this is the first year that we will be using these new procedures. Some of the highlights include accepting nominations by mail for board of director candidates to be handled through a nominating committee. The election will be by Slated Ballots. A slate of nominated candidates will be prepared on a printed ballot that lists all the names of the candidates and a box or line for casting the appropriate votes. A standardized summary of biographical information will also be collected from each candidate and included with the printed ballot. A summary sheet that outlines or explains the voting procedure and appropriate behavior during the election will also be made available together with the ballot. It is our desire to keep the general membership up to date and informed when it comes to election matters or new changes that are made to any policy and procedure.

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