The Illinois State Fairgrounds is the site of a new arboretum showcasing historic Americans and moments in history.

Famous and Historic Trees

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If trees could talk, the stories they could tell.

Our nation's trees stand as living witnesses to our nation's rich history and resourceful citizenry. The Department of Natural Resources' Urban and Community Forestry Program, with funding from the USDA Forest Service, has set out to tell those stories by creating the State of Illinois Famous and Historic Tree Arboretum. Located in Springfield at Conservation World within the State Fairgrounds, the arboretum tells the stories of people, but, more importantly, the connection between people and trees throughout history.

In 1785, when George Washington planted a yellow poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) at his Mount Vernon home, little did he know that 200 years later this tree would be selected as Mount Vernon's official bicentennial tree. Washington loved his tulip poplars and often took an evening stroll under these trees. While most people know Washington as our nation's first president, he also could be described as a naturalist, forester and horticulturalist. He had an intense interest in the natural resources of the region, and that translated into

yellow poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*

(Photo by Joe McFarland.)

Illinois' Famous and Historic Tree Arboretum is located on the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield.

the practice of horticulture. On one of Washington's many journeys throughout the region, he found the sweet red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) and transplanted it at his "Little Hunting Creek Farm," later to be known as the Mount Vernon estate.

red buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*

By 1885, Theodore Roosevelt had finished building his home on Sagamore Hill, also known as the Summer White House. Of the trees that landscaped his home, including a red osier dogwood, he stated: "There could be no healthier and pleasanter place in which to bring up children than in that nook of old-time America around Sagamore Hill."

Being president is quite hectic, which is why President John F. Kennedy is reported to have remarked while standing on a tree-filled hill on the grounds of Arlington National

crabapple, *Malus* sp.

Cemetery: "This is so beautiful I could stand here forever." This sense of solace provided by the beauty of trees has helped provide moments of peacefulness for even the most notable of national leaders. This very spot, landscaped with crabapples, became his final resting spot.

Conservation World is located on the northwest corner of the Illinois State Fairgrounds and is open to the public year-round.

Illinois' very own Abraham Lincoln was surrounded by trees his entire life. In the Famous and Historic Arboretum is a descendant of a persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) from the childhood cabin where he was born in

persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*

(Photo by Valerie Keener.)

1809, and a white oak (*Quercus alba*) grown from acorns from a tree in Albion, under which Lincoln campaigned for General William Harrison during the presidential race of 1840.

The Famous and Historic Arboretum has a collection of cherry trees propagated from the world-renowned, Washington D.C. Tidal Basin Japanese cherry trees, famous as symbols of peace. In Illinois, the cherries bloom in mid to late April.

John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, set out barefoot in the early 1800s, traveling from Pennsylvania through the upper Midwest planting, selling and giving away apple trees produced from seeds he collected from cider presses. A prodigy of a Johnny Appleseed tree is planted in the Famous and Historic Arboretum.

Clara Barton (founder of the American Red Cross) and Amelia Earhart (first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in 1928 and the second person to fly solo across the ocean) both have trees from their family homes planted in this arboretum—a Kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) and a sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), respectively. How appropriate that Earhart had a maple tree with helicopter seeds (samaras) outside her childhood window so she could watch the seeds fly to the ground each year.

sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*

The arboretum has an avenue of sycamore trees (*Platanus occidentalis*) that are significant to a number of famous Americans, including Gifford Pinchot, John James Audubon, Martin Luther King, Jr., Elvis Presley and Betsy Ross, and to three historic moments in American history: passage of the Stamp Act, Ellis Island and the Apollo XIV Moon mission.

Others significant historical events, places and people featured include the Mark Twain Cave bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), Indian Marker pecan (*Carya illinoinensis*), Williamsburg golden raintree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*), Minuteman red maple (*Acer rubrum*), Gettysburg Address honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), Walden Woods weeping willow (*Salix sp.*), Pearl S. Buck crabapple (*Crategus* sp.), Edgar Allen Poe hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) and the Longwood Gardens dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptosoboides*).

These are only a few of the many stories trees can tell. To view a brochure with a listing of trees in Illinois' Famous and Historic Tree Arboretum, including a map and the stories behind the trees, visit the DNR Urban and Community Forestry Web site at dnr.state.il.us/ORC/urbanforestry/PDF/2010_Historic_trees.pdf.

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