

A Living Memorial to Johnny Appleseed



Johnny Appleseed



Johnny Appleseed's Grave
Fort Wayne



Johnny Appleseed Monument
Fort Wayne

*Due John Oliver One hundred
and fifty trees when he goes for them
to four of my saplings on No. 100
waters*
John Chapman

A Receipt for Apple
Trees as Written by Chapman

Johnny Appleseed

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



F Johnny Appleseed, that strange, almost legendary figure who once roamed the forests of the Old Northwest, came back now and retraced his steps, it is easy to imagine the amazement that would fill the mind of the simple fellow when he saw how many memorials had been erected in his honor.

In a park in Mansfield, Ohio, he would see a tall marble shaft on which is inscribed: "In memory of John Chapman, best known as Johnny Appleseed, pioneer nurseryman of Richland county from 1810 to 1830."

In the city of Ashland in the same state he would find a monument made of boulders to which is affixed a bronze tablet which says: "In memory of Ashland County Pioneers, including Johnny Appleseed, John Chapman, an Ohio hero, patron saint of American orchards and soldier of peace. He went about doing good. Erected by the school children of Ashland county, Ohio, July 28, 1915, on the 100th anniversary of the founding of Uniontown, now Ashland."

In the same county, near Mifflin, he would find his name, the date of his birth and death, and the place of his burial engraved on the Copus Massacre monument, honoring James Copus and the three soldiers who were killed there by the Indians during the War of 1812.

In Fort Wayne, Ind., he would see a huge granite boulder bearing a bronze tablet which displays the figure of a man and the following inscription: "Johnny Appleseed was born in Massachusetts in 1776. Died near Fort Wayne in 1843. Buried in David Archer's cemetery. Pioneer apple grower of Indiana and Ohio. The Indiana Horticultural society and all those who are endeavoring to carry on the work he nobly commenced join in dedicating this monument to the memory of his deeds."

But it is probable that of all the memorials honoring Johnny Appleseed, the one which will soon adorn his native city of Springfield, Mass., would delight him most. For it is no marker of cold stone and bronze. Instead it is to be a living memorial, one which will bloom with beauty each recurring spring. It is a four-acre tract of land, which may have once belonged to his father and over which he undoubtedly roamed as a boy, and there the Springfield Garden club, sponsors of the project, will plant apple trees and other fruit-bearers and maintain this unique memorial as a public park.

The tract of land is roughly leaf-shaped with the Mill river as its stem and its irregular contours hold promise of making a place of unusual beauty. Flowering crabapples will have a place to display their spectacular profusion of bloom. There will be a wide variety of the sturdy old New England varieties of apples which Johnny spread broadcast throughout the East and the Old Northwest. Low hillsides will be fragrant with laurel, and the park will also contain white oak, hawthorn, red bud, dogwood, wild plum, butternut, sassafras, honeysuckle, trumpet vine, the fox grape (from which the modern Concord grape is descended), wild strawberries, blackberries and blueberries—in fact, all kinds of trees and shrubs connected with the Johnny Appleseed tradition.

Rustic bridges are to link the banks of the Mill river in its brief course through the park, and the illusion of distance and height in the small tract will be created by the planting of tall trees on the upper levels of the slopes. Although the trees, such as Johnny loved, and the park itself will be the memorial to him, there is also to be in it a large field boulder bearing a bronze tablet with a brief sketch of his association with that city.

Although so much legend has become attached to Johnny Appleseed's name that it is difficult to know where fact leaves off and fiction begins, it seems clearly established that he was born in or near Leominster, Mass., on September 26, 1774. He was one of three children born to Nathaniel Chapman and Elizabeth Simons (or Simonds) Chapman, who were married on February 8, 1770. Nathaniel Chapman served in a company of Minute Men at the outbreak of the Revolution, but after the death of his wife on July 18, 1776, he appears to have taken his two motherless children, Elizabeth, six, and Johnny, two (another son, Nathaniel, born that year, had died in infancy), and moved to Springfield.

