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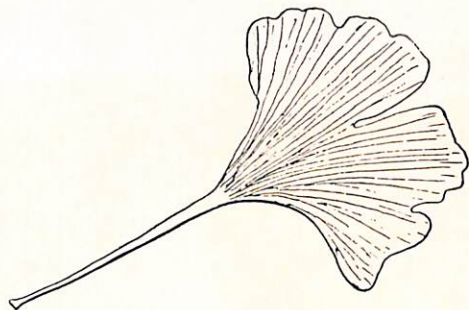
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### The Living Fossil - Gingko Trees

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## THE LIVING FOSSIL

The following story is by Dr. David Mac Arthur Jarzen, Curator of Fossil Plants of the National Museum of Natural Sciences of Ottawa, Canada. Dr. Jarzen spent the first 20 years of his life in Cleveland and has many fond memories of visiting and enjoying our Metropolitan Parks, especially Rocky River and Huntington Reservation. He was especially interested in the fine old ginkgo trees in the latter reservation.

The Cleveland Metropolitan Park System is quite fortunate to have growing on its grounds not one, but four, excellent specimens of a tree species that has been called a "living fossil."

On the northwest most corner of Huntington Reservation on the edge of the cliff overlooking a somewhat tired Lake Erie are four trees which are known as the maidenhair or ginkgo tree. These trees, more than Lake Erie deserve to be tired, for their ancestry has been traced back some 200 million years, into the late Triassic or earliest Jurassic period, a time when the dinosaurs were evolving into a dominant group.

Perhaps a reason for its long history lies in the fact that the ginkgo is not affected by the many serious pests which plague most other tree species. For example, researchers at several U.S. and foreign institutions have conducted experiments on the resistance of ginkgo leaves, stems and roots to various pests,

and have concluded that the tree shows a remarkable tolerance to such enemies as insects, bacteria, viruses, city fumes and the most dangerous of all tree pests, the fungi.

The ginkgo tree is a gymnosperm, and therefore is related botanically to the pines, spruces, and firs; but unlike these trees, the ginkgo produces broad leaves which are deciduous, and a fruit superficially like the flowering plants with which it is not related.

What is of major interest in the history of the ginkgo is that during the Tertiary and Quaternary periods, when the world experienced great upheavals of earth and later an ice age, the ginkgos were destroyed throughout most of their geographic range. One area of least destruction was in the upland regions of China. In the 10th Century A.D. the priests of China considered this rare tree as sacred and thus planted it around their sacred temples, insuring its survival. Later the practice of planting the ginkgo around temples spread to Japan, where European visitors "discovered" this ancient tree, and took seeds back to Europe. The Japanese name ginkgo was soon altered by Europeans to ginkgo and later eminent botanist Carl Linnaeus gave the sole species its Latin binomial *Ginkgo biloba*, referring to the two lobes of the leaf.

The ginkgo is not known to occur in natural forests. All of the individuals throughout North America, and probably the world are descendants from trees cultivated by the early Chinese priests.

So, when next you and your family are out for a leisurely Sunday drive through the Emerald Necklace, stop at the Huntington Reservation and admire these beautiful trees which so majestically overlook Lake Erie and the world of the 20th century; a world they have experienced for 200 million years.