

# Chestnut Mast



Volume 15, Issue 1 The Carolinas Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation® Winter '13-14

## A New Sanctuary for Chestnut Wood

By Doug Gillis

The more than 120-year-old sanctuary of Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Edneyville, N.C., was demolished in 2012 so a new structure could be built to replace it. Among the materials salvaged were 11 14-foot-long rough sawn American chestnut floor joists—two inches thick and 10 to 12 inches wide. Chestnut wood from the joists was used to fabricate the doors that lead into the new church building and its sanctuary. Other recycled material includes pews that were refinished to look

new. Stained glass windows were repaired and used in the new building.

The salvaged floor joists were cured and dried for four months to lower moisture content to 7 percent. Two sets of double doors, each door 3 by 7 feet, provide church members and guests an impressive entryway into the church. Once inside the foyer, double doors of the same size made of American chestnut wood provide access to the sanctuary.

The exterior doors, which are exposed to sunlight and variable weather, are constructed to withstand exposure to

the elements, and particularly afternoon sunlight. The rails and styles of the doors consist of a laminated oak core material with 3/8-inch chestnut veneer covering it.

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*Above, demolition of Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Edneyville, N.C., in 2012. The church was built around 1890. Photo by Bill Barnwell. At left, the current wood doors leading into Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Photo by Doug Gillis.*

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## President's Message

# We Need Your Stories



THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION



This issue of the *Chestnut Mast* is our Winter '13-'14 issue. Normally, we would have a newsletter mailed to you as a spring, summer or fall edition. We hope to return to a summer or fall edition for 2014.

I hope you'll enjoy the articles in this issue about the use of chestnut wood. Take a look at the review of Chapter activities on the next page and get involved.

We do need your stories. It takes research and a bit of creativity to develop interesting articles that are fresh, fun to write and interesting to read. Tiffany Jothen is excellent at editing and arranging the articles and pictures provided her to produce an attractive newsletter. She needs material to put it together, and depends on Chapter volunteers and guest writers to provide it.

I ask you to help with the production of future Chapter newsletters. You can also submit short articles that are published several times a year in the Chapters' section of the *Journal of The American*

### Have a story to share?

Email [dgillis001@carolina.rr.com](mailto:dgillis001@carolina.rr.com),  
or call 704-542-0627.

*Chestnut Foundation*®. The Foundation also appreciates articles and captioned photos for inclusion in its e-newsletter, which appears online every other month, in between publications of the *Journal*.

We struggle to put on paper what we easily share in conversation with friends. But remember that you can write an article as though you are talking with a friend. It need not be polished.

Yet, once on paper, and with the help of an editor if need be, your words can reach a widespread audience who reads with enthusiasm stories never before seen in print.

I enjoy talking to Chapter members who share their interest in the American chestnut. I convert some of those conversations into articles for this Chapter

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*Photos by or courtesy of Paul Sisco,  
Doug Gillis, Bill Barnwell and Brent  
Lerwill*

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newsletter, the *Journal* or the e-newsletter.

You likely have a story to share, or know someone who does. Talk with other American chestnut enthusiasts, and if you are willing to help, get your conversations down on paper and share them with others by having articles published.

If you have a story to share, email it to me at [dgillis001@carolina.rr.com](mailto:dgillis001@carolina.rr.com) or call me at 704-542-0627.

**Doug Gillis**  
**Winter 2013-2014**

# 10 Things We're Doing Now

By Doug Gillis

Thanks to everyone who participated in orchard activities offered by the Carolinas Chapter in 2013. Similar opportunities will be available this year, and you can be part of it! To volunteer for Chapter activities, contact me by phone or email. You can find my contact information on page 2.

Here are 10 things we worked on in 2013. All of the following orchard work will be replicated in 2014.