Early deeds unearthed by the Springfield Garden club record several parcels of land owned by Nathaniel Chapman, but the descriptions are woefully inadequate. They specify only "a spot by a stream and overlooking the Connecticut river." So there is no certainty that the tract of land which will be the park honoring Johnny Appleseed was owned by his father, but it is reasonable to suppose that this land knew the touch of Johnny's bare feet as he began his roaming through the woods in his earliest childhood.

Local tradition says that Nathaniel Chapman supported his family by turning out the wooden bowls and dishes used by the people of that day and that young John was his constant companion, going with him as he peddled his wood-ware in the towns around Springfield. There is also a tradition that Johnny's love for apple trees dated from his youthful fondness for the one which stood outside the door of his father's log cabin and under which he played as a boy. In 1793 Nathaniel Chapman was drowned while fishing in the Connecticut river near South Hadley Falls and soon afterwards Johnny's wanderings began. Soon after his father's death,

Johnny is said to have packed his meager personal belongings, walked down to the town clerk's office, where he left instructions that his father's cabin be given to the most needy family in Springfield, and started for the West.

According to one story, Johnny was accompanied west by a half brother. (His father is said to have married a second time and by this second wife had ten children, five boys and five girls. One of the boys was named Jonathan, and some writers evidently confuse him with Johnny Appleseed, whom they call "Jonathan Chapman"). But whether he was accompanied by his half brother or made the trip alone, he seems to have reached Pittsburgh in 1794, established himself on a farm there, and planted an orchard. From that period in his life dated his name of Johnny Appleseed.

To emigrants, floating down the Ohio on their way to new homes in the West, Johnny Appleseed became a familiar figure. He would invariably present each family with a package of apple seeds and urge them to plant them as soon as they had found their new homes in the West. As there were not enough seeds on his place to supply all the pioneers, Johnny went from farm to farm to buy more. His farmer friends regarded him as somewhat "queer," but the emigrants were glad enough to receive his offerings. In 1799 Johnny appeared as a wanderer in the valley of the Potomac. In the summer of 1800 he was again in western Pennsylvania.

In the fall of 1800 a woman living on the banks of the Ohio river near what is now the city of Steubenville saw a crazy-looking craft floating down the river. It was made of two canoes lashed together and heavily laden with bags. On top of them sat a wild-looking man, clad in ragged clothes and wearing a broad-brimmed hat. It was Johnny Appleseed and the bags contained little seeds which he had gathered from the cider presses of Pennsylvania. He was starting out as the advance guard of the wave of pioneer settlement which was pouring into the fertile Ohio valleys. Johnny's idea was to plant his apple seeds so that the trees would be growing when the settlers arrived.

The chronology of Johnny's life from this point on is somewhat uncertain. It is known that he established a nursery at Marietta, Ohio, and that he used this place as the base for his operations. He wandered from place to place in that state, planting his seeds and caring for the trees already growing. His travels carried him into Indiana, and even to Illinois, where, on a road leading into St. Louis, there stood until a few years ago an orchard which he is said to have planted.

Frequently he revisited the cider mills of Pennsylvania and Ohio to get more seeds which he would wash free of pulp, sort and sew into deerskin bags. These bags he presented to emigrants as they continued to penetrate the farther regions of the rich Mississippi valley, and some of these tiny bags are still the treasured possessions of descendants of the pioneers who profited by Johnny's bounty. Occasionally word drifted back to Marietta that the trees which he had planted were not doing well, or that the settlers, busy with putting in their food crop, were neglecting to plant the apple seeds which Johnny had given them, so he would set out again on his career of "Horticulture Evangelist."

Johnny started four nurseries in Ohio. They were situated near the present cities of Mansfield, Ashland, Salem and Delaware. He is said to have established more than a hundred sub-nurseries in various parts of the Ohio valley, and there is no way of telling how many thousands of fruit trees he started during the course of his 40 years of wandering. As Ohio began to settle up he spent more and more of his time farther west in Indiana and Illinois, and it is more than likely that he crossed the Mississippi into Missouri and that some of the orchards in that state owe their origin to this queer genius.

With nothing more than an ax, a hatchet and a hoe he would seek out a protected spot among the trees near a stream and there dig up the soil until it was thoroughly pulverized. Then he would plant thousands of apple, peach and pear seeds and build a brush fence around the infant nursery to keep away deer and other grazing animals. When the settlers arrived they had only to dig up the apple seedlings and replant them, when they had established their homes, to start an orchard. Johnny planted other things besides

apple trees in the wilderness. Small fruits such as grapes and berries he scattered through the forests.

