



**JOHNNY APPLESEED.**

A History of the Pioneer and Modern Times  
of Ashland County by Horace S. Knapp, 1863.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### Johnny Appleseed.

AMONG those whose names stand conspicuous in the memorials of the early settlers, is that of Jonathan Chapman, but more usually known as Johnny Appleseed. Few were more widely known or more extensively useful to the pioneers than this blameless and benevolent man. The evil that he done, if any, appears not to have been known; the good that he accomplished was not "interred with his bones," but "lives after him," and bears its annual fruit over a surface of over one hundred thousand square miles—extending from the Ohio River to the Northern chain of lakes. Few men, as unpretending, have been more useful to their race in their day and generation. Many of the best orchards now in Ashland County

are of trees which had their first growth in his forest-environed nurseries. He had one near where Leidigh's Mill now stands, from which the early fruit growers of Orange, Montgomery, and Clearcreek obtained their principal supplies of trees. The orchards of Mr. Ekey and of Mr. Aton, in Clearcreek, and of the late Elias Slocum, now occupied by Ephraim Slocum, one mile and a quarter east of Ashland, were from seed planted by him in the nursery above mentioned. He had also a nursery between the present town of Perrysville and the old Indian Green Town; another between Charles's Mill, in Mifflin Township, and Mansfield, on the farm now owned by Mr. Pittenger; another on the farm of the late John Oliver, in Green Township, northwest of Loudonville, on the Perrysville road,—and, although beyond the jurisdiction of this work, it may not be improper to add that one of his nurseries was within the present city limits of Mansfield, on a lot now owned by A. S. Newman, near Smith's brickyard. He doubtless had nurseries within this county other than those mentioned.

A letter from Hon. John H. James, of Urbana, Ohio, dated June 11, 1862, says: "The account of Johnny Appleseed, about which you inquire, is contained in a series of letters addressed to the Cincinnati Horticultural Society, at their request, on 'Early Gardening in the West.' These letters have been usually printed in the Cincinnati daily papers, as a part of the Society proceedings. That letter was republished in the Logan Gazette, of which I am able to send you a copy this mail."

The following is part of the communication referred to by Mr. James:—

“The growing of apple-trees from seeds gave employment to a man who came hither before this was a State. I first saw him in 1826, and have since learned something of his history. He came to my office in Urbana, bearing a letter from the late Alexander Kimmont. The letter spoke of him as a man generally known by the name of Johnny Appleseed, and that he might desire some counsel about a nursery he had in Champaign County. His case was this: Some years before, he had planted a nursery on the land of a person who gave him leave to do so, and he was told that the land had been sold, and was now in other hands, and that the present owner might not recognize his right to the trees. He did not seem very anxious about it, and continued walking to and fro as he talked, and at the same time continued eating nuts. Having advised him to go and see the person, and that on stating his case he might have no difficulty, the conversation turned. I asked him about his nursery, and whether the trees were grafted. He answered no, rather decidedly, and said that the proper and natural mode was to raise fruit trees from the seed.

“He seemed to know much about my wife’s family, and whence they came, and this was on account of their church. He did not ask to see them, and on being asked whether he would like to do so, he declined, referring to his dress, that he was not fit, and he must yet go some miles on his way. He was of moderate height, very coarsely clad, and his costume carelessly worn. His name, as I learned afterward, was Jonathan Chapman.

“In 1801 he came into the territory with a horse load of apple seeds, gathered from the cider presses

in Western Pennsylvania. The seeds were contained in leathern bags, which were better suited to his journey than linen sacks, and, besides, linen could not be spared for such a purpose. He came first to Licking County, and selected a fertile spot on the bank of Licking Creek, where he planted his seeds. I am able to say that it was on the farm of Isaac Stadden. In this instance, as in others afterward, he would clear a spot for his purpose, and make some slight inclosure about his plantation—only a slight one was needed, for there were no cattle roaming about to disturb it. He would then return for more seeds, and select other sites for new nurseries. When the trees were ready for sale, he left them in charge of some one to sell for him, at a low price, which was seldom or never paid in money, for that was a thing the settler rarely possessed. If people were too poor to purchase trees, they got them without pay. He was at little expense, for he was ever welcome at the settlers' houses.

“In the use of food he was very abstemious, and one of my informants thinks that he used only vegetable diet. At night he slept, of choice, in some adjoining grove.

“He was a zealous propagator of the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg, and he possessed some very old and much-worn copies of some of his works, which he continually lent where he could find persons to read them. It is said that he even divided some of his books into pieces of a few sheets each, and would leave the fragments at different places in succession, and would diligently supply the parts, as if his books were in serial numbers.

“Nearly all the early orchards in Licking County

were planted from his nursery. He also had nurseries in Knox, in Richland, and in Wayne Counties. As new countries opened, he moved westward, and he was seen in Crawford County about the year 1832, after which I trace him no further, until I learn of his death, at Fort Wayne. The physician who attended him in his last illness, and was present at his death, was heard to inquire what was Johnny Appleseed's religion—he would like to know, for he had never seen a man in so placid a state at the approach of death, and so ready to go into another life."