1. 75 "Restoration Chestnuts 1.0" propagated at the Meadowview Research Farms, which Chapter members donated back to the Chapter, were planted in pots late last March. More of these "**Restoration Chestnuts**" need to be planted in pots this spring.
2. Approximately **200 chestnut seeds** were planted at the Clodfelter property, located west of Asheboro, N.C., on April 10, 2013. Another planting is expected this year.
3. More than 900 B3F2 nuts, propagated in Chapter orchards in 2012 and harvested that fall, were planted April 20-22, 2013, at the Pryor Farm Seed Orchard near Edneyville, N.C. Approximately **700 B3F2 nuts** will be planted there this spring.
4. Hand **pollinations** of selected trees in Chapter orchards occurred in late spring 2013, the results of which provided the B3F2 nuts for harvest and planting in the Chapter's seed orchard this year. Similar hand pollinations will occur in 2014.
5. In June 2013, Chapter members helped **collect pollen** from American chestnut trees located in the Carolinas to hand pollinate Chapter trees at Meadowview. In September 2013, volunteers helped harvest nuts from those trees for Chapter use.
6. Inoculation of trees in several Chapter orchards occurred during the summer of 2013 with results checked during the fall of last year. **Cankers**, which form around the inoculation sites, are measured and compared to provide an indication of the relative resistance trees have to chestnut blight. Canker measurements will occur in 2014 to help select trees for further breeding.

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*At left, Chapter intern Michael Egan pollinating a pure American chestnut tree that has been inoculated with blight and is in the process of dying.*

*Below, James Inman helped cut and remove more than 100 non-selected, blight-inoculated trees for burning. Both pictures at Cataloochee Ranch in spring 2013. Photos by Paul Sisco.*



# The Perfect Storm for Salvaging

By Doug Gillis

An American chestnut tree planted long ago on a private farm on the Upper Klamath River near Orleans, Calif., suffered storm damage. A major branch that contained a significant amount of wood was torn from the tree. Brent Lerwill, a friend of the farmer, arranged to salvage the fallen wood. He cured the wood for two years in his shop and milled it to build kitchen cabinets for his modest beach house in Charleston, Ore.

Such a task would be more typical of someone living in Charleston, W.V., where American chestnuts once ranged before blight devastated the species in the early 1900s. A West Virginian

would have to work with salvaged boards 70 to 80 years old. Brent had fresh chestnut wood boards 4 to 8 inches wide from which to select cabinet material. He wanted the cabinets to have a rustic look. He purposely picked boards with more radical, twisted grain and with large knots and even knot holes, reserving the boards with straighter grain for another use.

Brent knew the wood of the fallen tree was a rare and valuable commodity, particularly on the West Coast. He can show off the cabinets and engage friends and visitors in conversation about the history and heritage of the American chestnut. His cabin is now unique and no longer modest. The American chestnut cabinets give it a distinctive grace.

American chestnut trees, planted as nuts or seedlings, were introduced to the Northwest as much as 130 years ago. Blight is not a problem in the Northwest, and American chestnut trees growing there, though limited in number, grow strong and tall.

The American chestnut, could it speak to us, might assert that wherever it is planted and given a chance to grow, that “this land is ... my land, from California to the New York Island.” American chestnuts are growing in California and are growing again on Long Island as hybrid American type chestnuts hopefully able to survive attacks of blight.

People, whether on the East Coast or West Coast or somewhere between, who are bonded by a common interest in the lore and culture of the American chestnut will keep the tree and its mystique alive forever.

*Cabinets made from salvaged American chestnut wood that was damaged during a storm.*

*Photo by Brent Lerwill.*



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The core material, similar to plywood, is made of layers of thin, 1-inch wide strips of oak. The grain of the strips in each layer is oriented 90 degrees opposite to the adjoining layers. The alternating layers are bonded together with adhesive. Such orientation provides a very stable core that does not warp, shrink or expand. Chestnut veneer was cut from the floor joist using a band saw. The veneer, with a finished thickness of 3/8-inch, was applied over the core material. The panels of the exterior doors are milled from solid, salvaged chestnut wood.

The finished doors, though specially constructed, have the standard look of rails, styles and panels. The two interior doors, which are protected from weather, have rails, styles and panels that are solid chestnut wood.

