

Bicentennial Tree Project

In 1975, at the urging of the Maryland Bicentennial Commission, most local jurisdictions appointed a local commission to plan for the coming celebration. Among other activities, these commissions worked with the local forester to develop a list of trees that were thought to be alive at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Some foresters took increment bore samples; others relied on local history to compile the list. 292 trees were identified state-wide; Harford led the list with 66 trees. Frederick, Kent and Queen Anne's Counties choose to only submit one tree.



The Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Forest Service, compiled the list and printed a booklet, "Maryland's Bicentennial Trees and A Listing of Species of Trees Believed to be Living in Maryland in 1776." They also provided a certificate to each owner. The Maryland Bicentennial Commission purchased and distributed bronze plaques to each tree owner (see photo). The inscription reads, "It has stood its ground, survived the American Revolution, and continues to serve an appreciative nation, July 1976"

After the Bicentennial Year, these commissions were disbanded and their records went various places. In some cases the original Bicentennial Tree application and hand drawn maps remained in the local forestry office. In some cases the records were stored with the local historical society. We have not been able to find any records at the State level, either in the archives or at the Department of Natural Resources.

In 2009, members of the Maryland Big Tree Program were made aware of the project and the publication by an owner of one of the remaining Bicentennial Trees in Harford County. He also had a copy of the above publication. Members of the MBTP made copies of the original and began to distribute them to other volunteers to begin searching for these trees. Since the project began, the volunteers have located over several dozen trees still alive.

A few of the trees were easy to locate, as they have become historical icons in their counties. These include the Manchester White Oak in Carroll County, the Calvert Oak in Cecil County, the St. Paul's Swamp Chestnut Oak in Kent County, and the Linden Oak in Montgomery County. Famous Bicentennial Trees that have died since 1976 include the Wye Oak (Talbot County), the Liberty Tree (a yellow poplar in Annapolis), the Richard's Oak and the Holly Hall Oak (Cecil County), and the Treaty Oak (Dorchester County).

The Maryland Big Tree Program has undertaken to locate and document as many of these trees as possible in preparation for the 250th birthday of our country in 2026. Should you have any information about any of the Bicentennial Trees, please contact John Bennett at 410-287-5980, or at mdbigtreeprogram@aol.com. The entire DNR document is over 50 pages and cannot be reproduced for the general public, but a list of the Bicentennial trees for a particular county can be mailed upon request.