TREES
OF
READING, MASS.

PART I.

No. 1. THE THOMAS BANCROFT ELM.

No. 2. THE CAPT. GEORGE BATCHELDER SASSAFRAS.

No. 3. THE DAVID EMERSON OAK.

No. 4. THE NEHEMIAH BANCROFT ELM.

No. 5. THE CHARLES D. THOMAS BIRCH.

READING:
PUBLISHED BY F. H. GILSON.

1888.

INTRODUCTORY.

THIS work was not started with any idea of publication, but sprang from a deep interest in trees on the part of the writer, who proposed to photograph and collect statistics of the principal trees of Reading for his own gratification, and possible entertainment of others in the future. Finding many interested, Part I. of the work is now published; and should there be enough copies sold to pay expenses, other parts will follow.

In photographing the trees, the aim has been to give the best possible representation of them, which could not always be done and preserve the same proportions in size between the photographs that exist between the trees themselves. The measurements, however, will furnish a correct basis of comparison; and in most cases a familiar object is introduced in the photograph to aid the eye in forming a true conception of size. It is proposed to publish sheets later, giving comparative sizes, which will contain a collection of portraits of trees reduced to a uniform scale of measurement.

The measurements of the trunks at a few feet from the ground are quite reliable, as there is little chance for variation; but near the ground, a difference in height of an inch frequently makes a difference of many inches in the circumference, owing to the irregularity of outline. The accurate height of a tree, even with the best of instruments, is not easily obtained; for, in many cases, one cannot readily determine which the highest branch is, different ones appearing highest from different points of view. The measurements of height are not given as absolutely perfect, but as the results of painstaking efforts to arrive at correct results.

In endeavoring to get at the history of our old trees, many difficulties have been met. In some cases, nobody living knows anything concerning them previous to their own recollections which place them at their present size seventy years ago. What an interesting book might now be written if one hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, record had been made of trees as they were planted, and measurements and incidents added from time to time! Cannot we have a tree record that shall include trees already planted, and to which can be added other trees as they are set out in the future? Such a record, in charge of the Reading Natural History Society, or some similar organization, could not fail to be of great interest and value in years to come.

Living as we do in a section of the country where trees grow almost like weeds, we fail to appreciate their beauty, and lose much enjoyment that might come of an intimate and appreciative acquaintance, especially with individual trees. When to trees—which have that element of interest that a botanist finds in all vegetation—is added a historical interest and pleasant memories of childhood's hours spent beneath the grateful shade, they occupy a large place in our affections, and become never-ceasing and

JAN 19 1926
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INTRODUCTORY.

inexpensive sources of healthy pleasure. Honor to those dear old souls who, many years ago, planted or spared what constitute now our old, majestic trees! Let every one who finds pleasure in these old trees do something toward assuring an abundance of them for future generations.

But one need not think that all the benefit is for the generations that are to come. Emerson, in his "Trees and Shrubs of Massachusetts," says: "I once heard an old man, standing in the shade of a tree nearly two feet in diameter, which towered above all around it, say, 'This tree, after I had been many years successful in business, and, in a change of fortune, had retired to this farm with a little that remained, I stuck in the ground, after I had used it as a stick in a ride of eight miles home from P——.'" Mrs. Elizabeth Sheldon, mother of Asa Sheldon, "The Wilmington Farmer," at the age of eighty-eight years, had four apple trees planted under her supervision, she assisting in the work. She lived to eat fruit from two of them.

Little do we in Reading appreciate our bountiful supply of trees, consisting of over thirty different native species, while on the western prairies trees can be had only by careful planting and constant care. Thousands of young trees spring up every year by our road sides, which, if judiciously spared, would in time make our roads as beautiful as is Summer Avenue, near the Prescott Place, where, nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, Mrs. Elizabeth Eaton, assisted by her son and a negro slave, set out what are now those grand old trees. To take a mercenary view,—a wealth of wood and lumber would be added to the town where now the land is repeatedly laid waste * by the bush scythe at the expense of the tax payers. If we do not plant trees, let us, at least, leave unmolested those which come up in suitable locations, especially deciduous trees whose bare branches in early spring obstruct little of the drying sunlight, and whose foliage later shades the road, making it moist and cool, rather than hot and dusty.

Many shortcomings in this work are evident; but indulgence is asked on the ground that a variety of occupations is not conducive to excellence in any one—the author, photographer, printer, and publisher happening to be the same person in this case.

I am indebted to many good people of Reading who have, without exception, courteously aided me in collecting facts concerning individual trees; and also to those valuable works, "Trees and Shrubs of Massachusetts," by Geo. B. Emerson, and "Forest Trees of North America," by Chas. S. Sargent, for many facts of a general nature.

No doubt, many interesting known facts concerning the trees in Part I. have escaped my search. Any information concerning them, or that will aid in the preparation of following parts, will be gratefully received.

