WHAT: Planting of potentially blight-resistant American chestnuts
WHEN: NEW DATE - Saturday, November 8 at 11a.m.
WHERE: Smith-McDowell House Museum, 283 Victoria Road, Asheville, North Carolina 28801

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 31, 2014

Blight-resistance chestnut trees to grace Olmsted landscape design at Smith-McDowell House

Asheville, NC – On Saturday, November 8, 2014 at 11 a.m., the Smith-McDowell House Museum will host a ceremonial planting of potentially blight-resistant American chestnut seedlings as part of “Olmsted Revisited-2015,” a three-phase project to recreate the essence of the home’s original landscape design by the Olmsted Brothers. The chestnut seedlings, called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0, are part of a unique breeding program led by The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) to restore the American chestnut to the eastern forests of America. This event was originally scheduled for November 1, but postponed due to inclement weather in the Asheville area.

Saturday’s event will begin with a presentation by TACF’s Southeast Regional Science Coordinator, Tom Saielli who will discuss the history and ecology of the American chestnut prior to the planting. The general public is cordially invited to attend this special event to help celebrate the preservation and promotion of Western North Carolina’s history. Light refreshments will be served.

The Smith-McDowell House, circa 1840, is a visible and impressive record of an important era in Asheville history. The Olmsted Brothers company, an influential landscape design firm formed in 1898 by brothers John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was hired in the early 1900s to design a landscape plan for the Smith-McDowell property.

In 2014, the Men's Garden Club of Asheville was invited to provide leadership in restoring the landscape vision. Using the Olmsted Brothers’ original plan, the Men's Garden Club of Asheville, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) and the Western North Carolina Historical Association joined forces to recreate the essence of the 1900s landscape design. New plantings consisting of native bushes and trees, including American chestnut, are being installed to enhance both the grounds of the house and its campus.

“The American Chestnut Foundation is very excited to partner with the Smith-McDowell House Museum, the Men's Garden Club of Asheville, A-B Tech and the Western North Carolina Historical Association,” said Saielli. “TACF is a strong advocate of their efforts to recreate the original essence of the Olmsted landscape design, of which American chestnut was most certainly a component. These type of ceremonial plantings allow us to share the fascinating story of the American chestnut and generate interest among local citizens to join in our efforts.”
Once the mighty giants of the eastern forest, American chestnuts stood up to 100 feet tall, and numbered in the billions. From Maine to Georgia, the chestnut was a vital part of the eastern forest, provided abundant food for wildlife, and was an essential component of the economy. In the beginning of the 20th century the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight, accidentally imported from Asia, spread rapidly through the eastern forests and by 1950 the fungus had eliminated the chestnut as a mature forest tree.

In 1983, a dedicated group of scientists and laypersons formed The American Chestnut Foundation and began a special breeding process, which in 2005 produced the first potentially blight-resistant trees called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0. Now assisted by more than 5,000 members and volunteers in 23 states, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 in select locations throughout the eastern US.

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is a 501 (c) 3 conservation organization headquartered in Asheville, NC. For more information on TACF and their work to restore the American chestnut tree, contact TACF Director of Communications Ruth Goodridge at (828) 281-0047, email: ruth@acf.org, or visit www.acf.org.

The Men's Garden Club of Asheville has provided 75 years of continuous community services, including beautification projects throughout the area. The Club adopted the “Olmsted Revisited-2015” project as part of the 75th anniversary of its founding. Visit: http://mensgardenclubasheville.org/.

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, established in 1959, serves over 26,000 credit and continuing education students combined per year and contributes to the economic welfare of the community. Further information about A-B Tech is available online at: http://www.abtech.edu.

The Western North Carolina Historical Association operates the Asheville History Center at the Smith McDowell House and continues to preserve and interpret the unique history and culture of the people of western North Carolina. For additional information, visit: http://wnchistory.org/.