

Rare Native Tree Planted At Fort Laurens

Date: May 26, 2006

Bolivar, OH—The American Chestnut tree, once one of the most important trees in eastern forests and now nearly extinct, was replanted at Fort Laurens State Memorial near Bolivar, Ohio due to the efforts of the not-for-profit organization the Friends of Fort Laurens Foundation.

Tom Pieper, president of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, stated the American chestnut was a species of tree of significant importance to the original 1778 construction of the Fort Laurens stockade and its inner buildings due to its good splitting characteristics. In addition, Pieper indicated the trees would have supplied the soldiers with a good source of badly needed food.

The Foundation purchased the seedling chestnut trees two years ago from a nursery in Plains, Montana. The seedlings were cultivated until they were ready for planting under the care and direction of Chris Daeger, arboretum manager and nurseryman at the Cincinnati, Ohio based Stanley M. Rowe Arboretum.

Approximately 25 American chestnut trees were planted by representatives of the Friends of Fort Laurens Foundation, the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) and Boy Scout Troop 203 and Cub Scout Pack 200 of North Industry, Ohio and Cub Pack 6 of Salem, Ohio. The trees were planted along Ft. Laurens Road/County Road 102 as part of the 1000 feet long planned reforestation area of the park. The trees currently range from 3 feet to 6 feet in height.

The American chestnut began to disappear from eastern forests that ranged from Maine to the Ohio and Tennessee Valley at the beginning of the 20th century. An Asian based fungus discovered in 1904, ravaged the trees and essentially eliminated this granddaddy of the forest in more than 30 million acres of eastern woodlands.

Foundation Trustee Scott Fisher said it is possible the newly planted trees at Fort Laurens could obtain the virus within 5 to 7 years. "The blight did not cross the Rocky Mountains and thus the reason the seedlings were purchased from a Montana nursery," said Fisher. "An American Chestnut-Chinese Chestnut hybrid that is supposed to be blight resistant is expected to be in circulation within two years. These hybrids could eventually replace any infected chestnut trees we have planted at Fort Laurens."

Miami University Professor of Botany and Ohio Vice-President of the Ohio Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, Carolyn Keiffer, told Fisher that Ohio needs a source of chestnut pollen in order to breed more chestnut trees. "So if the trees we have planted do nothing more than produce pollen over the next five to seven years, the northern Tuscarawas area should be an ideal area to begin the American/Chinese hybrid experiment," said Fisher.

Fort Laurens was the only American Revolutionary War fort built in what now is the state of Ohio. It was constructed on the banks of the Tuscarawas River near the present village of Bolivar, OH in northern Tuscarawas County. Twenty-one American soldiers were killed at the site.

More information on the American Chestnut Foundation can be found at: www.acf.org.
More information on the Friends of Fort Laurens Foundation can be found at:
www.friendsoffortlaurens.org