

# Pioneers relied on the sycamore

**W**HILE driving south on Southfield Road between 12 and 13 Mile, I noticed a tree with natural ornaments decorating its branches.

Hanging from the twigs of this sycamore tree were round fruits suspended by a single stem.

In addition to its characteristic ornaments, the sycamore has bark that makes it look sick. Large pieces of cream or light green bark are often seen flaking from the trunk. One might think the tree had psoriasis.

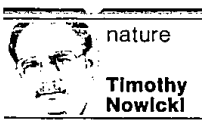
This feature makes it easy to remember the sycamore's name because it looks sick. Actually, the name probably comes from its resemblance to the English sycamore maple.

**SYCAMORE TREES** are often planted to landscape an area because they grow quickly, provide good shade and are strong. But in the early days of America's settlement, sycamore trees played a far more important role.

When George Washington rode around the country, there were sycamore trees 13 feet in diameter. In 1802 one was discovered in Ohio that was 47 feet in circumference.

Today, Michigan's champion tree in Lenawee County is a mere 24 feet in circumference.

Large trees of this dimension were very useful to early settlers. They



nature

Timothy Nowicki

were all hollow because the old wood in the center had rotted away. While families built their log cabins, they would take shelter from one of these giants.

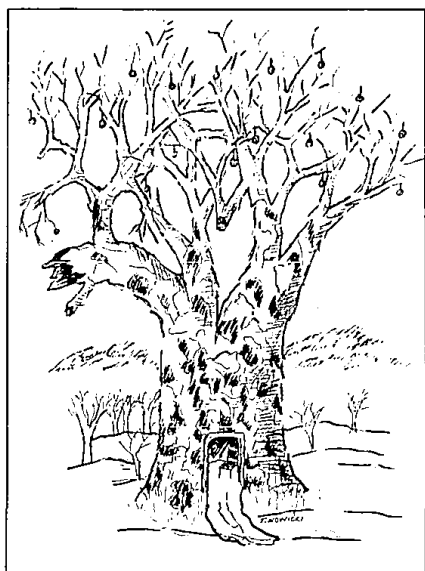
ONCE THE house was built, they would use these natural cupboards to store grain or meat during the winter. They even used them as stables for horses and cows.

Some trees were cut into sections, a bottom was attached, and they were used as a barrel.

As time went on, sycamore wood was used to make stereoscopes, organ cases and phonograph boxes. Today, they make butcher blocks and crates from sycamore wood.

Not only did sycamore trees benefit man, they also provided shelter for the chimney swift. Before chimneys became more common than sycamore trees, these birds would roost during the night inside this natural flue.

The writer is staff naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park.



Sycamores look sick because of their flaking bark, but they were important shelters to pioneers because their interiors were hollow.

# Musical benefits parks foundation

A performance of "Company" in the Birmingham Theatre on Friday, March 3, at 8 p.m. will benefit the Oakland Parks Foundation.

Stephen Sondheim's musical about relationships in marriages is based on playlets by George Furth, says George Googasian, president of the Oakland Parks Foundation.

Tickets are \$35 per person, with \$15.50 tax deductible by law. For reservations, call the foundation office at 335-2771.

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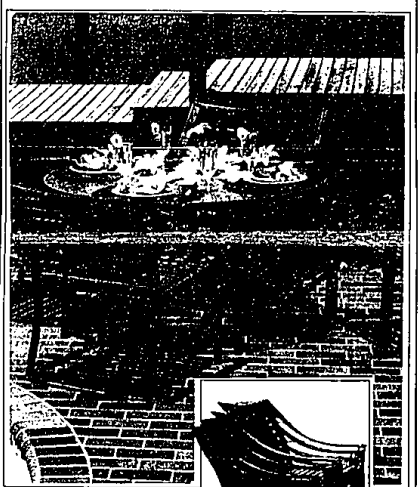
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