



# THE BUR

Volume 24, No. 1

Newsletter of the New York State Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

Spring 2018

## Chuck Maynard Receives Charles Burnham Award

### The American Chestnut Foundation's Highest Honor

by John Neumann, TACF-NY Secretary & Vice President for Education

Dr. Charles A. "Chuck" Maynard, was presented with the Dr. Charles Burnham Award, at The American Chestnut Foundation's 34th Annual Meeting in Portland, Maine, on October 7, 2017.

Dr. Maynard recently retired as Professor of Science at the State University of New York College of Forestry and Environmental Science (SUNY-ESF), the oldest and most distinguished institution in the United States that focuses on the study of the environment. Dr. Maynard is also co-founder and co-director of the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project at SUNY-ESF, and a charter member of The American Chestnut Foundation's New York State Chapter.

The Burnham Award, the highest honor bestowed by The American Chestnut Foundation, is named after Dr. Charles Burnham, an eminent scientist, co-founder of TACF and father of TACF's backcross breeding program.

It was particularly fitting that the award was presented to Dr. Maynard by his close colleague and friend, Dr. William A. Powell. Bill Powell had worked together with Chuck Maynard for more than twenty-five years as co-directors of their American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project at SUNY-ESF. On hand to congratulate Chuck was Allen Nichols, President of the New York State Chapter, and other friends and associates from SUNY-ESF and TACF-NY.

In 1989 and 1990, Drs. Maynard and Powell, worked with New York State

Chapter founders Herb Darling and Stan & Arlene Wirsig to set up the SUNY-ESF/TACF-NY partnership that has proved to be both durable and productive.

Dr. Maynard pioneered in cutting edge biotechnology techniques that advanced the science, and culminated in the successful development of the world's first blight-resistant transgenic American chestnut trees.\* The value of Dr. Maynard's scientific achievements in furthering the goal of returning the American chestnut to its native range is widely recognized, and is being integrated into The American Chestnut Foundation's strategic plan for American chestnut restoration.

Because of his distinguished devotion to the American chestnut and to science, as well as his personal qualities, Chuck has gained the admiration and love of his students, colleagues, and members of TACF's New York State Chapter.

When I think of Chuck as a teacher and person, a clear memory comes to mind. A number of years ago, groups of New York State Chapter members were touring the SUNY-ESF chestnut research labs in Syracuse NY. While waiting for the next group, I asked two of Chuck's students how he was as a teacher. One replied, "Professor Maynard makes me feel my work here is important." The other then said, "Definitely." At dinner that evening, when I mentioned this conversation to Chuck, he smiled and simply said, "Well, their work is important".



Photo Courtesy of Jules Smith

New York State Chapter President Allen Nichols noted that Chuck used every opportunity to praise the efforts of volunteers in our chapter. Allen recounted that when he promoted his "two tree orchard" idea (for chapter members to plant a pure American chestnut now, to be pollinated by our transgenic trees, once available for distribution), Chuck praised that concept as a practical way a person with only a small space could assist with chestnut restoration on his own property,

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The American Chestnut Foundation  
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<https://www.acf.org/ny/>

Founded in 1990, the New York State Chapter (TACF-NY) is the oldest chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, Inc., a non-profit 501 (c) (3) membership organization. TACF-NY, in partnership with the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is working to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern forests by developing truly blight-resistant American chestnut trees through biotechnology. Membership information may be found on the back page of *The Bur*.

#### Officers

(Terms End at the 2020 Annual Meeting)

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\*Executive Committee

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Linda McGuigan - *The Bur* Editor

## President's Message



As we head into 2018 SUNY-ESF and the NY chapter of TACF are busy as ever and doing everything we can to insure the success of our restoration program. SUNY-ESF is working on the submission to get approval to distribute blight resistant material consisting of, seedlings, pollen and grafting scions. If you check on page 3 you will see that we are looking for trees with "CRUDDY" bark which may allow us to protect trees from being killed by the blight. In addition to this we would also like to locate small chestnut resprouts that are still coming up from the original stumps.

