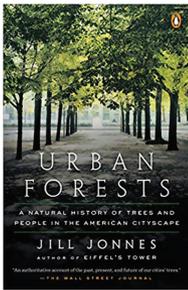


## Book Review

# A History of Urban Forests

Urban Forests: A Natural History of Trees and People in the American Cityscape. J. Jonnes. 2016. Viking, New York, NY. 394 p. \$32.00. ISBN 9780670015665.



Intended for a broad-based audience interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the history of trees and people in the United States, *Urban Forests* is a widely ranging and deeply researched resource produced by renowned author and ambassador of trees, Jill Jonnes. This 394-page book is informative and enlightening and features accounts

with, and interviews from, some of the world's foremost authorities in urban forestry. It is written in a manner that is engaging to the casual reader and surely gripping to any tree enthusiast; it does a fantastic job of transporting the reader to the world of urban forestry.

The introduction appropriately sets the tone by discussing the prominence of trees in relation to everyday society from their place in art and tale to their presence among the streets, parks, and national monuments in Washington, DC. It also outlines the importance of studying trees and attempting to further understand the insect and disease pests that can plague our urban trees. The text is divided into 22 formal chapters and closes with a final "Afterword."

Chapter 1, titled "So Great a Botanical Curiosity" and "The Celestial Tree: Introducing the Ginkgo and Ailanthus," delves into the history of trees in America. It includes information about politicians who loved trees—from Thomas Jefferson to Manasseh Cutler—to the role of early tree proponents, collectors, and entrepreneurs like William Hamilton, Engelbert Kaempfer, and Andrew Jackson Downing. This chapter details the early naturalization of nonnative trees common in the urban US landscape like Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) and Ailanthus (*Ailanthus altissima*).

Chapter 2, "No Man Does Anything More Visibly Useful to Posterity Than He Who Plants a Tree:

Inventing Arbor Day and the City of Trees," details the founding of Arbor Day and the public celebration of trees. In 1872 Nebraska City, Nebraska was the location of J. Sterling Morton's first Arbor Day. Other celebrations and festivities surrounding the planting of trees had taken place throughout different locations of the country with various local leaders, but the celebration of the planting and care of trees under this title is what eventually spread throughout the United States and around the world over the ensuing decades.

Chapter 3, "A Demi-God of Trees" and "The Tree Doctor," discusses Charles Sprague Sargent, who, in the late 1800s to early 1900s, was "the nation's leading dendrologist, scholar, and evangelist of trees" (p. 36) and creator of Harvard University's famous Arnold Arboretum. The chapter details his encounters with renowned naturalist John Muir and experiences mentoring under Harvard botanist Asa Gray. Chapter 3 also details the original "Tree Doctor," John Davey, English immigrant and founder of the Davey Tree Expert Company.

After the pleasantries of the introductions of some of the most famous forerunners of urban forestry, Chapter 4, "This Fungus is the Most Rapid and Destructive Known," takes somewhat of a turn in that it details the origins of the deadly chestnut blight with observations of American chestnut decline in New York City, commencing in 1904. By 1911, only two of the 1500 original American Chestnut trees in the forest of the NY Botanical Garden would remain, and the naturalist William Murrill would state to an accompanying journalist "it may be 100 years before we can have chestnut trees again" (p. 79).

Chapter 5, "Washington Would One Day be Famous..." details how important pioneers like David Fairchild, Barbour Lathrop, and the intrepid Eliza

Scidmore secured the place of the Japanese Cherry tree on the streets and landscapes of Washington, DC.

Chapter 6, “I Knew That There Were No Roads in China...,” outlines how Frank Meyer would roam China on foot for 13 years, becoming “one of the world’s great plant collectors” (p. 82). In 1913, Meyer would discover that the blight that was ravaging the American chestnut did in fact originate in China.