The accomplished pen of Miss Rosella Rice contributes the following agreeable sketch of the old man:—

"He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in the year 1775. No one knows why Johnny was so eccentric. Some people thought he had been crossed in love, and others, that his passion for growing fruit trees and planting orchards in those early and perilous times had absorbed all tender and domestic feelings natural to mankind. An old uncle of ours tells us, the first time he ever saw Johnny was in 1806, in Jefferson County, Ohio. He had two canoes lashed together, and was taking a lot of apple seeds down the Ohio River. About that time he planted sixteen bushels of seeds on one acre of that grand old farm on the Walhonding River, known as the Butler farm.

"All up and down the Ohio and Muskingum, and their then wild and pretty tributaries, did poor Johnny glide along, alone, with his rich freight of seeds, stopping here and there to plant nurseries. He always selected rich, secluded spots of ground. One of them we remember now, and even still it is

picturesque and beautiful and primal. He cleared the ground himself, a quiet nook over which the tall sycamores reached out their bony arms as if in protection. Those who are nurserymen now, should compare their facilities with those of poor Johnny, going about with a load in a canoe, and, when occasion demanded, a great load on his back. To those who could afford to buy, he always sold on very fair terms; to those who couldn't, he always gave or made some accommodating trade, or took a note payable — some time — and rarely did that time ever come.

“Among his many eccentricities was one of bearing pain like an undaunted Indian warrior. He gloried in suffering.

“Very often he would thrust pins and needles into his flesh without a tremor or a quiver; and if he had a cut or a sore, the first thing he did was to sear it with a red hot iron, and then treat it as a burn.

“He hardly ever wore shoes, except in winter; but, if traveling in the summer time, and the rough roads hurt his feet, he would wear sandals, and a big hat that he made himself, out of pasteboard, with one side very large and wide, and bent down to keep the heat from his face.

“No matter how oddly he was dressed or how funny he looked, we children never laughed at him, because our parents all loved and revered him as a good old man, a friend, and a benefactor.

“Almost the first thing he would do when he entered a house, and was weary, was to lie down on the floor, with his knapsack for a pillow, and his head toward the light of a door or window, when he would say, ‘Will you have some fresh news right from

Heaven?" and carefully take out his old worn books, a Testament, and two or three others, the exponents of the beautiful religion that Johnny so zealously lived out—the Swedenborgian doctrine.

"We can hear him read now, just as he did that summer day when we were busy quilting up stairs, and he lay near the door, his voice rising denunciatory and thrilling—strong and loud as the roar of waves and winds, then soft and soothing as the balmy airs that stirred and quivered the morning-glory leaves about his gray head.

"His was a strange, deep eloquence at times. His language was good and well chosen, and he was undoubtedly a man of genius.

"Sometimes in speaking of fruit, his eyes would sparkle, and his countenance grow animated and really beautiful, and if he was at table his knife and fork would be forgotten. In describing apples, we could see them just as he, the word-painter, pictured them—large, lush, creamy-tinted ones, or rich, fragrant, and yellow, with a peachy tint on the sunshiny side, or crimson red, with the cool juice ready to burst through the tender rind.

"Johnny had one sister, Persis Broom, of Indiana. She was not at all like him; a very ordinary woman, talkative, and free in her frequent, '*says she's*' and '*says I's*.'

"He died near Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1846 or 1848, a stranger among strangers, who kindly cared for him. He died the death of the righteous, calmly and peacefully, and with little suffering or pain.

"So long as his memory lives will a grateful people say: 'He went about doing good.'"



In "Ohio Historical Collections," by Henry Howe, p. 432, occurs the following notice of Johnny Appleseed, which generally conforms to statements from other sources:—

"He had imbibed a remarkable passion for the rearing and cultivation of apple-trees from the seed. He first made his appearance in Western Pennsylvania, and from thence made his way into Ohio, keeping on the outskirts of the settlements, and following his favorite pursuit. He was accustomed to clear spots in the loamy lands on the banks of the streams, plant his seeds, inclose the ground, and then leave the place until the trees had in a measure grown. When the settlers began to flock in and open their 'clearings,' Johnny was ready for them with his young trees, which he either gave away or sold for some trifle, as an old coat, or any article of which he could make use. Thus he proceeded for many years, until the whole country was, in a measure, settled and supplied with apple-trees, deriving self-satisfaction amounting to almost delight, in the indulgence of his engrossing passion. About twenty years since he removed to the far West, there to enact over again the same career of humble usefulness.