See the picture of me with a typical chestnut resprout. Our plan is to dig up some of those small plants and transplant them into the orchards at SUNY-ESF so they can be pollinated with blight resistant pollen as soon as they start to produce burs/nuts. Those small trees will be genetically identical to the original tree that was killed by the blight years ago. We would like to get some of these resprouts from all parts of NY and possibly other states. If anyone knows the location of some resprouts we would like them marked, and a leaf and twig sent in for positive identification. Then in the fall or spring while they are still dormant they can be dug up and transplanted. Anyone finding any trees with "cruddy" bark, or resprouts that are small enough to be dug up by hand please contact me.

Allen Nichols  
President, TACF-NY  
[fajknichols.75@gmail.com](mailto:fajknichols.75@gmail.com)  
(607) 263-5105



## Mark Your Calendars!

The annual TACF-NY meeting is scheduled for October 6, 2018 in New Paltz, NY.

We have 20 rooms reserved for the fall meeting at Americas Best Value Inn <https://www.redlion.com/new-paltz?>) in New Paltz, NY. These rooms will only be held until 5/11/18, so please make your reservations ASAP. If you wait until this fall there will not be rooms available. To reserve a room you MUST contact Kimberly Massaro ONLY at (845) 255-8865 ext: 251. Kimberly is not at the hotel Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but if you leave a voicemail she will get back to you. After 5/11/18 anyone that calls can talk to the front desk staff and make reservations, if rooms are still available. Please use the rate code K180510MC to get your discount. Looking forward to a great meeting and feel free to contact me if you have any questions. -Allen Nichols, TACF-NY President, (607) 263-5105



# “Cruddy” Bark Search

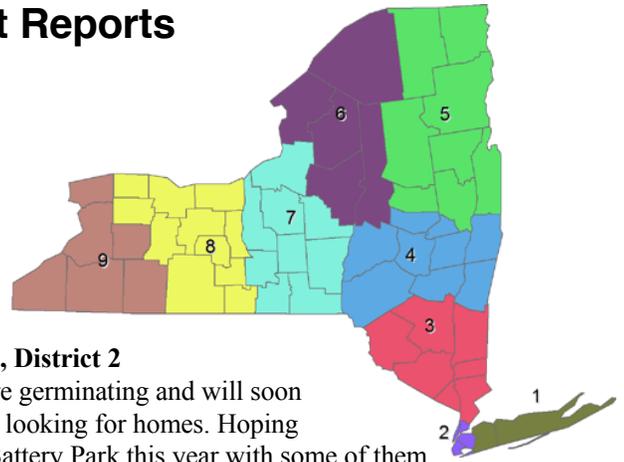
By Allen Nichols, TACF-NY President



Photo Courtesy of Niko Nantsis

The NY chapter is looking for any American chestnuts that have "cruddy" bark as seen in the above photo taken by Long Island member Niko Nantsis. This is a condition that is only partly understood but it looks to be transmittable from canker to canker and tree to tree. The trees that show this "cruddy" bark on the blighted areas seem to survive the blight. It looks as if the blight/canker continues to spread up and down the trunk of a tree but without destroying the cambium layer of the tree. If we can inoculate blighted trees with the "cruddy" bark defense, we could possibly keep many of our mother trees and large flowering trees alive longer. In dense stands of resprouts, or in our orchards, it is possible it may naturally transmit from tree to tree and allow many trees in those areas to continue to grow and flower. Please contact Allen Nichols or your district representative if you have found this phenomena.

## District Reports



### Dale Travis, District 2

Chestnuts are germinating and will soon be seedlings looking for homes. Hoping to re-plant Battery Park this year with some of them.