Bill Barnwell, a retired Henderson County Public Schools building supervisor, served as Mount Moriah's construction representative. Carolina Specialties Construction, LLC, an American Buildings Company (ABC) authorized builder served as the general contractor. Zack Gordon was the company's superintendent. Whole Log Lumber Company of Green River, N.C., processed the salvaged American chestnut wood for the project. Sam Samolitits of Mills River, N.C., fabricated the doors.

*Interior doors at Mount Moriah Baptist, showing a reflection of the stained glass from the front doors to the church.*

*Photo by Doug Gillis.*



# Farm to Living Room: The Décor

By Doug Gillis

Joe and Sandy James live at Chestnut Return, a farm near Seneca, S.C., which they bought as a retreat from life in the city. They now live there permanently, and Joe has turned the farm into a Research Station for The American Chestnut Foundation.

With the help of others, he is breeding hybrid American chestnuts to produce trees with resistance to root rot as well as chestnut blight. American chestnut trees once grew in the Piedmont of the Carolinas. Root rot, introduced from Asia into the Plantation South, is lethal to American chestnuts. By the mid-1800s, most American chestnuts were gone from the Piedmont. Chestnut blight, also introduced from Asia, attacked remaining trees in the Piedmont and only a small number of persistent trees not destroyed by root rot continue to sprout.

Within the James' home is furniture made from American chestnut wood which they have collected over the years from various locations. Chestnut makes fine furniture, particularly when stock with complementary grain and colors are selected for its fabrication. The legacy of the American chestnut tree and its wood are evident in the James' home.

The beauty of its finely finished wood is seen in the dresser in their living room. In an upstairs room is a bed frame with head and foot boards made from American chestnut. An illustration by Lee Roberson titled "Hope," mounted in a chestnut wood frame, hangs on the wall by the front entrance of the James' home. The "hope" is as the name of the James' farm implies: the chestnut will return to the Piedmont of the Carolinas.

## Time for show and tell

Do you have a unique item made of chestnut wood?  
Tell us about it! Email [dgillis001@carolina.rr.com](mailto:dgillis001@carolina.rr.com),  
or call 704-542-0627.



*Some of the furniture featured in the home of Joe and Sandy James, who live on Chestnut Return farm near Seneca, S.C.*

*At the top, an illustration by Lee Roberson titled "Hope." The picture hangs in a chestnut wood frame by the front entrance of their home.*

*Above, a dresser made of finely finished chestnut wood in their living room.*

*To the left, a bed frame made of American chestnut wood helps furnish an upstairs bedroom.*

*Photos by Doug Gillis.*

# Culinary Corner: *Pineapple Upside Down Cake ... With a Chestnut Twist on Top*

By Doug Gillis

Baking an upside down cake with chestnuts filling the holes in pineapple rings was inspired by my father, Glen Gillis. He enjoyed baking a pineapple upside down cake in an iron skillet.

He traditionally filled the holes in the pineapple rings with Maraschinos cherries. One time, he couldn't find any cherries and used fruit cocktail instead. If something other than cherries can be used to fill the holes, why not chestnuts?

My father, who told me about American chestnuts when I was 12 years old, would appreciate my using chestnuts in his recipe.

## Pineapple upside down cake

### Ingredients:

- 3 oz. butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cooking oil
- 1 cup whole chestnuts, peeled and boiled (not roasted)
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup super moist yellow cake mix (a box has enough flour for two upside down cakes)
- 1 20 oz. can of sliced pineapple in pineapple juice

### Preparation:

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Slice the whole chestnuts in half lengthwise.

Drain the juice from the pineapple slices, reserving it for use in making the cake batter.

Prepare the cake batter in the bowl using an electric mixer blending together:

- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups of the cake mix
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  eggs (crack 2 eggs into a bowl, stir with a fork, place  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the amount in the bowl)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of cooking oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of reserved pineapple juice (add small amounts of juice and blend if batter needs thinning)

### Making the cake:

Heat a 9-inch iron skillet on the stovetop using medium heat.

Melt the butter, then stir in the brown sugar until the mixture is blended together. Lower the heat and simmer for 4 minutes. Turn off the heat.

