
FOREWORD

The year was 1904; the place the Bronx Zoological Park in New York City; the beginning of perhaps the greatest single natural catastrophe in the annals of forest history—the discovery of chestnut blight. In less than 50 years more than 80 percent of the American chestnut trees in the eastern hardwood forests were dead; the rest were dying. A tree species that once occupied an estimated 25 percent of the eastern forest, encompassing 200 million acres of forest land, was gone.

Since 1904 many futile attempts have been made to control the advance of the chestnut blight and reestablish the American chestnut in eastern forests. Frustrations have been many, rewards few. One group, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station located at New Haven, Connecticut, has persisted longer than anyone in this endeavor. Recently information from Europe has stimulated renewed interest in the American chestnut problem. As one speaker at the Symposium, Eyvind Thor, so aptly stated, the history of the American chestnut has involved three stages: concern, resignation, and now, new hope for a solution.

The most recent new hope is the so-called hypovirulence phenomenon that was initially observed in Italy. Hypovirulent is a term for less virulent strains of chestnut blight. In Europe, blighted chestnut trees were found with canker wounds that had healed. Canker healing was attributed to the natural occurrence of hypovirulent strains of the blight fungus that overcome or minimize the effectiveness of the more virulent strains. In this country the hypovirulent phenomenon has potential as a biological control, but there are many problems and hurdles to cross before bridging the final gap to success.

During the 2-day Symposium, a total of 34 papers were presented. The first day was a general session that included historical accounts of chestnut blight and discussions of the status of selecting, breeding, and use of other techniques to produce blight resistant trees such as vegetative propagation and irradiation. The general session also included a discussion of the potential for biological control of chestnut blight in France, Italy, and the United States. A technical session on the second day provided researchers an opportunity to exchange information and ideas.

The return of the American chestnut to its once significant position in the forest is doubtful. However, the sincere interest and hope remains that a solution will be found to again make it possible for American chestnut to inhabit our forest land. The broad objective of this Symposium was to exchange ideas among participants so that a more coordinated effort can be made to find a solution to the American chestnut problem. We hope this Symposium was a positive step toward achieving our long-term objective of restoring the American chestnut to the eastern hardwood forests.

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Chestnut Symposium Participants (left to right).
Row 1: Samuel Gingrich, Wayne Weidlich, David McCarroll, Safiya Samman, Sandra Anagnostakis, Martha Roane, Tullio Turchetti, Jean Grente, Robert Phares. **Row 2:** Jerry Payne, Gary Griffin, John Elkins, Richard Jaynes, Albert Dietz, Lorenzo

Mitterpergher, Allen Dodds, Eyvind Thor, Franklin Cech. **Row 3:** Dale Hindal, Mark Double, Roy Keys, Bruce Given, Clark Haynes, John Elliston, Fred Hebard, Paul Opler, Edgar Huffman. **Row 4:** Clay Smith, Frederick Berry, George Kuhlman, Neal Van Allen, Peter Day, William MacDonald.