### Allen Nichols, District 4

As District 4 Director it has been a busy fall and spring. I have sent out over 3,000 nuts for mother trees to over 100 members already in 2018. I have many requests for presentations and the summer will be busy. I made a concerted effort on some of the cold winter days to contact people that had expired memberships from 2016, and that in conjunction with many new members increased the NY chapter membership to new levels, with our membership level the highest of any single state chapter.

### Roy Hopke, District 7

SUNY Morrisville students visited the Sherburne Plantation for their Invasive Species Course in February. Jim Donowick collected approximately 8,000 nuts from the plantation this fall, which were distributed widely. For many years Jay Hager has been a dedicated volunteer at the plantation. Unfortunately, health issues have restricted his activities this past year. Jay tells us his treatments have helped, and hopes to be more active this year. Thank you Jay! We will be putting some more trees in the plantation this year to replace the die offs. DEC has a nice sign explaining the chestnut planting at the gate and there is a trail in and around the plantation. A lot of people are seeing this effort.

### Bill Snyder, District 9

Bill Snyder presented an American Chestnut update to the Annual Rural Landowner Workshop, sponsored by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Allegany County. The talk was well attended and interested persons expressed a desire to become members. The annual field maintenance day at the William White Chestnut forest in Zoar Valley is scheduled for May 5th, starting at 9:30 am.

District 1 – Enrico Nardone, [EGNardone@Seatuck.org](mailto:EGNardone@Seatuck.org)

District 2 – Dale L. Travis, [dale@daletravis.com](mailto:dale@daletravis.com)

District 3 – Frank Munzer, [MunzerFrank@gmail.com](mailto:MunzerFrank@gmail.com)

District 4 – Allen Nichols, [fajknichols.75@Gmail.com](mailto:fajknichols.75@Gmail.com)

District 5 – Emmett Hoops, [emmett.hoops@gmail.com](mailto:emmett.hoops@gmail.com)

District 6 – Peter S. Pike Sr., [northernpiker1@aol.com](mailto:northernpiker1@aol.com)

District 7 – Roy Hopke, [SnowHawke1@gmail.com](mailto:SnowHawke1@gmail.com)

District 8 – Paul Ackerman, [trapnman1@netzero.net](mailto:trapnman1@netzero.net)

District 9 – William A. Snyder, [wasnyderhort@gmail.com](mailto:wasnyderhort@gmail.com)

# Annual Chapter Meeting at Syracuse a Huge Success:



Photo by Mark Meehl

- Over a Thousand Pure American Chestnuts Exchanged or Given Away
- Chuck Maynard Recognized for Receiving TACF's Highest Honor
- Frank Munzer Honored as Vice President Emeritus
- 99 Year Old Sherret Chase Honored For Longest Chestnut Work
- We Toured SUNY-ESF Chestnut Labs, Greenhouses & Orchards
- Chapter is Growing & Strengthened with Three New Vice Presidents

## What a great meeting it was!

We learned. We laughed. We conducted chapter business and planned for the future. We exchanged ideas and free chestnuts. We celebrated our accomplishments, and honored three of our members. Here are the highlights:

Over fifty enthusiastic TACF-NY members, SUNY-ESF American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project personnel along with others interested in bringing back the American chestnut, gathered at the SUNY-ESF campus and the Genesee Grande Hotel last October 20th and 21st for the 27th Annual Meeting of our chapter.

The presence of Herb Darling, our first chapter president, the only surviving founder of our chapter (Stan and Arlene Wirsig have passed on to the great chestnut forest), former national president and first chairman of the board of TACF, and now our president emeritus, whom SUNY-ESF named the first blight resistant transgenic American chestnut

trees after, always give us confidence and guidance.

Many of us met at The Genesee Grande hotel Friday night for the annual Harvest Exchange, where over a thousand pure American chestnuts, gathered from various locations in New York State and beyond, were exchanged or given away free to those who will plant them, or will give them to others who will plant them. The purpose is to preserve the genetic diversity of as many surviving American chestnut trees as possible and to promote the planting of these trees for future pollination with our "Darlings" (the proven blight-resistant transgenic American chestnut trees developed over the last 27 years through our chapter's partnership with SUNY-ESF).

