

The Celebration of the Centennial of the Arborist Law in Connecticut - 2019

On May 2, 1919, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a ground-breaking piece of legislation. Called at the time the “Tree Expert Law”, we now call this legislation the “Arborist Law”. The reason for this law is fairly simple. At the time of its passage, the forests of Connecticut were regrowing. As we moved away from our agrarian past, forests were overtaking the abandoned farms. By the 1900’s, the heavy demand on the forests for fuel from wood and charcoal was also receding, as the highly mechanized 20th Century was coming into full swing. However, just as the state started to see more trees, major problems began to hit, including the chestnut blight (1905) and the first gypsy moth outbreaks (1912).

As a consequence, the state was hit with a dilemma. As the field of arboriculture started to develop, good people with the needed skills and knowledge began to step forward. So did various unscrupulous operators, many of whom claimed the same expertise. W. E. Britton of CAES described this problem well (see inset). That is why the 1919 Tree Expert Law was passed. One of its main feature was the creation of a Tree Protection Examining Board, for the purpose of determining the qualifications of the men (they were all men in those days) seeking to be designated as Tree Experts.

The Role of the CTPA

The Connecticut Tree Protective Association traces its history back to these earliest days, as it was founded in the wake of the first Tree Expert Law. On June 27, 1919 the Tree Protection Examining Board gave the first of many licensing exams. Those early tests were known for being rigorous but fair. Still, it was quickly recognized by those in leadership that an organization was needed to help prepare people for these exams. Thus, CTPA was created, on August 16, 1922.

Much has changed over the past 100 years. The chestnut blight effectively eliminated the American chestnut as a dominant tree in our forests. The gypsy moth population grew until it became a regular scourge of trees throughout the state. Dutch elm disease arrived, to forever change the streets of our cities and towns. More insects and diseases also arrived, including the hemlock woolly adelgid and the emerald ash borer. These joined the lengthy list of native insects and diseases that afflict our trees. Natural adversities such as hurricanes, ice storms, droughts and floods also took their toll. Arborists, meanwhile, got better at what they do, developing improved techniques for climbing and pruning trees, for diagnosing tree problems, for protecting trees from harm and for doing it all safely and effectively.

Onward, Into the Future

Connecticut’s arborists remain focused on the challenge. From the 64 tree experts listed in the first report (1921), the number of licensed arborists in the state has risen to nearly 1,000. Arborists have become a diverse group, with the field today more reflective of the pool of professional women and men in Connecticut. Ongoing education has always

From the First Report of the Tree Protection Examining Board - June 30, 1921. Written by W. E. Britton, Scientist at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station, State Entomologist and First Chair of the Examining Board:

“For many years men have traveled about the State and in various places obtained work for the alleged improvement of orchard and shade trees, such as pruning, spraying, bracing, filling cavities, or applying fertilizers. In some cases good services were rendered and the owners satisfied; in others no benefit resulted. Occasionally, trees were positively injured by the treatment, because the so-called “tree doctors” did not understand their business. Finally, this condition existed: tree work was being done by well-trained, intelligent and conscientious men; by poorly trained but reliable men; and worst of all, by unscrupulous men who were usually, though not always, poorly trained. The unsatisfactory work of the unreliable men had a tendency to bring the whole business into disrepute. Some of them were at work here one day, but the next they would be gone, perhaps forever, only to be followed by a new crop. Even though such men guaranteed their work, the owner could obtain no redress because the men could not be found.”

been a key component of arboriculture. In 2022, the University of Connecticut looks forward to awarding its first two year degrees in Arboriculture and Urban Forestry.

It is said, “from tiny acorns, mighty oaks do grow”. That proverb is the right one to sum up what has resulted from the passage of a single piece of legislation back in 1919. Of course, as any arborist will tell you, 100 years is not old for an oak, particularly for one growing strong and solid, rooted in good soil.

CTPA is pleased to support the celebration of the Centennial of Connecticut’s Arborist Law. As it does so, it looks forward to the many more years in which Connecticut’s trees will grow and be celebrated and to the many ways in which those trees will contribute to the health and well-being of the people of Connecticut.



organized August 16, 1922

CTPA is an educational non-profit association dedicated to “Advancing the care of Connecticut’s trees”. Formed in 1922 to help prepare candidates for the Tree Expert Exam, it still assists people seeking to earn their Arborist License. Today, with over 800 members, it is the main means by which advances in arboriculture and tree care are disseminated to the state’s arborists.

Key Questions Regarding Connecticut's Arborist Law

What is the Arborist Law?

Sections 23-61a to 23-61m of the Connecticut General Statutes are sometimes called the Arborist Law. The designation is unofficial. It is a part of Chapter 451 of the Connecticut General Statute, which is titled "Public Shade Trees and Tree Protection Examining Board". This chapter also includes the statutes that relate to the Tree Wardens.

What is contained in the Arborist Law?

The Arborist Law has 4 main elements:

1. A definition of what constitutes arboriculture
2. The requirement that anyone who practices arboriculture, as defined by statute, be licensed by the State of Connecticut
3. The establishment of a testing process for the arborist license
4. The requirement that any arborist business be registered with the State of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and have at least one licensed arborist on staff

It should be noted that the law does not require that everyone who does tree work be licensed. It does require that anyone who "advertises, solicits or contracts" to do arboriculture must be licensed. Further, any arboricultural work contracted by an arborist must be done under the supervision of a licensed arborist. Also, tree planting and tree removal are not included in the definition of what constitutes arboriculture.