Chapter 7, “A Poem as Lovely as a Tree...,” summarizes the post-WWI planting memorials and initiatives that were “sweeping the nation” (p. 94). Joyce Kilmer’s “Trees,” a poem now synonymous with tree-related celebrations, was first published in December 1918 by the *New York Times*.

While Chapter 8, “Two Great Essentials for an Arboretum...,” details the passing of Charles Sprague Sargent (1927) and John Davey (1923), it also details the “birth” of the Morton Arboretum (1924), National Arboretum (1927), and the inaugural celebration of Arbor Day in Massachusetts (also 1927).

Chapter 9, “Imagine the Wiping Out of the Beautiful Avenue of Elms...,” discusses the “mystery of the dead Ohio elms” (p. 117) that commenced in 1929, with confirmation of the introduction of the deadly Dutch elm disease at the Baltimore port in 1933. Chapters 11, 15, and 20 detail the ensuing loss to the American landscape brought about by the devastation of American elm populations, the struggle to protect existing trees, and re-introduction efforts through the selection of Dutch elm disease-resistant varieties.

Chapter 10, “A Forest Giant Just on the Edge of Extinction...,” outlines the 1947 discovery of the Dawn Redwood in remote Szechuan province, China, and the important role played by Elmer D. Merrill, third director of the Arnold Arboretum.

Chapter 12, “Having Cities Work with Nature...,” details the rise of urban forestry in finally becoming a recognized profession by members of government, the media, and the general public. Key contributions made by prominent urban forestry pioneers, including Professor Erik Jorgensen, University of Toronto; Rowan Rowntree, USDA Forest Service scientist; and Chief of the USDA Forest Service, John R. McGuire, were discussed.

Chapter 13, “Trees Are the Answer...,” also highlights notable contributors to the field of urban forestry including New York City Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern, Deborah Gangloff of American Forests, and President George H.W. Bush who urged in his January 1989 State of the Union address the planting of “more trees from the rural countryside to the center of our cities” (p. 193).

Chapter 14, “Don’t *Trees* Clean the Air?...” highlights the efforts and successes of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in his effort to plant 500,000 trees, along with critical assistance and leadership from USDA Forest Service specialists David Nowak and Greg McPherson. Their groundbreaking work was critical in pioneering the understanding of the broader scope of urban tree benefits. A continuation of this work was also discussed in Chapter 19, as well as how the importance of further understanding of tree benefits provided twenty-first-century politicians and civic leaders with the ammunition needed to start various million-tree planting campaigns.

Chapter 16, “I Have Never Saw Such a Bug in My Life...,” outlines the 1996 find of the insidious Asian Longhorned Beetle in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, which was initially mistaken for vandalism. Chapter 21 discusses the additional find of this invasive insect in Worcester, MA, and highlights the concern of maple producers and tree enthusiasts throughout the Northeastern United States regarding the prospect of further spread of this insect.

Chapter 18, “I Was Surprised It Was So Aggressive”: Waging War on the Emerald Ash Borer,” outlines the 2002 find of the infamous and destructive emerald ash borer, and the decline and death of ash trees in the greater Detroit area that would soon spread across the United States.

Chapter 22, the final chapter of the book, titled “A Tree Is Shaped by Its Experiences: The Survivor Trees” highlights what is known as the “New York survivor tree.” This Ground-Zero Callery pear survived the devastating occurrences of 9/11 and was nursed back to health by locals who adopted the tree as their own. This chapter also discusses the American elm that survived the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that also achieved special “survivorship” status.

This book closes with an “afterword” that recaps the historical and cultural significance of trees to the United States as well as discusses the prominence of Professor Robert Ulrich’s 1984 study describing the hastening of patient hospital recovery if they could view urban greenery through their window, rather than a brick wall. This study, according to Jonnes, got us thinking about the importance of urban forests and urban greenery all of those years ago. Her book, *Urban Forests*, introduces these same considerations to all of us once again, through a twenty-first-century lens.

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