Saturday morning began with many more arrivals, as well as coffee, tea & a hot breakfast for all. Chapter President Allen Nichols reported on membership growth and gearing up for chestnut restoration. He discussed the projected not very

distant distribution of the transgenic blight-resistant, 99.999% pure American Chestnut seedlings, pollen and scions. He also noted that today, almost none of us have ever experienced fully grown, healthy American chestnut trees in the forest. Allen said "Despite that fact, our member dedication is remarkable and our efforts are not for ourselves but for future generations".

Dr. Charles A. "Chuck" Maynard, a charter member of our chapter, was recognized for being at The American Chestnut Foundation's national meeting earlier in October and receiving their highest award (See our page 1 story.) This is a great recognition of Chuck personally as well as the recognition of the advancement of science by the ESF American Chestnut Project, and the merit of the world's first blight-resistant American chestnut trees.

All of the officers terms ended at this meeting. Frank Munzer's planned retirement as Vice President launched serious deliberations with officers and members of the nominating committee. Because of his long and valued service, the committee nominated Frank as Vice President Emeritus. To strengthen the future capabilities of our chapter, the committee presented a bold alternative to having just one generic vice president.

# Members are Ready to Take on the Challenges Ahead



Allison Oakes shows transgenic American Chestnut trees in a greenhouse on the SUNY-ESF campus. Photo by Mark Meehl



Tyler Desmarais shows transgenic American Chestnut trees in the field. Photo by Linda McGuigan

A written plan was presented to create three chapter vice presidents, each with a specific area of responsibility: science, education, and outreach. The nominating committee had three well qualified candidates to present. The resolution was unanimously approved, and all of the nominated candidates were unanimously elected to serve three year terms. Allen Nichols was elected President to serve a second term. John Dougherty was elected Vice President for Science. John Neumann was elected Vice President for Education. Emmett Hoops was elected Vice President for Outreach. John Neumann was elected Secretary for a second term. Fran Nichols was elected Treasurer for a second term. Herb Darling was elected President Emeritus for a second term. Frank Munzer was elected Vice President Emeritus and a special custom made framed and matted citation was presented.

Our District Directors reported on the varied activities taking place in the nine regional districts across the state. This arrangement makes it easier for chapter members to volunteer and get involved closer to where they live. The dedication and work accomplished across the state, all done by volunteers is amazing.

President Allen Nichols recognized one of the chapter volunteers who is always present at the annual meetings, Sherret Chase. He is oldest member of our chapter and is a former chapter director. Sherret turned 99 last June. Allen lauded Sherret's efforts to restore the American chestnut,

longer than anyone we are aware of, going back more than 90 years to Sherret's boyhood. Allen said, "Through all those decades, Sherret continued his American chestnut work, and he is still at it. Sherret, you are an inspiration to us all." While Sherret was visibly appreciate of this recognition, his simple reply was "Never give up. I will see you all at this meeting next year." We believe he will.

The science reports, presented by members of the ESF team, are always popular and informative. Erik Carlson's subject was using CRISPR technology for American chestnut. Hanna Pilkey discussed chestnut pollen collection and Andy Newhouse presented the effects of transgenic chestnut leaves on tadpoles. Dr. William Powell, director of the ESF Chestnut Project, talked about what's next. After decades of effort, where we are now is very exciting.

After enjoying a great lunch, we had a most interesting lunchtime speaker, Neil Patterson, of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment. Mr. Patterson is a Cayuga Native American. He spoke about Native American culture and the Haudenosaunee League (known to many Americans as the Iroquois Confederacy) in particular, especially in relation to respect for, and care of, the environment. We learned much, and are grateful to Mr. Patterson for sharing with us.

