

Metasequoia Travels the Globe

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Fifty years after *Metasequoia* seemed threatened by extinction, the tree has taken firm root in soils both alien and familiar. Not only has it been re-introduced to its ancestral domains in the American Northwest, in Russia, and in Japan, but it has established itself in new homes all over the globe, thanks in part to Professor E. D. Merrill's determination to find sanctuary for the species. Dr. Merrill was perhaps not the first Westerner to receive *Metasequoia* seeds from China—records show that some had already arrived at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and perhaps also at the Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam by late 1947—but it was from the 1948 shipments to the Arnold Arboretum that a network of individuals and institutions was formed that ensured the tree's wide distribution. The enthusiastic reception accorded the seeds is exemplified by the comment of Lord Aberconway, president of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1948, to his colleagues at their annual general meeting: "We hope that in due course our English gardens may bristle with that very interesting plant, in spite of its forbidding name."

Indeed, one can admire some very fine specimens of *Metasequoia* in England as well as in the rest of the British Isles. Seeds were shared from the lots sent from the Arnold Arboretum to the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew and Edinburgh, as well as to several universities. Seeds were also given to individuals, including the above-mentioned Lord Aberconway, whose head gardener, Mr. Puddle, received a packet of seeds directly from Dr. Merrill at the Chelsea Flower Show in 1948. The seeds germinated immediately in his garden at Bodnant, in north-



ARCHIVES OF THE ARNOLD ARBORETUM



MAINAU GÄRTE

At the Arboretum on the island of Mainau in Lake Constance, Germany. Said to be the oldest allée of Metasequoia in Europe, the trees were five feet tall when planted in 1959. Above, they appear in a 1970 photograph; below, they are seen twenty-some years later.

west Wales, and from the spring of the following year and continuing into the 1970s, the plants were shared with institutions with a special interest in rare plants.

Ireland's first *Metasequoia* seeds came from Seattle via London. The curator of the Univer-



Metasequoia glyptostroboides at the University of Copenhagen Arboretum, Denmark. The seed germinated February 1948 and was planted on the grounds in June of the same year.



At National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin near Dublin. The seed was sown on 3 April 1948, the tree is now about 40 feet tall.



At Jardin des Plantes, Orleans, part of the Arboretum National des Barres. One of the oldest and largest specimens in France, photographed both in summer and winter.



At the Dunedin Botanic Garden, New Zealand. This tree is one of many propagated at the Timaru Botanic Garden and distributed to New Zealand gardens. It's said that when the director of the Timaru garden read about *Metasequoia* in 1948, he immediately wrote away for seeds.



At the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart, Tasmania. This 46-foot tall tree was two years old when it was planted in 1958. It produced seeds in 1992.



At Mount Royale Cemetery, Montreal, Canada, next to a monument to E. H. Wilson (1876–1930). Both monument and tree—said to be the first planted out of doors in Canada—were installed in May 1949. When photographed in 1995, the tree was less than two meters tall (just over six feet). The cause of the leaderless growth is unknown, but the habit is often found in specimens growing in very cold climates, where the average minimum winter temperatures fall below -15 degrees Fahrenheit.

sity of Washington Arboretum sent a batch to the Londonderry arboretum of Commander Frank Gilliland, a plantsman with a taste for conifers, who in turn forwarded some to the director of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. From Glasnevin, which later received two shipments of seeds directly from the Arnold Arboretum, plants were distributed to other counties in Ireland.

The International Botanical Congress held in June of 1948 at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands presented Dr. Merrill with a splendid opportunity to disseminate seed. Nineteen delegates representing ten countries were present, from as far away as India, Indonesia, and

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Australia, and each no doubt returned home with future trees in their pockets. The hosts of the Congress sowed their seeds the same evening that Dr. Merrill handed them out; subsequently they distributed to other Dutch universities, gardens, and nurseries both seeds and seedlings that eventually made their way into the commercial trade.

Inquiries to botanic gardens worldwide revealed that trees are growing in most of the European countries from Ireland in the west to Czechoslovakia in the east, from Scandinavian countries in the north to the gardens of the Mediterranean. They grow high in Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, and dot the hills of Hawaii. The garden of Kirstenbosch in South Africa sports a fairly large specimen, as do various cities on the coast of mainland Australia and in Tasmania and New Zealand.

Metasequoia trees survive winter diebacks and the weight of heavy snows in the botanic gardens of Hamilton and Montreal in Canada. At the other extreme, *Metasequoia* tolerates the sizzling summer rays in the city of Adelaide, Australia, which lies within hardiness zone ten. The specimens in Europe's oldest allée of *Metasequoia*—on the island of Mainau in Lake Constance, which borders Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—were planted in 1959 as five-year-olds; it is hoped that those recently planted in northern Tasmania, along the driveway leading to a new arboretum, will prove equally prosperous.

And in Japan, in Miki-Town, Kagawa Prefecture on the island of Shikoku, an "Ancient Wood Park" honoring Dr. Shigeru Miki was opened in 1993, complete with a grove of dawn redwoods and life-size models of dinosaurs. A hilltop monument in the park commemorates the paleobotanist who, studying what he assumed to be the fossil of a long-extinct species, gave the name to the ancient, but very much alive, genus *Metasequoia*.

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