Why is the Arborist Law important?

Perhaps the most significant feature of the Arborist Law is that it allows the state to establish specific standards for arboriculture. Further, it requires that each prospective arborist, in order to be licensed, demonstrate a level of knowledge and an understanding of the techniques of arboriculture sufficient to satisfy the Commissioner of DEEP. It is up to the Tree Protection Examining Board to set these standards and conduct the testing process. The Board then recommends candidates for licensing to the Commissioner's office.

The Tree Protection Examining Board is also established by the Arborist Law. There are two ex-officio members of this Board: the plant pathologist and the forester from the CT Agricultural Experiment Station. In addition, there are five appointed members. Each appointed member is chosen by the Governor.

Why is the Arborist Law important to the people of Connecticut?

Trees are important. It is fair to say that we would not enjoy the same quality of life and have the same connection with our environment if we did not have trees around us. It is also fair to say that without

trees and other green plants, life as we know it would not be possible. Trees provide so many benefits, from oxygen, clean air and clean water to improved public health and increased property values. It is no wonder that we have come to place a high value on trees and the roles they play in our lives.

Trees can also live a long time. They are large organisms that can dominate a landscape. Part of their ability to produce great benefits is due to their great size. That can lead to a down side. Because they are large, when trees fail they can cause serious injury and damage, to people and to property.

It is because of all of this that an arborist is important. They understand trees and know what the long-term effects of certain actions and occurrences will likely be for a given tree. It would be a terrible thing if someone were to turn a healthy tree into a safety hazard through poorly done work, especially since the effect of this damage may not be known until months or years later.

At the same time, a healthy tree is a valuable asset. People should be able to protect something they consider as having value. The Arborist Law allows a tree owner to know that his or her tree is being cared for by someone who has demonstrated competence and knowledge through a rigorous process of examination.

In short, the Arborist Law is the basis for a level of trust among the tree owner, the arborist and the state.

What does an individual need to do in order to earn his or her Arborist License?

The Arborist License is issued by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. In order to be licensed, an individual must successfully pass an examination process. Then, once licensed, the individual arborist must continue to demonstrate that he or she is maintaining his or her level of knowledge and competence by earning continuing education units.

The process of earning the Arborist License is not an easy one. There are three steps in the process. First, the candidate must pass a written exam that consists of 150 questions – 50 on the proper and safe use of pesticides and 100 on various aspects of tree and arboricultural knowledge. The candidate then takes a practical exam centered on tree identification. Finally, if both of the earlier steps have been passed, the candidate is invited to come before the Tree Protection Examining Board. There, he or she is asked a series of oral questions, by which the Board determines whether this individual has the knowledge and understanding of arboriculture and the commitment to safety that is needed by an arborist. If so, the Board will then recommend to the Commissioner of DEEP that this individual be licensed.

What is the Arborist Business Registration?

A tree owner seeking out tree care is more apt to make contact with an arborist business than an individual arborist. In recognition of this relationship, the Arborist Law was amended in 2013 to ensure that accountability for professional tree care extends to arborist businesses as well as to the individual arborist.

Under the Arborist Business Registration, each company that “holds itself out for hire to perform arboriculture” must register with DEEP and must, at each place of business, have at least one licensed arborist in its employ. The company must also report to DEEP the name and license number of each arborist it has working for it.

For those who use the services of a tree care company, this is a major step forward. It increases the client’s confidence that each arborist business has at least one arborist on staff who is the representative of that business.

Why is the Connecticut Tree Protective Association celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Arborist Law? What is CTPA doing as part of this celebration?

The CTPA was formed directly from the passage of the original Arborist Law, then called the “Tree Expert Law”. Early on, members of the Tree Protection Examining Board and those who received the first licenses recognized the need for training, to assist those seeking to pass the Tree Expert licensing exam. They also saw the benefit of having the licensed professionals get together, for the sake of sharing professional experiences and for learning from the scientists at the Experiment Station and elsewhere.

It was based on that insight that the CTPA was formed. It held its first meeting on August 16, 1922, at Hammonasset Beach in Madison.

Today, CTPA’s membership tops over 800 individuals, about 70% of whom are Connecticut licensed arborists. It is a very active association that is still primarily educational in nature. Twice a year, CTPA brings together 700-800 individuals who are passionate about tree care and who are seeking the best ways to care for the trees within Connecticut. It seeks to “advance the care of Connecticut’s trees” by exposing its members and others who attend its meetings to the latest findings in the science of tree care and to the latest professional tools and techniques.

CTPA is also an exemplification of the pride that arborists have in their profession. All of this – the widespread support for arboriculture, the strong interest people have in becoming licensed as arborists, the deeply rooted and steady advancement of scientific tree care, the growth of the CTPA – began with an act of the Connecticut State Legislature. To celebrate this foresight on the part of the General Assembly, members of CTPA are planting a tree – a white oak – in each one of the state’s 169 cities and towns. These tree plantings will be done in the fall of 2019, with each bearing a plaque explaining why it is being planted.