"His personal appearance was as singular as his character. He was a small, 'chunked' man, quick and restless in his motions and conversation; his beard, though not long, was unshaven, and his hair was long and dark, and his eye black and sparkling. He lived the roughest life, and often slept in the woods. His clothing was mostly old, being generally given to him in exchange for apple-trees. He went bare-footed, and often traveled miles through the snow in that way. In doctrine he was a follower of

Swedenborg, leading a moral, blameless life, likening himself to the primitive Christians, literally taking no thought for the morrow. Wherever he went he circulated Swedenborgian works, and if short of them, would tear a book in two and give each part to different persons. He was careful not to injure any animal, and thought hunting morally wrong. He was welcome everywhere among the settlers, and treated with great kindness, even by the Indians. We give a few anecdotes, illustrative of his character and eccentricities.

“On one cool autumnal night, while laying by his camp-fire in the woods, he observed that the mosquitoes flew in the blaze and were burned. Johnny, who wore on his head a tin utensil which answered both as a cap and a mush pot, filled it with water and quenched the fire, and afterward remarked, ‘God forbid that I should build a fire for my comfort, that should be the means of destroying any of his creatures.’ Another time he made his camp-fire at the end of a hollow log in which he intended to pass the night, but finding it occupied by a bear and her cubs, he removed his fire to the other end, and slept on the snow in the open air, rather than to disturb the bear. He was one morning in a prairie, and was bitten by a rattlesnake. Some time after, a friend inquired of him about the matter. He drew a long sigh and replied, ‘Poor fellow! he only just touched me, when I, in an ungodly passion, put the heel of my scythe in him and went home. Some time after I went there for my scythe, and there lay the poor fellow dead.’ He bought a coffee bag, made a hole in the bottom, through which he thrust his head and wore it as a cloak, saying it was as good as anything. An itin-

erant preacher was holding forth on the public square, in Mansfield, and exclaimed, 'Where is the bare-footed Christian, traveling to heaven?' Johnny, who was laying on his back on some timber, taking the question in its literal sense, raised his bare feet in the air, and vociferated '*Here he is!*'"

In a November month, and when the weather was unusually rigorous, Chapman was in Ashland, wearing a pair of shoes so dilapidated that they afforded no protection against the snow and mud. The late Elias Slocum, having a pair of shoes that he could not wear, and that were suitable to the feet of Mr. Chapman, presented them to the latter. A few days after this occurrence, Mr. Slocum met the old man in Mansfield, walking the snow-covered streets in bare feet. In reply to the inquiry as to the reason he did not wear his shoes, Chapman replied that he had found a poor, bare-footed family moving westward, who were in much greater need of clothing than himself, and that he had made the man a present of them.

He declined, repeatedly, invitations to take food with the elder members of the family at the first table,—and it was not until he became fully assured that there would be an abundant supply of food for the little children who had remained in waiting, that he would partake the proffered hospitality.

He was never known to have slept in a bed—his habit being either to "camp out" in the woods, or, if sleeping in a house, to occupy the floor. He placed very little value upon money. His cash receipts from sales of fruit trees were invested in objects of charity, or in the purchase of books illustrating his peculiar religious faith. On a morning after he had slept on

Mr. Slocum's floor, Mr. Slocum found a five-dollar bank-note in the room near the place where Chapman had passed the night. Being well persuaded on the point of ownership, he left his house in search of Mr. Chapman, and as he was yet in the town, soon came up with him and inquired whether he had not lost a five-dollar note. Upon examination of his pockets, Mr. Chapman concluded he had, and received the note, but remonstrated with Mr. Slocum against incurring so much trouble on his account.

Willard Hickox, of Mansfield, whose boyhood was passed in Green and Hanover Townships, and who well remembers Chapman, relates an incident illustrating a trait of character which could be cultivated with profit by the "fast people" of this day. Calling at the cabin of a farmer, Chapman discovered near the doorway a bucket of "slops" which the housewife had probably designed for the pigs, and upon the surface of which were floating some fragments of bread. He at once employed himself in removing these pieces from the bucket, and while thus engaged, the woman of the house appeared. He greeted her with a gentle rebuke of her extravagance—urging upon her the sinfulness of waste—and that it was wickedness, and an abuse of the gifts of a merciful God, to suffer the smallest quantity of anything which was designed to minister to the wants of mankind to be diverted from its purpose.

He never *purchased* covering for his feet. When he used anything in the form of boots or shoes, they were cast off things, or generally unmated, which he would gather up, however dilapidated they might appear—always insisting that it was a sin to throw

aside a boot or shoe until it had become so thoroughly worn out as to be unable to adhere to a human foot.

His Swedenborgian books were, as before stated, ever-present companions. Mr. Josiah Thomas inquired of Johnny whether, in traveling on bare feet through forests abounding in venomous snakes, he did not entertain fears of being bitten. "This book," replied the old man, "is an infallible protection against all danger, here and hereafter."

We have thus given such incidents as are deemed from authentic sources, designed to impress upon the mind of the reader the characteristics of this eccentric and remarkable man, whose simple habits, unostentatious charities, and life of self-denial, consecrated to the relief of suffering humanity and the amelioration of *all* God's creatures, are embalmed in the memory of all the early settlers.

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