We toured the ESF greenhouses (see left photo above) and high light growth chambers in Illick Hall. We also examined

the many chestnut plantings at the ESF Lafayette Road Experiment station (see right photo above). The tours were enjoyable and informative. Progress was evident everywhere. We also had our questions answered by the SUNY-ESF chestnut team professionals.

Afternoon workshops included observing bee pollen on a scanning electron microscope, lead by Dakota Mathews; learning how to use TreeSnap (an app used to document American chestnuts in the wild, lead by Linda McGuigan; planting mother tree orchards, lead by Allen Nichols; and brainstorming activities and resources needed for a possible 2019 release date of the blight-resistant transgenic American chestnut, lead by John Dougherty.

There was also the announcement of the winners to our silent auction and the 50/50 drawing, with all proceeds going to the chapter.

Saturday evening we enjoyed an adventurous dinner at the Empire Farm Brewery in nearby Cazenovia, where we explored the brewery and enjoyed a private room, great food, and fellowship

Once again, we thank Linda Polin-McGuigan, the always capable and dedicated ESF Chestnut Project Plant Tissue Culture lab manager and TACF-NY chapter member for diligently coordinating all of the meeting arrangements. We left the meeting happy, energized and ready to take on the challenges ahead.

## Chuck Maynard Honored

*Continued from page 1*



*Photo by Linda McGuigan*

without having to bag any of the female flowers, and encouraged Allen to continue.

One hundred years from now, when healthy and large American chestnut trees have been fully restored to our eastern forests, the name of Charles Maynard may have been forgotten. But for us who know him, Chuck Maynard is a chestnut champion for the ages.

\*Over the course of more than 25 years, Professors Maynard and Powell, along with their team of dedicated scientists, technicians, graduate and undergrad students, with support of TACF- NY, pioneered the development of genetic engineering techniques to insert the oxalate oxidase detoxifying gene from wheat (also found in banana, potato, corn, tomato and other foods) into American chestnuts to yield fungus-resistant trees. Science research has confirmed that genetic transfers commonly occur in the natural world. Even though these trees are 99.999% pure American chestnut, because they carry the oxalate oxidase enzyme that confers blight resistance, they are considered to contain a PIP (Plant Incorporated Protectant) and therefore are regulated by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). Given that the gene was added by the natural genetic engineer, *Agrobacterium*, it is regulated by the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Regulatory review by the FDA (Food & Drug Administration) is voluntary, but since the American chestnut produces a food and feed crop, SUNY-ESF will also seek their review and approval as our part of their due diligence to the restoration.

## Chestnut Trees to Grow in Brooklyn



*Matt Cline, Bart Cezar and Brad Vogel with American chestnuts to be planted*

In TACF-NY's District 2, covering New York City, TACF member Brad Vogel and prospective member Matt Cline hand off young pure American chestnut trees to TACF member Bart Cezar along the banks of the Gowanus Canal in July 2017. TACF-NY President Allen Nichols provided pure American Chestnuts in March 2017 to Vogel, who enlisted the help of Cline, Suresh Seneviratne, and Katie Petryna to grow seedlings in their Brooklyn apartments. While not all of the seedlings survived, those handed off appear robust for the time being. Cezar, who met Vogel initially through the Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club, has arranged with a local organization for the young trees to be planted in Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza at the entrance to Prospect Park.

## Cook State Park's Chestnut Log Cabin



*Luann Hopke standing in front of the Log Cabin Inn. Photo by Roy Hopke*

TACF-NY's District 7 Director Roy Hopke reports that Cook State Park in Chenango County, NY is the home of the "Log Cabin Inn", constructed entirely of American chestnut in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Core (CCC). This historic structure has been well maintained over the years and is still in active use. If you know of a structure in New York State that is made of American chestnut, please gather information, a photo, and contact *The Bur* editor, Linda Polin-McGuigan at [lpolin@esf.edu](mailto:lpolin@esf.edu) for possible use in a future issue.

