

STORIES of New Jersey

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LIVING LANDMARKS



Burlington Sycamore

Much older and more beautiful than the granite and marble monuments erected in New Jersey to honor famous men or famous events are a number of fine old trees that have withstood storm and disease for centuries. Some of these, because of their historic associations, are being cared for today by historical societies, governmental agencies or private individuals.

Oaks and sycamores predominate in the list of living monuments. Both are hardwood trees and noted for long life. The oak grows slowly. The sycamore (also called the buttonwood) sets a faster pace; by some authorities it is considered the most massive of our native deciduous trees. It resembles the plane tree, and is distinguished by its burr-like blossom and the periodic peeling of its bark, leaving streaked patches of white. The sycamore prefers low ground, and is most commonly found in southern New Jersey.

In the city of Burlington is the largest tree in the State, a giant sycamore measuring 20.3 feet in circumference $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the ground. Estimated to be more than 400 years old, this tree once shaded the lawn at the home of William Franklin, last Royal Governor of New Jersey. A small strip of land now lies between the tree and Delaware River, but in the early days the river flowed close by the sycamore. To the sturdy trunk was moored the ship Shield, from which a little company of English colonists landed in 1678 to establish the settlement that later became Burlington. This veteran is known as the Witches Tree, because of a tradition that witches danced about it.

On the King's Highway at Haddonfield is a row of sycamores more than 250 years old. Their branches were green over the heads of marching soldiers during the Revolution, and beneath them camped foraging parties led by General Anthony Wayne, as he gathered supplies for the army of Washington. Count Donop, Count Pulaski, and the Marquis de Lafayette knew their shade. In 1778 the British army marched beneath their boughs on its retreat to New York after