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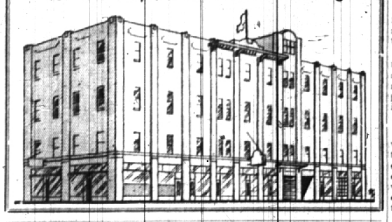

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NATURE NOW

Pioneers Valued Hickory

By LYDIA KING FREHSE
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

We met October at its brightest and best on a recent day spent at the Waterloo recreation area near Chelsea.

The last of the swallows circled overhead, a sharp-shinned hawk drifted high, and crow calls protested our presence on the ridges and along the winding tree-lined drives.

Late asters, purple and white, made tall bouquets among the dried grasses and the last of the chicory bloomed its loveliest blue.

The red and coral of maple, the rose and scarlet of sumac and sassafras all joined in a final salute to another autumn's ending.

But it was the soft dull gold of the hickories under the luminous sun which held a poignant note of remembrance, for the hickory was part and parcel of all our growing-up years.

* * *

EACH SATURDAY in October was the signal for an expedition to the "Bottom Woods" until enough of the rich hoard of hickory nuts was dried and stored for winter's cakes and candies with enough left over to crack on a winter's evening.

Of all our silva the hickory tree has a truly American flavor. Strong, useful and self-reliant, it was cherished by the Indian and pioneer alike. What is left of it is prized now as then for the rich sweetness of its nut and for the hardness, toughness and resiliency of its wood.

Mrs. Frehse

The Indian facing a long and lean winter stored hundreds of bushels of hickory nuts. When crushed and boiled the resulting "milk" added rich sweetness to corn cakes. Ground hickory meal thickened venison stew and a drink was made by fermenting a hickory mash.

The logs of the pioneer's cabin, the handles of his axes and implements, the rail fences that enclosed his hard-won acreage were all made of hickory. It combined with maple to make bed, chair and table, green maple finally clasping the hickory dowels in a vice-like grip. Its coals were hot and clear on hearth and camp fire; its smoke flavored and cured meat and game.

Of the 18 or 20 species of hickory, all except two are native to the United States.

In Michigan we have four to six species variously classified including the pignut, bitternut and shellbark. Of these the last is most prized for its sweet nut.

The shellbark comes into leaf in late spring, first unfolding its winter buds like great coral-colored magnolia blooms. All summer the large compound leaves hang dark and aromatic. Often they drop early leaving the shaggy loose plates of bark to identify the tree in any season.

There was more of hickory left in the Waterloo area than this scribe has lately seen and we yielded to the temptation to fill our empty lunch bags with the nuts fallen thick along the roadside.

As the car sped homeward these hands fell easily into an accustomed pattern, stripping the white nuts of their green hulls. Come Thanksgiving time we plan to make a hickory nut cake (from a receipt long written in a fine Spencerian hand) and slather it with caramel frosting—waist-line or no waist-line.

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3 Go to Scout Convo in West

A trio of Girl Scout executives from the Birmingham area will be among the Southern Oakland delegates to the national council convention at San Francisco, Nov. 1 to 4.

Headquartering in the Mark Hopkins hotel, the women will hear Wright Bryan, editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, talk on "What Makes a Good Citizen," and two national scout executives talk.

Attending will be Mrs. James O. Keene, 3670 Evergreen, Mrs. J. E. Fouser, 5151 Adams, and Mrs. Elmer Craig, 18744 Sunnybrook, besides several Royal Oak and Berkley women.

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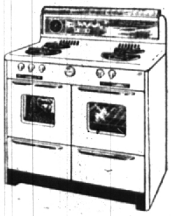

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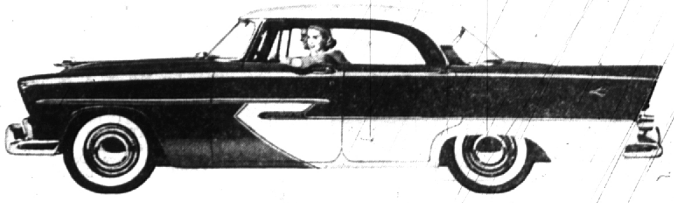
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