F. H. GILSON.

November, 1887.

*In justice to some of our men who work on the roadsides, it should be stated that much of the destruction is done thoughtlessly. A few years ago, on being asked by one of them for a criticism, I requested that several young trees be left standing. My request was complied with, and the trees now bid fair to become valuable additions.

THE THOMAS BANCROFT ELM.

TREES OF READING, MASS. No. 1.

THE THOMAS BANCROFT ELM.

WHITE ELM.

AMERICAN ELM.

Ulmus Americana, L.

This tree is situated on the east side of West St., between King and Summer Sts., in the dooryard of the place now owned by Mr. John Watson.

It is supposed that Mr. Thomas Bancroft (b. 1673, d. 1731) was the first to build on this site. It is not known whether the tree was standing at the time or not, but its location favors the assumption that it was set out. Considering its great size, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that it was planted as far back as 1700, and its perfect vigor is against placing it much earlier. Probably Thomas Bancroft planted it soon after building. Mr. John Hart Bancroft, who was born at this place in 1811, and is the oldest member of the family now living, states that the tree has seemed to be its present size ever since he can remember (over 70 years).

The measurements in August, 1887, were as follows:—

<i>Circumference.</i>	<i>Height.</i>	<i>Spread.</i>
6 in. from ground, 26 ft.	66 ft.	90 ft.
5 ft. " " 14 ft. 8 in.		

The circumference at five feet gives the smallest measurement of the trunk, which grows larger towards the branches above and the roots below.

This is one of the largest trees in town, and adds much to the value and attractiveness of its surroundings. The branches extending towards the east almost meet those of another elm planted about one hundred years ago by Joseph Bancroft (b. 1735, d. 1825) who was a grandson of Thomas Bancroft. The western branches extend over the highway towards the barn, which stands on the opposite side of the road, and succeed in establishing the relationship between the house and the barn to such an extent that one almost feels like an intruder when passing on the highway.

Our photograph, taken from a point northwest of the tree, shows its appearance in September, 1887. Three of the heavy mass of branches that spring from the main trunk are visible. Mr. John Watson will be noticed standing at the left of the trunk, while above the roof of the building, on the extreme left, may be seen the limbs of the Joseph Bancroft Elm.

The white elm has small, reddish blossoms, which appear in numerous clusters in April or May. They lose no time in going to seed, and before the leaves are fairly out the abundant crop of flat seeds is locating along walls and fences preparatory to making an immediate start. The roots attain unusual length, being, probably, the longest of any of our native trees. The wood is heavy, hard, tough, and not easily split. It is used for wheel stock, cooperage, saddle trees, flooring, and boat- and ship-building, for which latter purpose large quantities are exported to Great Britain. The bark was formerly used for chair seats, and can be made into quite strong cord.

The white elm is a native tree, from Newfoundland to Florida, and west to Dakota and Texas. It thrives nicely in our locality, when not infested with canker worms, and has been deservedly planted in New England more than any other native tree. As a street tree it stands unequalled.

THE CAPT. GEORGE BATCHELDER SASSAFRAS.
TREES OF READING, MASS. No. 2.

THE CAPT. GEORGE BATCHELDER SASSAFRAS.

SASSAFRAS.

Sassafras Officinale, Nees.

We have in this tree something to be proud of especially from the naturalist's point of view. While neighboring towns may boast of elms, oaks, and various other trees as large or larger than any within our borders, so far as can be ascertained no other sassafras tree in the state equals in size the Batchelder Sassafras.

It is located in a pasture at the southwest corner of Main and Franklin Sts., and about six rods south of the Main Street schoolhouse.

When Joseph L. Pratt (b. 1814) was a boy, he used to drive cows to a pasture on what is now Franklin Street, and frequently on his way back would stop to dig up the roots of the big sassafras.

In the year 1844 the school-house near by was built, and Mr. Alden Batchelder (b. 1836) and others were transferred to it. The boys soon discovered that the outer bark of the tree could be easily fashioned by their pocket knives into various attractive designs, and the demands made on the old trunk threatened the life of the tree, some one even going so far as to cut into the roots with a hatchet. Capt. George Batchelder (b. 1798 d. 1868) who lived on the north-east corner of Main and Franklin Sts., and owned the tree, took the matter in hand, and, visiting the school, took the name of every boy who had removed bark, and succeeded in stopping the depredations. Mr. Alden Batchelder remembers the top as being larger then than at present.

One spring about the year 1864 when Mr. Howard W. Batchelder (b. 1856) attended school here, the boys removed the bark again, even standing on the ledge which is just north of the trunk, and removing all within reach. Again it was feared the tree would die, and once more Capt. Geo. Batchelder came to the rescue.

