



Before the Eagle

➤ ALTHOUGH THIS country has no national tree, as England has the oak and Canada the maple, a tree was used as symbol of American honor and independence long before the eagle was officially adopted as the device to be used on the Great Seal of the United States, and subsequently on our coinage and currency.

Until the Continental Congress adopted a national flag and specified its basic design, each state flew a flag of its own. The flag of Massachusetts, which floated over the stoutly defended breastworks at Bunker Hill, consisted of a white field displaying a green pine tree, with the motto: "An Appeal to Heaven."

This motto was suggested, no doubt, by the upward-pointing spire of the tree, so like the monitory steeples that reared themselves above all New England villages.

Even before it appeared on their flag, the pine tree was used as a symbol on the coinage of Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Pine Tree Shilling, struck in the seventeenth century, is one of the greatest of numismatic treasures.

Which particular pine tree was thus chosen for honor by the men of Massachusetts is not specifically stated, but there can

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be little doubt that it was the white pine. It was abundant in early days, it had great majesty and beauty, and was useful and valuable as well as beautiful.

Towering trunks cut from virgin forests made magnificent masts—important in a seafaring and shipbuilding community. Smaller specimens were hewn into logs for the early cabins, sawed into splendid, smooth lumber for the fine frame houses and churches that have made New England's early builders deservedly famous.

But, alas, we could no longer adopt the white pine as our national tree even if we wanted to. For just as we have practically exterminated the American eagle from all save a few still-wild spots under American sovereignty, so have we wiped out most of our white pine forests.

We have either prodigally chopped them down without taking the trouble to replant them, or more wastefully still, have permitted fire to ravage them unchecked. And the spread of a terrible tree disease, white pine blister rust, has made re-establishment of white-pine woodlands even more difficult.

Science News Letter, June 27, 1953

MEDICINE

Polio Reports Inflated

➤ WE ARE having an inflation in polio cases reported. Gamma globulin, the material in blood that may protect against paralytic poliomyelitis, is probably responsible.

Total cases of poliomyelitis reported to the U. S. Public Health Service each week this season are running considerably above the cases reported about the same period last year. This makes it look like a bad polio year.

A "high proportion" of cases, however, are nonparalytic, and it is the nonparalytic cases being reported that are inflating the totals.

In the past, many nonparalytic cases undoubtedly did not get reported. Maybe the doctor was not sure whether the case was polio. More likely the parents did not call a doctor, thinking Junior's illness was just a summer cold or one of those feverish, upset stomach spells that children so often get for no apparent reason.

But today if Junior has a little fever, an upset stomach or headache, or all three, mother calls the doctor, hoping to get gamma globulin for Sister and any other children in the family. And the doctor, wanting to give his young patients every possible protection, reports the case to the state health department so that he can get some gamma globulin.

Junior probably has nonparalytic polio. Even without laboratory tests, there are signs by which the doctor can diagnose the ailment. The point is that with gamma globulin in the picture, doctors apparently are being called much oftener than in the past for cases of nonparalytic polio. So the total cases being reported this year are

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higher than the total reported last year, but not, probably, any higher than the actual number of cases reported and unreported, last year.

One other factor probably is responsible for some of the apparent increase in cases this year over last. That relates to the comparison on a weekly basis between years. Cases reported for the week ending June 6 this year, called the 22nd week, were compared with cases reported May 31 last year, also called the 22nd week. But actually, there is almost a week's difference there. It might be fairer to compare June 6 figures this year with June 7 figures last year, since at this season cases are increasing sharply each week.

Science News Letter, June 27, 1953

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