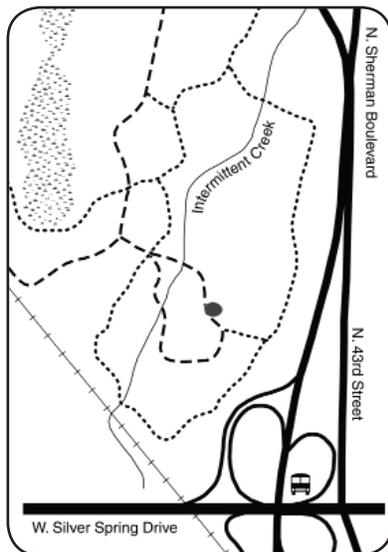


Mystery Photo 1

I found this tree on my second day of work at Havenwoods. I was thrilled. As a native Ohioan, buckeye trees have a special place in my heart. I fondly remember collecting buckeyes (the seeds), planting buckeye trees, playing marbles with the roundest seeds, and eating "buckeyes" (see recipe). As a kid, I carried buckeyes in my pocket for good luck.

I've been watching this Ohio buckeye tree since 1983. Over the years, I've visited it in spring to see its large spikes of flowers and in fall to check on the buckeye crop. My first look at the tree told me that it was planted in an open lawn or field. A tree that grows up in a forest must put most of its energy into growing upwards so that it can get enough sunlight, but this tree grew out. A tree growing alone can branch out extravagantly – reaching for the sun in all directions. Just for fun, I checked an aerial photo from 1956. Sure enough – there is a tree growing in the spot where the buckeye grows today. If the shadow is any indication, it was a large tree then – growing in a mowed field.



This tree is a big one. I wondered how it compared to other buckeye trees in the state, so I checked the Wisconsin Register of Big Trees. The biggest buckeye in the state is 71' tall and 172" in circumference when measured at 4' 6" above the ground (a standard height used by foresters). Our buckeye will never reach that size. It is about 40' tall and 99" around right now. Unfortunately, it appears to be slowly dying.

We may never know how old our tree is. The center is hollow, so we will never be able to count the growth rings in the trunk. There are at least two other ways to estimate the age of a tree. One way assumes that a tree adds an average of 1" in circumference each year of its life. That would mean someone planted our tree in 1909 – about the time that the Zautckes sold the land to Milwaukee County for the

construction of the House of Correction. The other method takes into account the varying growth rate of trees and is supposed to be more accurate. To estimate the age, you multiply the diameter times a growth factor (buckeyes grow faster than oak trees and slower than poplar). Using this method, the tree would be around 125 years old. These are only estimates, but whether you assume it was planted in 1909 or 1884, it is still an old tree.

I often wonder who might have planted it. Buckeye trees aren't planted near people very often. Another name for Ohio buckeye is fetid buckeye. Some people think the flowers, leaves, and bark stink. I like to think someone who had once lived or traveled in Ohio planted it. People often take trees, shrubs, and flowers with them when they move to a new home. The familiar vegetation just makes them feel better. Fortunately, the buckeye didn't escape and spread all over Havenwoods like some plants from other places have done. However, it isn't the planting of the tree that really amazes me. What really amazes me is that through farms and prisons and military use and road building and all the other uses of this land – the tree still stands. It must have always been a very impressive tree!

Buckeye Candy

2 cups creamy peanut butter
1/4 cup butter, softened
1 tsp vanilla
3 3/4 cups (16-oz. box) powdered sugar
2 cups (12-oz. pkg.) semi-sweet chocolate morsels
1 tablespoon vegetable shortening

Combine butter, peanut butter, vanilla, and sugar in a bowl and mix well. Refrigerate a couple of hours or overnight. Shape into walnut-size balls. Insert a toothpick in center of each ball. Place on a cookie sheet, as close together as possible, and put in the freezer overnight (or at least 4 hours). Melt the chocolate over a double boiler slowly, or in the microwave. Dip frozen balls into melted chocolate. Leave a bit of the peanut butter showing when you dip, so they look like a buckeye (buckeyes are called buckeyes because they look like the eyes of white-tailed deer). Place on wax paper to dry. Remove the toothpick and smooth over the hole. Freeze or store in a tightly covered container, in the refrigerator, for up to 1 week.