

## RARE TREES IN ELYSIAN PARK

THEODORE PAYNE

THIS IS THE HISTORY of the collection of rare trees and shrubs in Elysian Park; where they came from and how they happened to be planted there.

Back in 1890 an Englishman named H. A. Brydges established a nursery at 440 South Broadway. Two years later this nursery was taken over by Lyon and Cobbe. The firm of Lyon and Cobbe was succeeded in turn by Lyon and Company; Ethelind Lord; Lord and Evans; Evans, Boyson and Saint; Evans and Saint; and Hugh Evans. On November 3, 1903 I purchased the nursery from Hugh Evans for the sum of \$800.00.

So being, as we might say, the legal heir to the firm of Lyon and Cobbe, and as all these rare plants were grown in the Lyon and Cobbe nursery, I feel it my privilege to write this story.

At a meeting of the local horticultural society, it was proposed to establish a small botanic garden of rare plants in

Elysian Park and for this purpose the Park Department set aside an area at the head of Chavez Ravine. A botanic garden committee was appointed, the members of which were—William S. Lyon, J. C. Harvey and Austin Campbell-Johnstone. William S. Lyon was a well known horticulturist and botanist who did considerable collecting in Southern California and on Catalina Island. The tree *Lyonothamnus* "Catalina Ironwood" was named after him. Also *Prunus lyonii* "Catalina Cherry" and many other plants. Before going into the nursery business he was the first State Forester of California, serving in that capacity from 1887 to 1892. He wrote a book, "Gardening in California" published by George Rice & Sons of Los Angeles; a fine work now long since out of print. Later he took a government position in the Philippines and died there some years later.

J. C. Harvey was an official of the Stan-



*Calodendrum capense*, "Cape Chestnut", in full bloom growing in Elysian Park  
Photo by Ralph D. Cornell





A close-up of the lilac-pink flowers of the "Cape Chestnut"

Photo by Ralph D. Cornell

dard Oil Company. He was an enthusiastic horticulturist and an authority on tropical and semi-tropical vegetation. He traveled a great deal in various countries and collected many of the seeds from which these trees were grown.

He and Lyon more than any others were responsible for this project; they shared the expense and donated the trees to the Park Department.

Austin Campbell-Johnstone and his brother Conway were the owners of the Campbell-Johnstone Ranch near Pasadena, including Johnstone Lake. He was an authority on Australian flora, especially the eucalypts and acacias. While interested in horticulture generally, his special hobby was bulbous plants of which he had a fine collection at his home on South Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena.

Charles Russell Orcutt, a well known botanist of San Diego, took quite an interest in this undertaking and collected

some of the seeds. Possibly William S. Lyon imported some kinds.

The Botanic Garden Committee and members of the horticultural society used to gather in the Park on Sunday mornings. The trees and shrubs were planted out in 1893 and 1894. Ernest Branton, an employee at the Lyon and Cobbe Nursery, did the actual planting.

I met Mr. Lyon a few days after arriving in California in June of 1893, and made the acquaintance of Charles Russell Orcutt, Austin Campbell-Johnstone and J. C. Harvey soon after entering the employ of Germain's in April of 1896.

Much of the above information together with a list of plants was given to me by Ernest Branton many years ago.

Today about fifty of these trees are still growing in the park. It is not my intention to list all of them but simply to mention a few of the most interesting species.



By far the most beautiful tree in the park today is *Calodendrum capense* "Cape Chestnut", from South Africa. With its rich dark green foliage and numerous terminal panicles of lilac pink flowers it is indeed a pleasing sight. This tree has a spread of 67 feet and when in bloom carries thousands of flower spikes. It is most likely the parent of all trees of this species in California today.

Just across the path from the foregoing is a fine specimen of *Castanospermum australe*, "Moreton Bay Chestnut" or "Black Bean" from Australia. A handsome evergreen tree producing quantities of yellow orange or orange red flowers. When this tree is in bloom it is visited by immense numbers of hummingbirds and has become known to some of the local population as the "hummingbird tree".

There are two very large specimens of *Tipuana tipu* "Tipu Tree" from South America. Handsome trees with pinnate foliage and quantities of yellow flowers.

*Chorisia speciosa* "Floss-Silk Tree" from Brazil is an odd looking specimen with a swollen trunk which looks almost like a barrel. The trunk and branches are of a greenish color and are covered with immense numbers of stout thorns. The soft silk or cotton from the seed vessels of this tree is used for pillows and cushions.

*Cedrela odorata* "Cigar Box Cedar" from the West Indies and South America is a large spreading tree with pinnate leaves sometimes over two feet long. It furnishes a fine wood used for cigar boxes and furniture. Interesting for its large clusters of opened seed vessels which look like small wooden flowers.

A large specimen of *Cupressus guadalupensis* "Guadalupe Cypress" is quite interesting. It has many trunks from the base and the reddish brown bark is smooth.

Not far from this cypress is a very tall, straight specimen of the *Agathis australis* "Kauri Pine", from New Zealand. This tree must be well over 100 feet high.

There is a fine specimen of the *Macadamia ternifolia* "Queensland Nut", with rich green foliage.

*Dalbergia sissoo* "Sissoo" from India is described as growing into tall tree, however the specimen in the park is probably not over 25 feet tall but has a spread of 40 feet.

Across the road from the other trees is a fine specimen of *Schotia latifolia*, a native of South Africa. This particular plant is not very tall but has a spread of over 30 feet and the foliage completely covers the ground.

Of special interest is a very fine specimen of *Pinus cembroides* var. *parryana*, "Parry's Nut Pine" a native California species. This tree is about 40 feet high and has a trunk diameter of 20 inches three feet from the ground. It is doubtful whether there are any trees in the wild state larger than this one.

Another unusual plant, also a California native, is a very large specimen of *Simmondsia californica* "Goat-Nut" or "Jajoba". This plant is 10 feet high and has a spread of 12 feet. I have never seen anything in the wild state to compare with it for size. A few years ago it was really taller than now. It was about 14 feet. Then it fell over and continued to grow in a reclining position. It is the most intricately branched plant I have ever seen. The branches twist and turn in every direction forming a fantastic mound of intertwining vegetation.

It would be well worthwhile for any lover of plants to visit this site and see this interesting as well as botanically historical collection of fine specimen trees.

## COVER PICTURE

A recent view of the Herb Garden looking north from Tallac Knoll. In the right foreground, one sees the "Pattern" Garden. Leading from this garden to the left is the allee bordered by flowering plum trees. Toward Tallac Knoll, left foreground, will be the Medicinal Garden. North of the allee can be seen the Kitchen Garden. A detailed story of the development of the Herb Garden appears within the pages of this issue.





Payne, Theodore. 1956. "Rare trees in Elysian Park." *Lasca leaves* 6(Autumn 1956), 76–78.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/130616>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/125287>

**Holding Institution**

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

**Sponsored by**

Los Angeles Arboretum

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: The Arboretum Library at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.