But notwithstanding these hard pulls the tree still stands, a vigorous, old tree, although it doubtless has seen its best days. The measurements in August, 1887, were as follows:—

<i>Circumference.</i>	<i>Height.</i>	<i>Spread.</i>
At ground, 10 ft. 3 in.	Top of foliage, 58 ft.	30 ft.
4 ft. from ground, 8 ft. 1 in.	" " dead branch, 61 ft.	

Our photograph, taken in September from a point south-west of the tree, shows the ledge on which the boys stood while getting bark. The topmost branch which is dead is not shown very distinctly. The schoolhouse is situated beyond the intervening knoll, the roof only being visible. Mr. Howard W. Batchelder is the present owner of the tree.

The sassafras in this latitude is usually a shrub or small tree, seldom attaining 30 feet in height. It is found from Canada to Texas, attaining its greatest size in Arkansas and the Indian Territory. The yellow blossoms appear in clusters in spring before the leaves. The fruit consists of a small blue drupe. The reddish wood is light, soft and brittle, very durable in contact with the soil, and is used for light skiffs, fence post and rails, and cooperage. The whole tree is pervaded with a pleasant aroma, it being strongest in the bark of the root from which the oil of sassafras is obtained for flavoring. In the South the mucilaginous leaves and young branches form the material for making "gumbo fileet" a powder which is used in the preparation of "gumbo" soup.

THE DAVID EMERSON OAK.
TREES OF READING, MASS. No 3.

THE DAVID EMERSON OAK.

WHITE OAK.

Quercus alba, L.

Few trees are so effective as the David Emerson Oak, situated in the dooryard of the Emerson place, on the northerly part of Pearl street, near Main street. It makes a remarkably attractive place out of what otherwise might pass as ordinary. One cannot become familiar with the location without forever afterwards feeling an attachment for the old tree, which, standing between the house and the barn, stretches its long, protecting branches from roof to roof, and forms a beautiful canopy of limbs and foliage, covering the entire dooryard. What a place for weary man to rest on the grassy slope, while through the occasional apertures overhead the sun's rays stream, making bright, irregular patches of light, with ever varying outline, as the leaves move lightly in the summer breezes! What a pleasure mere existence is 'mid such quiet, peaceful surroundings! Would that the tired, worn-out toilers in the cities might have places like this, in which to forget their cares and burdens, and give themselves up to the quiet restfulness that comes to one whose body and intellect are, even for a brief time, in harmony with nature and nature's laws—in harmony with God.

The Emersons were the first to make a home on this spot. The old house was located close beside the road, and here David Emerson was born in 1762. The present dooryard was then a part of the pasture, in which the oak chanced to sprout from seed. It is said that David, when a boy, ran and jumped over the then diminutive specimen. This must have been about the year of the Declaration of Independence.

About 1830, a new house was built, and was located further back, so that the tree was included in the dooryard,—a most happy selection for a building site.

The place has never been sold since it was first settled, but has always remained in the hands of the original family, the present owner being Arthur G. Emerson (b. 1855), grandson of David Emerson.

The old oak measured in August, 1887, as follows:—

<i>Circumference.</i>	<i>Height.</i>	<i>Spread.</i>
1 ft. from ground, 10 ft. 7 in.	46 ft.	87 ft.
5 ft. from ground, 9 ft. 5 in.		

The white oak trunk is generally much enlarged near the ground by the spreading roots. The almost entire absence of this in this tree, would lead one to think the grade of the yard has been raised so as to cover the lower part of the trunk.

Our photograph shows its appearance one September morning in 1887. Unfortunately, there is no position from which an entire and unobstructed view can be obtained. The branches, which extend beyond the limit of our view, are partially hidden on the left by the limbs of an elm tree, and on the right by a maple.

The white oak is found from Maine to Florida, and west to Arkansas, reaching its greatest development on the western slopes of the Alleghany Mountains, and in the Ohio River valley. It is one of the most valuable of timber trees, and furnishes material for ship-building, carriages, agricultural implements, cooperage, baskets, railway ties, and various other articles. The large roots are used for making knees for ship-building; the bark is very valuable for tanning; while the acorns are greedily devoured by various animals, and are sometimes quite pleasant to the taste, especially when roasted.

THE NEHEMIAH BANCROFT ELM.
TREES OF READING, MASS. No. 4.

THE NEHEMIAH BANCROFT ELM.

WHITE ELM.

AMERICAN ELM.

Ulmus Americana, L.

The name of Bancroft is intimately connected with our trees, as, indeed, it is with various other affairs of the town. Under the title of the Thomas Bancroft Elm (Tree No. 1) we have already spoken of its probable planting by Thomas Bancroft about 1700, and of a tree near by, planted by his grandson, Joseph Bancroft. Nehemiah Bancroft (b. 1768, d. 1863) was the son of Joseph, and doubtless inherited some regard for trees, which was cultivated in admiring the tree planted by his great grandfather, Thomas, close by the house in which he was reared. When he set up house-keeping for himself, he located on the west side of Grove St. on the place now owned by Mr. N. E. Hill.