Carefully lay pineapple slices in the bottom of the skillet, overlapping edges slightly. Place a piece of chestnut in each hole of each ring. Place remaining pieces of chestnut on the pineapple slices.

Pour the cake batter over the pineapple and chestnut slices, covering everything to the edge of the skillet. Place the skillet in the oven.

Check after 25 minutes to determine if the batter is baked by sticking a toothpick into the cake and removing it to see if it comes out clean. If it isn't baked, add 5 more minutes cooking time and retest it. Once the cake is baked, remove the skillet from the oven.

Immediately run a knife around the edge of the skillet to loosen the cake from the sides. Let the cake cool 10 minutes.



*Put a twist on this traditional recipe by adding chestnuts to the center of the pineapple slices. This recipe typically calls for cherries, but the chestnuts give this cake a unique flavor. This version is inspired by the American chestnuts Doug's father introduced him to at age 12. Photos by Doug Gillis.*

### Flipping the cake so the topside is up:

Place a towel on a countertop and put the skillet on it. Place a serving dish over the cake and fold the edges of the towel over the dish.

Holding the still warm skillet with one hand and the serving dish with the other, flip the skillet over. Place the serving dish and skillet on the counter, leaving the cake covered by the skillet for an additional 5 minutes.

Remove the skillet. The cake is ready to serve.



### Recipe idea?

Calling all cooks! Contact a board member with recipes that include chestnuts as a main ingredient. We might feature your recipe in the next issue of the *Chestnut Mast*.

# 10 THINGS

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7. Throughout 2013, we worked to breed American type chestnut trees resistant to both root rot and chestnut bark blight. This occurred at the Chestnut Return Research Station near Seneca, S.C. Seedlings grown in tubs and inoculated in 2012 were bare rooted in the winter and rated for **resistance to root rot**. The ones with the best relative resistance were planted in the fields at the farm. Those trees will grow, and later be inoculated and rated for resistance to chestnut bark blight and selected out for further breeding. The same process will be repeated this year.
8. We reviewed ongoing work at **Chestnut Return Farm** with members and guests at the Chapter meeting on Sept. 14, 2013.
9. During the Chapter picnic and orchard tour on Nov. 9, we also reviewed work in the **Pryor Seed Orchard** with members and guests in attendance.
10. Another part of orchard work is **harvesting nuts from pure American chestnut trees** in the wild or from orchard trees in September. Collected burrs are “shucked” and the nuts within are bagged in damp peat moss, stored and refrigerated for the winter to allow germination. They are used to plant orchards in the spring.

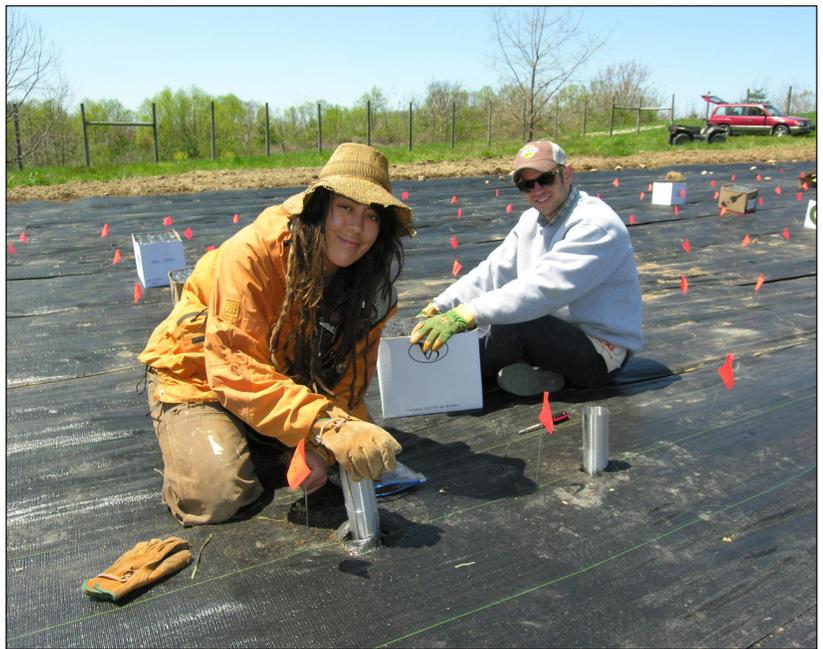
If you would like to experience orchard work for yourself, let us know. We would be happy for you to join our team!

