



Periodical Cicadas and Locusts

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Periodical cicadas are a type of insect that are known for their cyclical emergence from the ground every 13 to 17 years in late spring/early summer. Broods, designated by Roman numerals that entomologist Charles L. Marlatt assigned in 1907, represent groups of cicadas that occupy a distinct region east of the Mississippi River and nearly all emerge in the same year. Using predator satiation as a survival technique, they surface in large numbers (there can be over a million individuals per acre!), breed for a few weeks, lay eggs and die. Historically, periodical cicadas have been incorrectly referred to as locusts as early colonists equated their periodic emergences with biblical plagues. In reality, they are largely beneficial to the environment, though they can harm young trees. Locusts are a variety of grasshopper that migrate in large swarms and can destroy entire fields of vegetation when they land. Both types of insects were often reported upon by the press as Americans were both fascinated and troubled by them.

Important Dates

- 1897: Brood V, a 17-year periodical cicada, appears in Ohio.
- 1907: C.L. Marlatt assigns a Roman numeral numbering scheme to 30 different periodical cicada broods (with both 13- and 17-year life cycles) based on emerging years from 1893 to 1909.
- 1900: Brood VIII, a 17-year periodical cicada, appears in Ohio.
- 1902: Brood X, a 17-year periodical cicada, appears in Ohio.
- 1906: Brood XIV, a 17-year periodical cicada, appears in Ohio.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following search terms in combination (as an "all" word search) or proximity: locust, locusts, cicada, cicadae, brood, Marlatt.
- Limit your search a specific time frame (limiting by both month—May through June—and year) or by state to find information about specific cicada broods or emergences.
- Since cicada and locust were often used interchangeably, read the article closely to determine which insect it is referring to.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- ["The Seventeen-year Locust—Its Habits and Peculiarities"](#) *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), June 13, 1863, Image 1, col. 4-5.
- ["Cicada Septendecim"](#) *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), June 20, 1872, Image 1, col. 5-6.
- ["17 Year Locusts"](#) *Hocking Sentinel* (Logan, OH), June 3, 1897, Image 1, col. 3-4.
- ["17-Year Locust Here"](#) *News-Herald* (Hillsboro, OH), June 29, 1905, Image 5, col. 4.
- ["Locust Plagues"](#) *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), December 16, 1910, Image 2, col. 1-2.
- ["The Locust to Appear"](#) *Democratic Banner* (Mt. Vernon, OH), March 13, 1914, Image 3, col. 3-4.
- ["No Real Similarity Exists Between Periodical Cicada and Grasshopper"](#) *Iron County Record* (Cedar City, UT), June 20, 1919, Image 3, col. 3-4.