The Nehemiah Bancroft Elm—located east of the house on the opposite side of Grove St., and on the line of the wall—probably sprung from seed where it now stands, for the side of a stone wall is a favorite place for elms to make a start, and had any one owning the house been disposed to plant, they would probably have selected a site on their own land. The land opposite was then owned by Mr. Thomas Hartshorn.

About the year 1815 a little girl—now Mrs. Selina B. Flint (b. 1807)—returning to her home on Forest St., having been to the village on an errand, saw Mr. Nehemiah Bancroft by the tree, and his son Miah (b. 1792, d. 1865) in the tree, which then had a trunk of perhaps ten or twelve inches in diameter. The father directed what limbs should be removed, while the son sawed them off. They gave it a vigorous trimming, removing all lateral limbs to a considerable height, and, as the little girl told her mother, “spoiled the tree.” But whatever might have been said to that effect then, few can be found at present that speak of it excepting in terms of admiration. Its measurements in August, 1887, were as follows:—

<i>Circumference.</i>	<i>Height.</i>	<i>Spread.</i>
8 in. from ground, 16 ft. 4 in.	79 ft.	77 ft.
4 ft. “ “ 11 ft. 6 in.		
7 ft. “ “ 10 ft. 8 in.		

The view, taken in the same month, gives a good idea of its present appearance as seen when approaching on the road from the south. On the side of the road next to the tree may be seen Claude Ulmus Gilson, born in 1878, at the first house north on same side of the street. The botanical name of this tree was chosen for his middle name.

The present owner values the tree highly, and the indications are that it will stand perhaps for generations to come, a constant object of admiration of the appreciative passers-by.

In a future number of this work it is proposed to include a tree planted fifty-three years ago by Mrs. Selina Flint mentioned above. She has always loved trees, and does yet, having had three set out in this her eighty-first year.

THE CHARLES D. THOMAS BIRCH
TREES OF READING, MASS. No. 5.

THE CHARLES D. THOMAS BIRCH.

CUT-LEAVED BIRCH.

WEeping BIRCH.

Betula alba pendula laciniata.

It is proposed to devote this work principally to our native trees, yet they are treated as individuals rather than as a species, and therefore room is made for this foreign individual. It is located about a rod south of Mr. Chas. D. Thomas's residence, on the east side of Prospect St., between Woburn and King Sts. It was propagated from a tree imported from Germany, about thirty-five years ago, by Ellwanger & Barry, nurserymen, of Rochester, N. Y.

Mr. Thomas, happening to see one of the first trees of this variety planted in this country, gave an order for one to Mr. Jacob W. Manning, nurseryman, of Reading, who procured three trees from the importers. One of these is the subject of this sketch, and was planted where it now stands, in the spring of 1864, by Mr. Charles D. Thomas (b. 1831) and Miss E. Josephine Temple, she holding the tree while Mr. Thomas filled in the earth. The following year, Miss Temple became Mrs. Thomas.

The top divides into two smaller trunks, at about six feet from the ground. These are sprouts which appeared soon after planting. The old top is still alive, and has assumed the character of a limb, which measures about five inches in diameter, and extends toward the east.

The measurements in August, 1887, were as follows:—

<i>Circumference.</i>	<i>Height.</i>	<i>Spread.</i>
2 in. from ground, 5 ft. 10½ in.	47 ft.	39 ft.
3 ft. " " 5 ft. 6¼ in.		

Our photograph, taken in August, 1887, from a position southeast of tree, shows the main trunk and the larger of the two smaller trunks, the other being directly in the rear. The old original top is the lowest branch on the right-hand side. Still further to the right may be seen a pruned hemlock, which was set out at the same time as the birch.

The long pendulous branchlets, which respond to the slightest zephyr, give an air of grace and refinement to the entire surroundings. Notwithstanding Mr. Thomas has some of the rarest trees in Reading, not one of them would be missed half so much as this beautiful specimen.

The cut-leaved birch is a variety of the European white birch (*Betula alba*). It is said the original tree was found in Sweden, by the son of the noted botanist, Linnæus. It was propagated in the nurseries of Germany and exported to America for the first time about 1850. Our native white birch (*Betula alba* var. *populifolia*) is generally considered by botanists as another variety of the same species, although some authorities make it a distinct species.

The cut-leaved variety is so rare, and so highly esteemed as an ornamental tree, that it is not embodied in such humble but very useful articles, — spools, shoe-pegs, etc., — as is our common variety.

It is especially effective on lawns, either singly or in combination with other trees, the green of the leaves contrasting very prettily with the almost pure white of the trunk and larger branches.