

## The Woodbook

Romney Beck Hough  
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Is this one of the most extraordinary tree books ever published? It lays claims to being included in such a list and is certainly a masterpiece of the bookmaker's art. It arrives in a rather unseemly wooden box but inside lies an extraordinary object, bound and printed in black and gold, in three languages (English, German & French).

Hough began publishing this work, originally titled *The American Woods*, in 1888 and it was 40 years later before he completed the fifteenth and final volume. All are now included in this single volume. Hough was continuing the work of his father, who had been commissioned to conduct the first official forestry survey in the USA, published in 1877 and 1880.

The heart of the book comprises profiles of 354 North American tree species, each of which is given a double-page: botanical information and drawing on the left; three horizontal wood sections in full colour, showing transverse, radial and tangential views, on the right.

These are not artistic illustrations but lovingly planed and artfully photographed pieces of wood. This rigorous and almost obsessive technique brings out every detail of the colour and grain. The countless wondrous shades, lustres and hues of the woods, held tight in their gold framing, makes flicking through the book a genuine visual experience for artist, arborist and general reader alike.

The book is packed with aromatic and romantic names: the southern blueblossom, the screw-pod mesquite, the wild china-tree, the over-cup oak, the wild custard apple, the

