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The Cambridge Washington Elm. During the past year the mail and telephone have brought to the Arboretum many inquiries regarding the so-called "Washington Elm", a specimen of the American or White Elm (*Ulmus americana*), which grew in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has been regarded as having close historic association with the movements of General Washington when he visited Cambridge in July, 1775. The last appearance of life in the tree does not appear to be definitely recorded, but we know that it finally fell to the ground October 26, 1923, after being for a long time a menace to the public because of its decaying condition. Its demise must be attributed simply to old age and disease hastened, no doubt, by modern street construction.

Most of the inquiries, referred to above, have been with regard to the plants now offered by several nurserymen who have used the word "patriotism" freely in their seductive advertisements. These dealers insist that the plants they offer have been propagated directly from the original tree which stood on Garden Street, bordering Cambridge Common, or were propagated from trees a generation once removed, in all cases the propagation having been effected by division and not by seeds.

The inquiries have mainly taken the form of questions regarding the genuineness of the plants offered as progeny of the tree which has been popularly associated with General Washington. Unfortunately there is no absolute proof that Washington either "assumed command" of the "American Army" under the shade of this tree, or that he noticed it or cared for it; and there is certainly very much doubt with regard to the authenticity of the origin of some of the offerings made by professional nurserymen. These men work on the credulity or ignorance of their clients whose patriotic feelings they capitalize by charges of high prices for plants which practically cost little, if any, more than ordinary propagated material.

That the stories regarding the tree are largely founded on sentiment and tradition, rather than on facts, appears to be borne out by historical

data. These accounts are widely scattered and, of course, are often apparently contradictory. It would be too much of an undertaking to attempt to reproduce the most important of these records in this Bulletin. Anyone interested in the facts or traditions will find a very good résumé of the evidence in a letter compiled by Samuel F. Batchelder, printed in the Cambridge (Mass.) *Tribune*, in December, 1923, and afterwards reprinted as a pamphlet, in 1925, under the title "The Washington Elm Tradition—Is It True?" The available records are here well analyzed and give us a partial picture of how history is made. In the latter case a quotation from the pamphlet is especially interesting in its connection with the Elm.

"A typical account of the fully developed (traditionists') vision is in the 'Diary of Dorothy Dudley' under date of July 3, 1775:— 'Today he (Washington) formally took command under one of the grand old elms on the Common. It was a magnificent sight. The majestic figure of the General mounted upon his horse, beneath the wide spreading branches of the patriarch tree; the multitude thronging the plain around, and the houses filled with interested spectators of the scene, while the air rang with shouts of enthusiastic welcome as he drew his sword and thus declared himself the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army ' As for 'Dorothy Dudley's Diary' almost everyone knows by this time that it is a literary forgery—and not a very clever one at that—written for the centennial anniversary volume entitled '*The Cambridge of 1776*'. Its whole phraseology is obviously modern, and it is full of small inaccuracies. In this passage, for example, the only house nearby was the Moore house, built about 1750, where the Shepard Church now stands: as Cambridge had been virtually deserted by its inhabitants there could have been no thronging multitude of spectators: and the army was not then the Continental Army but the Army of the United Colonies. All the same the passage is worth repeating to show the traditionists' state of mind. It is just the sort of thing which our school-children have been fed up with for generations Moreover, to clinch the effect of the printed word, the most outrageous pictures have been published in the history books, especially the school histories issued during the middle of the last century. In these pictures the artists have allowed their historical imaginations to run amuck. Prancing steeds, dipping colors, dear little drummer boys, long rows of troops aligned to a hair's breadth, gorgeously uniformed, and presenting glittering arms with fixed bayonets, thrill every youthful heart, while smack in the middle of the front rank stands the Elm, with just room for Washington, flourishing his sword, to ride between it and his immaculate warriors What child after devouring such a scene could doubt the tradition for the rest of his life?"

Much more might be quoted but enough is given to show that there is a serious element of doubt about the connection of the tree with this stirring event on July 3, 1775. It will be noted that the discredited "Diary of Dorothy Dudley", quoted above, states that Washington "formally took command under one of the grand old elms on the Common" and describes the tree as a "patriarch" with wide spreading

branches. No specific tree is here mentioned among a number of good sized elm trees which then existed on the area known as the Cambridge Common. While the sentimentalists and traditionalists have referred to the Washington Elm as a venerable or patriarchal tree, and would have us think of it as a hoary wide branched monarch of its kind, it is worth while to consider the actual facts as to its age. After the tree fell, on October 26th, 1923, Irving W. Bailey, Professor of Plant Anatomy in Harvard University, an expert in plant growth and wood structure, carefully examined the trunk and sections of the wood and arrived at the conclusion that when it fell it was between 204 and 210 years old. (See Cambridge Park Department Report for the year ending in March, 1924.) Granting that the age was the higher figure it would appear that this tree was about 62 years old when Washington assumed command of the Colonial troops, or, if we accept the lower figure we have a tree 56 years old. This certainly is no great age for a White Elm (*Ulmus americana*). Professor Bailey found that in 1775 the trunk of the tree was at least 24 inches in diameter at 30 inches above the ground. Two inches more may be allowed for thickness of bark, so that the total circumference at that time was less than 8 feet.

As already stated the sentiment and tradition built up about this tree have recently been capitalized in a commercial way by a number of nurserymen or dealers in plants. One of the most glaring cases, which deserves to be classed as extremely misleading, or meriting a stronger term of condemnation, is exhibited by a circular of four pages, issued by an enterprising dealer in Chicago. In this illustrated advertisement we are told again "Here, under that old Elm, on July 3, 1775, Washington assumed command of the 'rebels and farmers' that made up the American Army. Under that old Elm nine thousand militiamen renewed their allegiance to the Colonies and to the new Commander-in-Chief". It is further described as a "stately Elm" for "close to two centuries", as though it never had had a vigorous juvenile period of growth.

