

The Changing Landscapes of Ninety Six

Once a dense forest, the area now known as Ninety Six, was gradually cleared by people. Fire, storms, and the introduction of non-native plants and animal species also contributed to changing the landscape. If you lived here in the 1700s, you would have seen the woods transform.

This region was home to many American Indian groups, who hunted nearby in dense forests of oak, hickory, elm, locust, and poplar. By the mid-1750s, the Cherokee predominated and white traders, hunters, and trappers came to the area. The landscape was less dense. Areas were burned and cleared for farming and fields were used for grazing.

In 1780, Ninety Six is occupied by Loyalist troops. By the time Patriot troops arrived to camp nearby in 1781, there were open fields dotted only by tree stumps. Loyalists garrisoned in the town, hoped to keep the approaching enemy in view and deny them cover in the woods, cut down trees for up to a mile around. Only clusters of hickory, oak, and black walnut trees grow beyond the settlement.

Today, we see a second growth of forest where the land was once cleared. Plants seen today include winged elm, black walnut, pine, red maple, redbud, poison ivy, and Virginia creeper.

Why should we care about the plants and trees found in Ninety Six National Historic Site?

The trees and plants provided our ancestors with shelter, food, medicine, and comfort. Without available flora to use colonists may not have survived living in the backcountry.

The properties of different plants and uses of wood were common knowledge. For example, our ancestors knew that pignut hickory made good wagon wheels. They knew that both black walnut and pie made good furniture but that pine was a poor choice for a cooking fire since pine burns to ashes instead of the coals needed to bake bread. From our ancestors, we also learned to enjoy a refreshing drink called root beer, originally made from the roots of the sassafras tree. Because sassafras root is now known to have harmful properties, it is no longer used in root beer, but we still have similar recipes today.

For our ancestors, the forest seemed endless and perhaps even frightening. Today, we know that without proper management this valuable resource and all that it provides can be lost.

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Ninety Six

Another Kind of Living History



NPS | Island Ford Road

Living History

Ninety Six is not only home to the living history of the settlement and Siege of Ninety Six but also home to the living history of the plants and trees in the park. The trees alive during the 1750s-80s, are long gone but their descendants still grown throughout the park today.

For example, sassafras was used to make root beer in the 18th century. After processing to remove safrole, sassafras root extract is still used for that purpose today.

In the 18th century people traveled in wagons. So where did they get the materials to make wagons? They often used pignut hickory to make the wheels. Sugar maple was also used to make fence posts.

Colonists used the environment around them for many purposes. Trees and plants were used for shelter, food, clothing and dyes, as well as for medicinal reasons.

Shelter & Sustenance

You've just arrived in the backcountry using a wagon made of strong woods like pignut hickory, oak, and poplar. Now what do you do? Build a home of course!

The first shelters were rude cabins of round logs from hardwoods like walnut and oak. Sometimes poplar and heart pine were used. Later houses were built with hewn logs. In the areas where the trees were cut, they planted crops. Immediate need for food

made it necessary to hunt. The forests supplied the wood for the few pieces of furniture to make the cabin more comfortable. Chairs and bedsteads were fashioned from small trees, and tabletops were made from sawn lumber. Even the household utensils were carved or fashioned from branches and small trees. Plows and farming utensils were made the same way.



Clothing & Dyes

Colonists used the natural flora for something other than food and medicine —dyeing. Fabric used to make clothing and other household goods, such as blankets, was often dyed to create a variety of colors.

Pine Bark & Acorns	Light/Med. Brown	Goldenrod flowers, lichens	Yellow / Gold
Oak Bark	Tan	Sassafras leaves	Orange
Walnut hulls	Brown to Black	Berries, lichens	Pink/ red
Sweet gum bark	Purple/ Black	Dogwood	Blue / Green

Health & Folk Medicine

Settlers quickly learned the new plants and began to use them to promote good health and cure ailments.

Nearly every ailment could be attributed to some imbalance of the humours (blood,



phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) in the body. Symptoms were not studied or treated. Patients were treated by some form of purging—bloodletting, sweating, laxatives, vomiting, and blistering.

Dogwood bark and roots were used for fevers, sores, and cancer. The buds or buttons were infused to treat gastrointestinal distress. Small branches and twigs were often used as a toothbrush.

Snakebites, jaundice, and pleurisy were treated with the inner bark of the **ash** tree.

Slippery elm / American elm bark was used to create salves for burns, wounds, boils, ulcers, burns, and skin inflammation. It could also be ingested for sore throats and coughs.

Goldenrod was often used to reduce swelling, as a diuretic, to treat kidney stones, and even gout, rheumatism, and arthritis.

In the early days, trial and error was used quiet often without much scientific research. Remember the early doctors and herbalists next time you go in for an appointment!