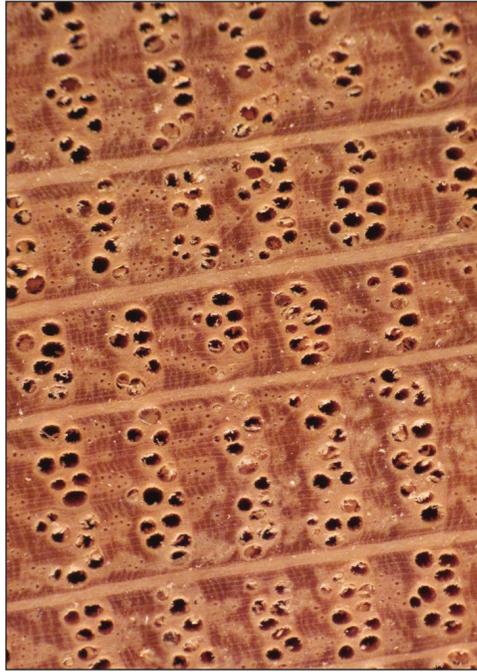
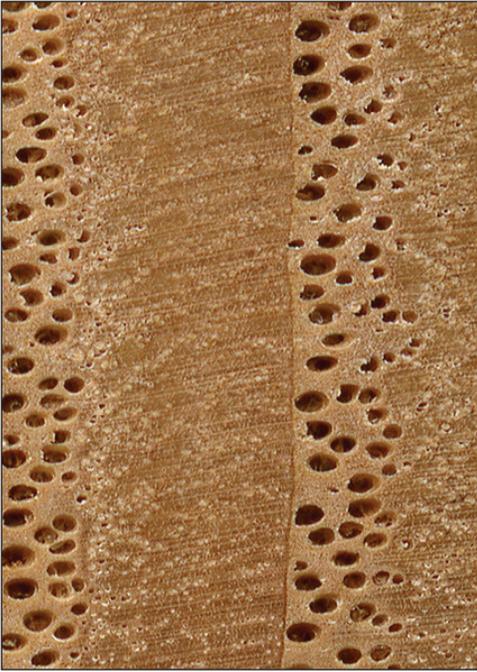
*Below, Scott and Nancy Pryor, who own and maintain Pryor Farm near Edneyville, N.C. The couple hosted the annual orchard tour, as well as other events, in 2013.*

*At right, Elliott Hollifield and Larkin at a Pryor Farm planting in April 2013.*

*At bottom right, the Chapter picnic and orchard tour is an annual event. In November 2013, it was held at Pryor Farm.*

*Photos by Doug Gillis.*





### What's the difference?

In this issue, you'll find a story about chestnut wood being used for furniture—and pictures showing the décor.  
(See page 5.)

Both chestnut and oak make great, sturdy furniture. But how do you tell them apart?

The best way to determine if wood is **chestnut or oak** is to examine a clean, smooth cross section cut on the end grain of a wood sample. Both chestnut and oak woods have bands of porous cells (springwood) parallel to the bark.

Both woods also have rays that extend from the center to the outer edge of the trunk.

But here's the difference:

Oak has relatively wide, light colored and easily visible rays of cells that cross perpendicular to the porous rings. Rays in chestnut wood are very narrow and can't be seen with the naked eye.

Can you tell which is which from the pictures on the left?

Take a look!

### See this issue in full color!

This issue and previous issues of the newsletter can be viewed in full color at [www.carolinas-tacf.org](http://www.carolinas-tacf.org) under "Resources."

*Above left, chestnut end grain.*

*Above right, red oak end grain. Taken from*

*The Wood Database, [www.wood-database.com](http://www.wood-database.com).*

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