

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Ohio: The Buckeye State

Buckeye is a name for Ohioans, and the state is called the Buckeye State. This designation has history that goes back to the eighteenth century.

Fifteen years before Ohio became a state, members of the first settlement in the Northwest Territory gathered at Campus Martius in a stockade and established the first court of justice and seat of government in 1788. The sheriff, Col. Ebenezer Sproat officiated at the ceremony. Native Americans witnessed this and were impressed by Sproat's height, military bearing and voice. In admiration, they referred to him as *Hetuck*, a word for buckeye, which was a comparison to their favorite local tree, so named because its nut resembled a deer's eye – hence Buck-eye.

In 1833, Dr. Daniel Drake, a physician and historian in Cincinnati gave a speech advocating that the Buckeye tree become the symbol of the state. (This didn't occur until 120 years later.) Drake noted that newcomers thought native born Ohioans were "untaught and awkward" comparing them to buckeyes – a soft type of wood, and a term of scorn. Drake explained that buckeye trees were exceptionally valuable, saying, "Every native of the valley of the Ohio should feel proud of the appellation which has been conferred upon him, for the Buckeye has many qualities which may be regarded as typical of noble character."

Seven years later during Ohio native William Henry Harrison's 1840 presidential campaign, his opponents criticized him saying he "was better suited to sit in a log cabin and drink hard cider." This insult became a campaign slogan. Harrison supporters displayed log cabins on wagons in parades and promoted the General as a frontiersman. Election paraphernalia and souvenirs included walking sticks/canes of buckeye wood, and strings/necklaces displaying buckeye nuts. One campaign song referred to Ohio as the "Bonnie Buckeye State". Harrison won the election, establishing a national perception of Ohio as the Buckeye State.

The tree - *Aesculus glabra Willdenow* occurs throughout Ohio, has palmately compound leaves with 5-7 leaflets. In spring it produces clusters of yellow flowers which by midsummer become greenish fruits. In fall these fruits drop from the trees, revealing large seeds/nuts, known as buckeyes, inside. Once the husk has been removed, the nut has a spot, which reminded Native Americans of the eye of a buck deer. In pioneer days, they were plentiful and used to make buttons. Buckeye trees with their white, fine grained soft wood were valuable. They were easy to carve and used for log cabins, woodenware (bowls, and utensils), flooring, and some furniture. Their bark produced a dye which could tan leather, and the seeds were used as insecticides. Some people believed that carrying a buckeye nut in one's pocket was a good luck charm. Importantly, all parts of the tree (leaves, bark, nut) are highly toxic if eaten, and can cause serious illness or death. On the occasion of Ohio's 150th anniversary of statehood, in 1953, the Buckeye was designated the official tree of the state.

In 1950 The Ohio State University adopted the name "Buckeyes" – which became associated with its intercollegiate athletic teams. Coach Woody Hayes created new uniforms for the football team in 1967. A round white decal depicting a buckeye leaf was applied to players' helmets for big plays and consistency on the field. This practice continues today. Other Ohio State sports teams incorporate the leaves into their equipment and attire.

The word "Buckeye" appears often in state geography, companies, and organizations. Buckeye Lake (located east of Columbus) is Ohio's oldest state park; it was established in 1949 and offers numerous recreational activities. The Buckeye Trail is a 1400-mile walking/hiking path extending from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. It is a loop marked with blue blazes, encompassing footpaths, old towpaths, abandoned railroads, and it showcases scenic views and diverse plant life. Ohio offers a Golden Buckeye Card to residents over 60, which provides seniors discounts and savings at numerous merchants. In the greater Cincinnati area, many commercial listings include Buckeye Tree Service, Buckeye Electric Company, Buckeye Business Products, and Buckeye Riverside Towing. And of course, there are Buckeye candies, first created in 1919, and now a popular snack. Ohioans consume 6 million pounds per year of the sweet peanut butter bonbons dipped in chocolate.

The Buckeye name is ingrained in the history and lore of the state. This remarkable tree, its byproducts, and its symbolism are a source of pride for all Ohioans.