# The American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project at SUNY-ESF

## *Tadpoles, Fungi, and Bumble Bees Advance Transgenic Chestnut Research*

By Andy Newhouse



As most of *The Bur* readers are aware, American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) was once an integral part of eastern US deciduous forests, with many environmental, economic, and social values. This of course ended with the introduction of chestnut blight, but transgenic American chestnuts expressing a gene for oxalate oxidase (OxO) successfully tolerate blight infections. OxO is naturally found in many crops and wild plants, so it is not new to the environment, but testing interactions with neighboring organisms is a reasonable precaution and an important part of the federal regulatory process. Several recent experiments at ESF have evaluated various aspects of environmental interactions of transgenic American chestnuts.

Starting last spring, we observed tadpole development and survival in the presence of chestnut leaves: this simulates an interaction that might take place in vernal pools, which are temporary ponds that form in deciduous forests. Leaf types in this test included transgenic and non-transgenic American chestnuts, Chinese chestnut, F1 hybrid chestnut, American beech, and sugar maple (beech and maple

represent native trees in NY that are currently common in areas with vernal pools). Some treatments also received supplemental food along with leaves. The only leaf type that was significantly detrimental to tadpole survival was American beech: there were no differences in tadpole between chestnut leaf types. Development rates were similar for most leaf types, with one notable exception: in jars that did not receive supplemental food, tadpoles developed significantly faster in the presence of American chestnut leaves, whether or not they were transgenic, compared to maple and other leaf types.



*Tadpole with leaf litter. Photo by Andy Newhouse*

We thus concluded that restoration of American chestnuts in general could potentially be beneficial to frogs, and more specifically that transgenic chestnut leaves are not harmful to tadpoles.

Next, we looked at mutually beneficial relationships between tree roots and fungi, called mycorrhizae. Some people assume that since OxO helps chestnuts tolerate infections of the blight fungus, it might also affect associations with beneficial fungi. To test this theory, we observed mycorrhizal interactions on the roots of our most blight-tolerant transgenic lines ('Darling 54' and 'Darling 58'), along with non-transgenic controls. All of the tested trees had more than 90% of their root tips colonized with mycorrhizal fungi. There were no

significant differences between root colonization of transgenic and non-transgenic chestnuts.

Finally, we tested interactions between chestnut pollen containing the OxO enzyme and native bumble bees, which forage on chestnut pollen and probably contribute to pollination. We have not yet been able to test how much OxO is expressed in transgenic chestnut pollen, so we added purified OxO enzyme to wild-type chestnut pollen for this experiment, based on OxO quantities we've tested in other chestnut tissues. We provided all bees with American chestnut pollen: some of which was supplemented with OxO and some of which was left without OxO. We found that the bees that received a realistic concentration of OxO in pollen performed nearly identically to the bees that received the controls that were without OxO: there were no significant differences in terms of survival, bee size, pollen use, hive construction activity, or reproductive effort. This indicates that oxalate oxidase, as it will likely be expressed in chestnut pollen, doesn't appear to present novel risks to bees.



*Bees with chestnut pollen. Photo by Andy Newhouse*

Along with other environmental impact comparisons, these studies provide further evidence that transgenic American chestnuts are unlikely to present unique environmental risks compared to other types of chestnuts. All three of these studies are currently being prepared for potential publication in scientific journals.

Website:

[www.esf.edu/chestnut/](http://www.esf.edu/chestnut/)

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/esfchestnut>



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All memberships to TACF include TACF publications, a car decal, membership to one of the state chapters as well as opportunities to participate in local chestnut activities. Visit [www.acf.org](http://www.acf.org) or call (828) 281-0047 for more information.

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NY Chapter membership includes the Newsletter *The Bur*. The NY Chapter helps guide research at SUNY-ESF and maintains plantings to keep the American Chestnut gene pool. TACF & TACF- NY Chapter are 501 (c) (3) non-profit organizations. Except for the membership services portion of your contribution (valued at \$15) your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.