THE HORSE CHESTNUT
ACCOLADES FROM CHARLES S. SARGENT

The forerunner of Arnoldia was titled Bulletin of Popular Information. Its purpose was to call attention “to the flowering of important plants and other matters connected with them.” Initially published every Saturday during spring and autumn and from time to time during the remainder of the year, Charles S. Sargent wrote every issue of the Bulletin from its inception in 1911 to the year before his death in 1927. Not until 1918 did he feature Aesculus hippocastanum, when he included it in a review of large exotic trees that he could recommend for the northern United States for ornament or timber. He concluded that “from the experience gained in Massachusetts during about a century” only about twenty had proved themselves worth planting. From then on he expressed his admiration for the horse chestnut annually and enthusiastically.

No American Horsechestnut or Buckeye can compare in size or in the beauty of its flowers with the species of southwestern Europe (Aesculus hippocastanum), which is well known to many Americans who have never heard there were Horsechestnut-trees growing naturally in the United States. The European Horsechestnut is another of the great trees of the world. It is as much at home here and grows to as large a size as it does in western Europe. Few trees have more conspicuous flowers or foliage of deeper green.

When it is covered from top to bottom, as it is this year in the neighborhood of Boston, with its great erect clusters of white flowers, it is the most splendid object among the trees hardy in the northern states. The finest plant in the neighborhood of Boston known to

E. H. Wilson photographed Salem’s acclaimed horse chestnut in 1925.
the Arboretum is in a garden in Salem, Massachusetts, believed to have been planted one hundred and ten years ago and now seventy feet high with a trunk ten feet in girth, and a perfectly shaped head eight feet across.

It was a favorite tree with Benjamin Bussey who bought his place in Jamaica Plain in 1806 and probably planted Horsechestnut trees there a little later. A few of them are on the walk which led from his house to Bussey Hill, and these are no doubt the oldest planted trees in the Arboretum.²

The European Horsechestnut only flourishes in deep cool soil, and although it has been largely used to shade city streets in this country and in Europe, it is not suited for such a purpose for the heat and drought of cities often cause it to lose its leaves in midsummer. Its place is in parks and gardens and by country roadsides.

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¹ Arboretum director E. D. Merrill, a believer in one-word magazine titles, changed the name in 1941.
² Also on Sargent's list are ginkgo, European larch, three species of poplar, three willows and their hybrids, katsura, white mulberry, ailanthus, European beech, English elm, one birch, three lindens, and the Norway maple.
³ The plant records of the Arnold Arboretum—although comprehensive from its founding in 1872 and now inclusive of some preexisting plants—say nothing about preexisting horse chestnuts except to note that the first Aesculus hippocastanum planted since the 1872 was propagated from seed collected on the grounds of the Bussey Institute (once part of Bussey's estate) and accessioned as number 266 in 1880.