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From Forest to Park: America's Heritage of Trees. Morton Arboretum and The Newberry Library.

Reviewed by Betsy Mendelsohn

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“From Forest to Park: America’s Heritage of Trees” traces the transformation from wild forests to cultivated parks in a way that does not pass judgment, and it also describes a broad range of cultural interactions with trees. It’s very nice to find temples of culture, like the exquisite Newberry Library, devoting public exhibit spaces to a natural theme, but given the popular interest in ecological restoration it is not surprising. The Library’s exhibit space, just a skip from the magnificent mile shopping district on Michigan Avenue, allows its partner, The Morton Arboretum out in sylvan suburban Niles, Illinois, to reveal its treasury of botanical books to a broad audience. Curators from both institutions drew on 170 fine and popular sources to mount an impressive exhibit of tree literature and iconography. Most of the objects are books opened to display an illustration or interesting page, but there are also prints separated from published sources, framed artwork, and some interesting ephemera. Labels try to both characterize the published sources of objects (usually images) and to relate objects to the story of the exhibit. The objects are grouped thematically, and only secondarily by date of production, which is a reasonably successful compromise for any treatment that tries to be thematic as well as historic. The point of the exhibit is descriptive rather than analytical, and seems to be that people have used and loved trees for centuries. Despite its bland goal, this exhibit is exciting if you like trees and books. The exhibit is mounted in two rooms, the first devoted to generally early books by botanical collectors, explorers, taxonomists, and systematists, and the second room to various printed media, generally of a later date, about forest uses. The thematic treatment allows curators to show how a tree species was depicted by several works over time, which is interesting to students of the book and natural history illustration. The bur oak, which for ecological restorationists is the icon of the pre-agricultural and pre-urban landscape of the Chicago

bioregion, is represented by a beautiful engraving drawn by the Redoute brothers, from Andre Michaux’s monograph of North American oaks published in 1801. Some of the small, framed prints by Redoute’s contemporaries seem to be displayed for decorative purposes (they’re very pretty), as they are not integrated well with the exhibit. In the second half of the exhibit, the themes include Paul Bunyan, logging, Arbor Day, fire, parks and giant sequoias, all popular topics related to trees. The images are entertaining and informative, although it’s hard to look at the logging images impassively in light of the low agricultural productivity yielded by many of the cutover lands. In an interesting twist on many environmental histories, the exhibit ends with the continent’s original inhabitants, by highlighting the achievements of the Menominees for innovating sustainable forestry practices in the present day. The materials displayed are in fine condition, although the books are not always in their earliest editions and some of the images are inadequately described (labels do not identify artist and medium). In using rare illustrated books to tell history, the curators chose to emphasize the subject of the image and its relation to historical and botanical themes, rather than to talk about art history. I regret this, because many of the images were obviously chosen for their aesthetic qualities, and should be related to the slim but fine secondary literature on natural history art and scientific illustration. Labels are long, but I think an institution like the Newberry Library attracts long label lovers; the curators should have made them longer. Some of the images tug at our hearts—logging the near-extinct old growth forests of the eastern United States—but the labels eschew any presentist hint that logging was anything but constructive. If there is bias in this exhibit, it is to celebrate the beneficence of government in promoting parks and conservation and the sheer American hugeness of logging the eastern forests. Accompanying the ex-

hibit is an elegant softcover volume printed by Stinehour Press, that reproduces many of the illustrations, available for \$11.95. Jack Temple Kirby wrote four introductory essays for the volume, which reproduces text by Ian MacPhail opposite reproductions of many of the exhibit's images. Embedded in Kirby's essay is an explicit call for the restoration of forested landscapes (p. 14), but primar-

ily the essays suggest interesting questions and linkages the reader may keep in mind when visiting the exhibit or reading this companion volume. <p> The library and arboretum have planned a free series of Saturday morning lectures about trees in January and on Feb. 14th, and an all-day symposium called "Keepers of the Forest: Native Americans and Trees" on January 31st. <p>

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