

Town Tree History

What trees lined the streets of your town 100 years ago or more? Were there more trees than today? Discover the many ways you can uncover this history by becoming a detective, archeologist and historian. Find out what happened to the trees. Are they still around after 100 or 200 years? The sources listed below are given as clues to uncover the tree history of your town.

Historic Buildings: New England is fortunate to have a number of historic buildings, some dating back to the 17th century. Perhaps you live in a rambling old Victorian house with attic and roof beams from a previous century. With the help of town Historical Society members, it may be possible to get an inside look at some historic buildings in your town.

Where's the wood? A good place to look is in the attic and basement of an old house. Many of the floor and ceiling beams are rough hewn and may still have pieces of bark on them. Perhaps they are chestnut beams from a tree that was killed by a blight years ago. Finished wood is more often seen in wide pine floor boards or wall panels. An old New England farmhouse exists where 3 wide pine boards run horizontally to form an entire wall!

Old buildings provide a great opportunity to both discover old trees that helped to build your town while also learning about your town history.

Transportation: How did people get around using tree products years ago? Sleighs, sleds, snowshoes, bicycles, boats, wheels and wagons were all used. Many early pick-up truck beds were made of poplar. Early bicycles had wooden wheels. To learn more about early transportation, contact your local Historical Society and look at their old photographs and artifacts. You could also contact and visit farmers to examine wooden farm tools, and explore old barn roof beams and floors.



Early Industry: Wood often fueled the fires of early industry in New England along with coal (ancient trees) and waterpower. Examples of where to look:

- * Local Historical Society
- * Library
- * Grandparents
- * Retired Loggers and Sawmill Operators

Nursing or retirement homes are an often overlooked resource. Some residents spent their childhood and earned their living in many industries no longer existing in your town. New England Box Company, Myles & Lyons furniture makers and The Charles Field Company, a manufacturer of baby buggies, were all based in Greenfield, Massachusetts over 100 years ago. **Hint:** With an individual's consent, a tape recorder is a good way to collect an oral history of recollections.

Town and State Forests: Often some of the older trees in an area grow in town or state-owned forests and parks. If you're stuck on where to start finding them, look in the local phone book under the state listing for the Department of Environmental Management. Names and locations of State Forests are usually listed here. Contact town officials for information on town-owned forests and parks. Your local library is also a good resource.

Native Americans: Studying the lifestyles, living quarters, food and medicines of native people in your area is a good way to learn about local tree history. Collecting maple sap for syrup was one of the many skills learned from these resourceful people. Visit your local library to gather research materials. If you have Native Americans living in your area, contact their tribal council.

Town tree history is all around you from Grampa Eli's barn to Great Aunt Nancy's spinning wheel. It's yours to discover!

Source: *Totally Tree-mendous Activities* by Sarah Hollister