

Fagus has long been thought to derive from Greek, *phagere*: to eat. The disagreement is that filage of Indo-European origin for both "beech" and "oak."

First page
of literature
in Sanskrit
on beech
the rustic cabins
on beech
First books
were beech
in Sanskrit
the Vedas
who knows
who wrote
Old English
on bound
beech
bark

Beech is Anglo-Saxon *bēc*: beech, document, or charter; and *beche* in Middle English, *bech*, *beech*, *beche* from Old English; *bece* of Germanic origin, *bech* in Old High German, *behe* in Middle Low German, *beche* in Modern Low German, in modern German *Buche*, Old Norse *bok*, and Dutch *bok* and Danish *bog* and Swedish *bok*, all meaning both beech and beech; Latin *fagus*, Greek *oak*. Also *bog*, *bok*, and *bok*, Indo-European is *bheg* *go*.

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I have always wanted to call up my own first experience of printed word recognition, of actually making out a simple sentence. I remember leaning to tie my shoe on the bottom stair step of the house on South Cherry Street, the old farmhouse, by then in the middle of cows, clad in pink asbestos slings. Rushing up the stairs to wake the parents with the heading news, with which they were less than ecstatic given the hour of the occasion, but by then I was already a reader. Already printing, leaving notes on the tree stump for the tree-down neighbor. Our common paper was 9 1/2" x 11" glossy fan photos of baseball players blank on the back side. My neighbor's father had a clankety Muhlthill press in his basement. I liked to imagine he forged the autographs on the pictures and sold them, and that he got stinking rich doing so. I sincerely aspired to be living next door to a celebrity forger.

I liked roller skates and walking dolls and crayons and long-haired cats and books. I sometimes had ringworms from adoped strays. I loved opening the book wide and close to my straightened face. I took pride in making out my library card and checking out titles deemed beyond my understanding. I was loath to close the book. I would color in Olaf Mellis' study photographs of my parents, but never colored in books. Aside from abusing my single pop-up book, I never vandalized a book.



Mother Goose was the first book. A pop-up from Mame and Bape. I pulled out most of the pop-ups except for the four-and-twenty blackbirds from the King's pie. I learned the rhymes by heart, but did I read them? The closest I come to recollecting that transformative moment is an eventual drift of attention away from the usually familiar images to the beavers, cryptic black letters.

Although it is the mansion that buses roll eglets into Newport for, the city's aristocratic beech trees are synonymous with the Gilded Age. Without them many of the houses would reveal themselves as gaudy mansions. White elephants, in the mind of Henry James, who spent much of his teens there.

When the tobacco and electric power king James Buchanan Duke died in his own white elephant in New York City, he left his Newport mansion and more of his fortune to his 12-year-old daughter, Dotti.

The authorship of *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* is shared by Charles Dudley Warner and Mark Twain. But the term *Gilded Age* was probably Twain's. He had a knack for tagging.

No palace on Newport's Bellevue Avenue would be properly palatial without European beeches: esp the common, the copper, and the weeper. Now at a minimum 100 years old they are calling it quits left and right.



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Some say they are just aging out. But that's not truly old for these hardy trees, though they are not native here, it is favored close, favored earth.

One obvious problem is having planted so many trees during the same period.

One local scholar suggests that their early demise might be attributed to their being specimen trees, generally grafted and often standing in full sun.

Poultice Greeley, a fine gardener, suggests that if they have been over-fertilized, they could peak and drop out as the has seen many a plant do, but demurs on tree expertise.

A century earlier it was the Europeans collecting American specimens. They were gaga for our trees. Kindly John Bartram was most obliging in sending seedlings to a Londoner "brother of the gods." The Revolutionary War briefly interrupted this exchange. And though they had shortages, England held off for a period, due to ransom over the outcome.

France however came agglomerating. The seeds François André Michaux collected grew over a quarter of a million trees in France. His 3-year *North-American Sylva* was the first of its kind regarding trees east of the Mississippi River. John Peltin's *A Forest Journey* reports that Michaux's father's collection had previously been established in beech on the oaks and the flora of America and exploited by the

The male catkins appear in April and are green, pendant, and borne on long stalks. The female flowers are scratchy, oval balls borne on a stem with protruding long slender styles, appearing by May. The female flowers mature 2-3 days before the male flowers. Flowers produce nuts every other or third year. Two nuts to a cupule.

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