



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 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, July 2, 1949

MEDICINE

Some Diaper-Marking Dyes Reported Poisoning Babies

➤ WARNING of a new danger to babies, especially premature ones, is issued by the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (June 25).

Aniline, or coal tar, dyes used to mark diapers can poison the babies, the chemical being absorbed through the skin. Such poisoning of 72 babies, five of them fatally, has been reported.

The danger can be simply prevented, the JOURNAL states, by boiling the diapers after they are stamped and drying them thoroughly before use. This fixes the dye so that it cannot be absorbed. Non-poisonous vegetable dyes, charcoal and silver nitrate are impractical for marking diapers because the marks from these fade with the repeated laundering in large institutions.

Science News Letter, July 2, 1949

ZOOLOGY

Mice Migrate Within Their Barn "World"

➤ THE "home country" of a common house mouse is not very large—a range of 60 feet for males and only 40 for the more timid females, Robert Z. Brown of the Johns Hopkins University discovered in the course of a study of mouse migrations within a large barn that constituted their world. He reported his observations before the meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists in Washington.

He live-trapped members of the barn's mouse population, estimated at 150 to 200, marked them for identification, and re-trapped them later to find out where and how far they had gone. There was a sea-

sonal migration as the weather grew colder in the winter, mice in the outer rooms of the barn leaving their home ranges and seeking more comfortable homes in an inner room filled with hay.

There was also a seasonal drop in the mouse population from a high in December to a low in February, and back again to high in April. Sharpest midwinter decreases took place among the juvenile and young-adult mice.

Science News Letter, July 2, 1949

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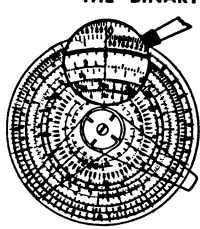
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