In this circular we are told that the propagator and salesman, who describes himself as an "Elm tree specialist", "secured cuttings from the famous and historical Washington Elm", and that from these he "was able to propagate a limited number of trees that are now from 6 to 8 feet high. The fact that they are direct descendants of America's most famous tree removes entirely the thought that they are mere Elm trees." The term "direct descendant" as used here, and by another nurseryman referred to below, is misleading, as the implication conveyed to the average mind is that the propagated material came directly from the Washington Elm, whereas, in both enterprises, the living buds used by the propagators were *not* taken from the historic tree itself but were from a generation once or twice removed, with no proof that these generations were authentic or true relatives of the original. In the case of the Chicago dealer the actual or admitted facts are that the young trees offered were grown from scions or twigs sent to him early in October, 1927, four years after the fall of the original tree, through the friendly offices of a Boston journalist who secured them

from a plant in Wellesley reputed to have been propagated from the original tree before it died. The method of propagation was by budding according to a statement by the nurseryman offering these trees. The price asked is twenty-five dollars per tree, including a small bronze tablet or marker.

It is adroitly suggested by the vendor that the trees are suitable for planting on school and public grounds, parks and similar places, as well as by patriotic societies. In an advertisement in one of our horticultural magazines he also makes a "special offer" to D. A. R. Chapters, and we are told also how to make the planting of such trees a "civic event" with appropriate "planting ceremonies" and how to "finance the project".

Another nursery concern, with headquarters in Massachusetts, is offering Washington Elms, grown by grafts from trees which are said to have been propagated from a tree which we are told was started as a scion from the old tree and was grafted at the Arnold Arboretum, and later sent to Wellesley, Massachusetts, where it was planted with other White Elms. It was not permanently labeled at the time of planting and it was some years later that a resident, now dead, of the town hesitatingly pointed it out as the particular tree. It was then given a fixed, distinctive label. There is no *proof*, however, of the correctness of the identification of the tree at Wellesley or of the validity of the origin of the second or the third generation.

The scion from the old tree was undoubtedly grafted upon White Elm stock. If the scion died or was broken off, which all plant propagators know is something which occasionally happens, it would probably be supplanted by a healthy sprout from the stock which might easily be more vigorous than a scion from the decadent old tree.

In this Massachusetts nurseryman's circular we are told that the famous elm "was a large tree when Cambridge was first settled", and that it is described in the "Harvard Book" as having a trunk "over 18 feet in circumference".

If the famous Elm was "a large tree when Cambridge was first settled" (in 1630) and when measured, presumably in its best condition, was "over 18 feet in circumference", is it not a curious circumstance that its own record shows that it was less than 8 feet in circumference in 1775, over 140 years later? And if the Washington Elm was 210 years old when it died and fell on October 26, 1923, there would appear to be a remarkable discrepancy between the human accounts and the natural records kept by the tree, which would seem to show that, as a matter of fact, *the seed of the Washington Elm had not been produced or the seedling started into life for nearly a hundred years after Cambridge was first settled!*

The plant said to have been propagated from it and growing in Wellesley is described in this Massachusetts nurseryman's circular as "now a beautiful, large tree growing on the grounds of the Public Library". As a matter of fact, if anyone should go to see the labeled tree at Wellesley he

would find a rather unkempt specimen between 30 and 35 feet in height and 26 inches in circumference (between 8 and 9 inches in diameter), breast high, apparently about 28 to 30 years old. Other White Elms of about the same age, in the same vicinity, are twice as large, but they all appear as if of the same parentage.

Grafted plants of the next generation of this Wellesley tree, one foot high, are offered to the patriotic public at five dollars each! And with each is given a label and a numbered certificate signed by the President of the company, which assures the purchaser and his or her heirs that the tree is a "direct descendant of the Washington Elm", although earlier in the advertisement we are told it came indirectly, or two generations removed. There is no known record of seedlings ever having been grown from this tree.

If a Washington Elm is budded or grafted upon the stock and root of another Elm, upon which it depends for its life, should it not be classed as a dual organism rather than a fundamentally pure successor of the original organism?

The anniversary of the 200th birthday of George Washington, in 1932, could be much more fittingly, permanently and usefully marked by the establishment of community forests rather than by high priced trees of doubtful history.

J. G. JACK.

Plants of Current Interest. Among the trees or shrubs noted in the Arboretum as showing flowers on November 26th (Thanksgiving Day), after an autumn remarkable for very light and very few frosts, the following may be mentioned: *Prunus subhirtella autumnalis* had many of its small, pretty, semi-double, pink flowers scattered among the nearly leafless twigs. It has been producing such flowers for several weeks. Unless the winter is very severe it will continue to bloom in the spring, for there are innumerable firmly closed flower buds which will withstand ordinary winter conditions.

Some Forsythias, such as *F. suspensa* and *F. intermedia* have many of their bright yellow flowers scattered over the branches.

Some forms of Japanese Quince (*Chaenomeles lagenaria*), were bearing many blooms.

Lonicera fragrantissima and *L. Standishii* bore occasional samples of their sweetly scented whitish flowers, as they usually do every mild time in late autumn.

Some plants of the common native Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) in the woods still carry some of their golden yellow flowers; two open flowers were found on the winter or spring flowering Chinese Witchhazel (*H. mollis*), and some plants of *H. vernalis* from Missouri and adjoining southwestern regions showed many of their delicately fragrant honey yellow blossoms while other plants of the same species appeared closely dormant.