

FORESTRY

# American Tropical Woods

► BURMA teak, long a favorite wood for naval use because it is durable and expands or contracts little under marine conditions, may soon give place in American vessels to nearby woods from Central and South America. Equally good wood seems to be available in the American tropics.

Mahogany, regarded as the highest quality boat planking because of its dimensional stability, may also be displaced by little known but equally stable wood from the tropical Americas. Among the rivals of both teak and mahogany are the Frijolillo of Central America, Laurel Blanco of Honduras, Yellow Sanders of the West Indies, Roble Blanco of Central and South America, and Primavera of Mexico and Central America.

A program of research, concerned with the woods of the Western Hemisphere, and sponsored by the Office of Naval Research, is underway at the Yale University School of Forestry. Much progress has been made. Types of wood little known in the United States, and their properties, were reported by Dr. George A. Garratt, dean of the

school. He spoke as a guest of Watson Davis, director of Science Service, on Adventures in Science, heard over the Columbia network.

Tapping the wood of the tropical region has been a dream of those who are charged with finding enough of suitable woods to fill America's national needs. The tropics contain many woods of greatly diverse properties. Balsa wood, now well known in the United States, is one of the lightest of all woods. It weighs less than six pounds per cubic foot, about 10% of the weight of water. The American tropics also produce lignum-vitae, a wood that weighs about 75 pounds a cubic foot, or 12.5 pounds more than water.

There are other ways in which various kinds of wood are very, very different, Dr. Garratt stated. There are woods that decompose within a few weeks in contact with the soil or other sources of moisture. Yet some varieties endure for hundreds of years under similar conditions. Some are easy to work such as the soft, easily-carved White Pine. In contrast there is dense, mineral-containing Manbarklak, so refractory that it dulls ordinary woodworking tools within a few minutes.

There are in the United States some 800 tree species native to the country. The forests of Central and South America include over 10,000 tree species. Certain of these tropical woods may be superior in many respects to the woods now used in this country for many special purposes, he declared.

The Yale University School of Forestry has been engaged in research in the field of tropical woods for more than 25 years. It has a collection of over 45,000 specimens, mostly tropical in origin, that represent some 12,000 individual species. Much of the scientific work has been concerned with a study of the properties of these woods. Two years ago the scope of the activities was expanded in response to the growing need for technical data relating to the properties of tropical woods for industrial applications.

Science News Letter, June 25, 1949

OPHTHALMOLOGY

## Eye Specialists Urge More Study on Contact Lenses

► MORE research and less commercial exploitation of contact lenses is urged by the American Committee on Optics and Visual Physiology in a report to the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (June 18).

The report is signed by Dr. Conrad Berens of New York, chairman of the committee which represents the A. M. A.,

American Ophthalmological Society, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology and the Association for Research in Ophthalmology.

The eye specialists are sympathetic to the person whose feeling of inferiority is made worse by having to wear spectacles.

"For such persons the wearing of contact lenses may be a great boon," the committee states.

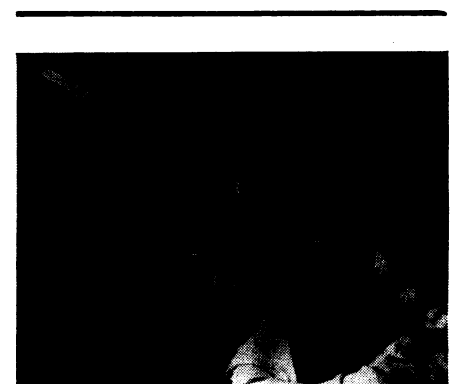
But they do not want the public to be "oversold" on the use of contact lenses. Most patients can only stand wearing them for a limited period of time, and even when properly fitted, there is blurring or hazy vision after a few hours, the committee finds.

The sale and fitting of contact lenses by lay persons not properly licensed by state laws to care for eye conditions is termed "dangerous."

Suggestions include courses for eye specialists to learn more about contact lenses and less exploitation of them by manufacturers.

Contact lenses fit over the eyeball inside the eyelids. In some kinds of eye trouble which are difficult if not impossible to correct with ordinary spectacles, contact lenses are particularly useful. Originally developed for such cases, contact lenses have been gaining popularity among spectacle wearers for cosmetic reasons, since the contact lenses do not show when worn.

Science News Letter, June 25, 1949



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