Planting trees was not the only activity in the Odyssey of Johnny Appleseed. He was always a welcome visitor in the log cabins of the settlers, for he always carried a Bible and some books from which he would read and preach to them as they sat before their blazing fireplaces in the evening.

Chapman is said to have been a disciple of John Swedenborg and certainly he practiced his teachings of humility and kindness. He never killed anything for food. He carried a kit of cooking utensils, including a mush pan, which he sometimes wore as a hat. Usually he wore a broad-brimmed black hat, but this was about the only article of clothing in which he bowed to convention. He was clad in a ragged shirt which, loosened about his waist, served also as a traveling bag in which he carried various articles. He usually wore two or three pairs of trousers, one over the other, so that the holes wouldn't show, and his cloak was a common gunny sack with holes cut for the head and sleeves. Most of the time he went barefoot in winter as well as in summer. No wonder the white men called him "queer!" But the Indians said: "He has been touched by the Great Spirit," and he was as welcome in their lodges as in the cabins of the whites.

This fact made Johnny Appleseed an especially important figure in the early history of the Ohio valley. He frequently gave the settlers warning of Indian raids and in this manner doubtless saved hundreds of lives. During the War of 1812 when the British and Indians were overrunning Ohio Johnny repeatedly warned the Americans of approaching danger.

At one time the Indians killed a man in Richland county and the residents of Mansfield fled to the blockhouse in the town public square. The danger of a general massacre seemed imminent and it was imperative that some one go to Mount Vernon, several miles away, and summon the troops which were stationed there. Johnny Appleseed volunteered to make his way through the night for Mount Vernon and arrived there safely after visiting several cabins en route and warning their inhabitants of their danger. When he returned to Mansfield it was with a sufficient force to overawe the Indians and prevent the attack.

Just as there is a variation in the dates assigned for his birth, so do the historians disagree as to the date of his death. The Fort Wayne memorial gives it as 1843, as does the tablet on the iron fence which surrounds his grave in the Archer burying ground near Fort Wayne. One biographer says the date was March 11, 1845, and another puts it at March 11, 1847—a difference of two years but, at least, they agree on March 11!

Whatever the date, it is definitely established that the place of his death was in the home of a friend, William Worth, in Fort Wayne. He was buried in what was known as the Archer burying ground near that city. For many years his grave was neglected and it seemed that Johnny Appleseed was about to be forgotten by a generation who knew little of his labors in their behalf. Then in 1912 the Indiana Horticultural society and the Ohio Horticultural society decided that it was time to take action and save Johnny Appleseed's name and fame from being utterly lost. The burying ground where he slept was known, but the exact location of his grave was uncertain. Pioneer residents of the locality were sought out and by piecing together their stories it was possible to determine the plot of ground which held the dust of Johnny Appleseed. So an iron fence was built around it and on it was placed a tablet, bearing his name and the date of his death (1843).

Although Johnny Appleseed has been dead nearly a century, reminders of him of one sort or another come to light from time to time. About ten years ago George W. Hall of Portland, Ind., while examining an abstract, came across the record of what he believed to have been the site of Johnny's home in Indiana. The land is in Section 3 of Wabash township in Jay county and is now an island in the Wabash river. Visiting the place, Mr. Hall found remnants of a cabin, and near by were several apple and plum trees, indicating that a fruit grower had once lived there. Through talks with pioneers of that region, who remembered stories of the queer character that had passed through the country planting apple seeds and distributing small trees among the settlers, Mr. Hall believed that he had definitely established the connection of Johnny Appleseed with this cabin site on the island in the Wabash.

When the news of his death reached Washington it is said that Gen. Sam Houston, then a senator from Texas, paid this tribute to him: "This old man was one of the most useful citizens of the world in his humble way. He has made a greater contribution to our civilization than we realize. He has left a place that can never be filled. Farewell, dear old eccentric heart. Your labor has been a labor of love, and generations yet unborn will rise up and call you blessed."