

Sycamores can live 500 years, reaching middle age at 200 to 300 years, and then become hollow. Even though they are hollow, they are not dead, and continue to live for many years. Sycamores encountered by the early settlers were 500 to 600 years old, with decayed, hollow interiors. Pioneers stabled a horse, cow, or pig in one, or sheltered a whole family until their log cabin was raised. "The hollowness of sycamores can reach truly stunning proportions. In Ohio, some trees could hold forty men or hold fifteen men on horseback. The many stories of handy sycamores serving as temporary homes for colonial families led the Victorians to choose the sycamore to symbolize shelter in their language of flowers."

The wood of sycamore is hard, heavy, and fairly weak,, which limits its commercial value. Yet it is found in veneer, baskets, tobacco boxes, paneling, barrels, pallets, crates, butcher blocks, furniture, Pullman cars, and buttons (hence the old vernacular, buttonwood, for sycamore).

The pioneers cut trunks of great dimension into cross-sections and then bored through the center, to Make primitive solid wheels for ox carts. It was also used to make wooden barber poles, wooden washing machines and wooden stereoscopes!

## Medicinal Uses

The inner bark was used as a tea in the treatment of dysentery, coughs, colds, lung ailments, hemorrhages, measles, and also as a blood tonic. Externally, it was used as a wash on wounds. An infusion of the bark and roots was used as a foot soak for treating rheumatism. The bark ooze was used as a wash on infected sores. An infusion of the bark, mixed with honey and locust bark was used as a gargle to treat hoarseness and sore throat. The sweet sap was tapped in the spring and used in the preparation of syrup and sugar.

## Historical Fun Facts

- The terms under which the New York Stock Exchange was formed is called the Buttonwood Agreement, because it was signed under a Buttonwood tree.
- Sycamore seeds accompanied the lunar orbit of Apollo 14 in 1971 and were later planted near the Philadelphia Independence Hall.
- Native Americans often used the entire trunk of the tree to make dugout canoes, some of which were 65 feet long.

### Source websites:

<http://na.fs.fed.us>,  
[http://plants.nrcs.usda.gov/plantguide/doc/cs\\_ploc.doc](http://plants.nrcs.usda.gov/plantguide/doc/cs_ploc.doc).  
<http://homepage.mac.com/cohora/plants/sycamore.html>

# Sunderland Buttonball Tree



1968 (file photo)

The Sunderland Buttonball tree (American Sycamore) is a center-of-town tree that has been standing observing Sunderland residents for centuries. It has a strong welcoming presence overhanging road, sidewalk and yard.

Sunderland Historical Commission  
October, 2008

## Meet Massachusetts's Largest Sycamore Tree!

Sunderland is home to the largest American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) in Massachusetts. This tree is listed as a Massachusetts Champion Tree, a designation based on a tree's trunk circumference, height and crown spread.



### Sunderland Buttonball Stats as of October 2003

**Height:** 114.4 feet  
**Girth:** 24.9 feet  
**Spread:** 143 feet  
**Total Points = 449**

## The Sunderland Buttonball Tree

It is not known exactly how old the Sunderland Buttonball tree is. However, the New England Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture, (ISA) working jointly with the National Arborist Association (NAA) and the International Society of Arboriculture, recognized the Sunderland Sycamore as a "significant tree" having lived at the time of the signing of the Constitution (1787). A plaque was installed near the tree by the New England Chapter of the ISA in honor of this tree in 1989.

Historically, the tree ranks with those of Deerfield. No battles are actually known to have taken place in its immediate vicinity. However, during the American Revolution, it was reported that the "Train-Band Men" (*town militia consisting of all able-bodied men, from sixteen to forty years of age*) used the tree as a meeting place. In 1861, the Greenfield Guard marched into town arriving in front of the Town Hall where they performed a specimen of their perfection in drill on North Main Street before marching off to Montague. With nearly the whole town assembled for this event, one can imagine young children sitting in the branches of the Buttonball tree for a bird's-eye view.

## Sycamore Tree Facts

Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)



is a common tree and one of the largest in the eastern deciduous forests. Other names are American planetree, buttonwood, American

sycamore, and buttonball-tree. It is a fast-growing and long-lived tree of lowlands and old fields.

Sycamore is valuable for timber and is also widely planted as a shade tree because of its distinctive white, exfoliating bark and broad, dense crown.

Sycamore grows in all states east of the Great Plains except Minnesota. It is also found in the mountains of northeastern Mexico. The American sycamore grows to a larger diameter than any other North American hardwood. Trees are on record to exceed 30 feet in girth and 140 feet in height.



Seed pod