



# Underneath Ohio's RATHBONE ELM

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The renowned Rathbone Elm stood proudly in Marietta until its demise in 1959. It, like the historic Logan Elm in Pickaway County, was a large American elm and one of Ohio's most famous natural landmarks. William Waldo Rathbone named his estate Elm Shade after the giant tree. By the time of his death in 1884, Rathbone had become the largest grower of sweet potatoes in the country, shipping plants to farmers and gardeners throughout the US and Canada.

The Rathbone Elm was known as the largest elm in America if not the world, attracted an estimated 25,000 visitors annually toward the end of its life, and was featured on many picture postcards.

Famed arboriculturalist John Davey, writer, inventor, and father of modern tree surgery, brought his passion for tree care to America from his native England and settled in northeastern Ohio. Here, in 1880 he founded the Davey Tree Expert Company in Kent, now the fourth largest 100 percent employee-owned company in the country. His book "The Tree Doctor" was a pioneering work that inspired the tree care industry.

Here is an excerpt from the 1907 edition of Davey's book describing the Rathbone Elm—

*Think of the wonderful, silent forces that have been at work to construct this great body for two centuries or more! Every spring as the Redbirds, Orioles and other songsters have poured forth their thrilling music from its top, which is a "grove" in itself, this marvelous creature has undertaken to build a new concentric "ring" or layer to the already mammoth trunk. A million buds await the action of their invisible co-workers below. The majestic top, a little woodland in itself, has stood guard over the old Rathbone home, encountering the bleak storms and howling winds of six long months since its foliage was stripped and returned to mother earth. It has seen the Ohio frozen and held for weeks in frigid bands and, anon, vapor that once spread over hundreds of thousands of miles, condensed and formed into irresistible torrents... but there this monarch stands awaiting the orders of a greater monarch, old king "Sol," who has just "crossed the line" and is about to give his behest: "Forward, march! six months' work ahead."*

John Davey's romance with nature and words enlivens his prosaic descriptions of scientific tree care, environmental stewardship, and urban forest preservation. His family prospered, with his progeny including inventors, tree care researchers, and an Ohio governor. A true pioneer, John Davey not only was an innovative tree care professional, but a true lover of creation, and he was driven to share his passion with the public through books and regular newspaper columns. ◆



Named after Mingo Chief Logan, the Logan Elm grew in Pickaway County. Tradition holds that Logan gave an impassioned speech, known as "Logan's Lament," at the signing of a peace accord under the tree in 1774.

The Anthony Wayne Elm was known as Cincinnati's most famous tree. General Wayne was said to have tied his horse to the elm and camped here with his army in 1793. Modern times were no doubt challenging for the stately tree trying to grow in a hostile urban environment. Photo courtesy of Marianne Prue/Cincinnati Parks Urban Forestry.



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#### References

- Rathbone elm was world's largest. *The Rathbun-Rathbone-Rathburn Family Historian*, 4(3), 35, 42.
- Wikipedia contributors. "John Davey (tree surgeon)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 8 Dec. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2013