

The Apple Orchard – My Peaceful Playground

August 29, 2018



It is often that I revisit the apple orchards my father grew even if only in my mind. Hanging on the wall of my study here on the Three Rivers Campus is the aerial view of my father's farm. So, it brings back many great memories of picking, eating, and yes, throwing rotten apples from the ground at my brother.

In Nova, Ohio, there remains the last known apple tree planted there by John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed. That old apple tree is 176 years old and still producing green apples used for applesauce and baking in addition to making cider.

John Chapman, born September 26, 1774, in Leominster, Massachusetts, was known to plant his apple seeds across Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, planting up to 50 trees per orchard. The reason for planting 50 trees? According to a Frontier law at the time people could lay claim to the land if it was developed as a permanent homestead. Later, John would sell the property to settlers. By the time of his death in 1845 at age 70, Johnny owned more than 1200 acres.

The apples Johnny Appleseed grew were very tart and called "spitters" as that is what you would do if you bit into one. Those apples were grown for a very specific purpose. For making cider. Preferably, hard cider.

The danger at the time was in the water, which would carry bacteria. Cider was safe to drink. And, it seemed to turn a bad time into a much better time, although I think that would be according to the one who drank a little too much of the fermented fruit juice.

John Chapman was a man of faith, from the Church of Swedenborg. It is thought the way John dressed was to show his wealth did not come from fine clothing and shoes, but in humility and bare feet. He did, however, carry a bag of apple seeds wherever he traveled as he covered more than 100,000 square miles to plant his trees.

I have read the question one may ask, "*When is the best time to plant a tree?*" The answer? "*Ten years ago.*" And, anyone who has ever planted a tree can testify to that truth. The age of a typical apple tree is 15-45 years.

When I drive by my father's farm these days almost all the fruit trees are now gone. The land now produces corn, soybeans, or is pasture for horses. But, once in a while, I will spot an old fruit tree still standing, covered in vines, and never trimmed again to produce fruit again. There, in those old limbs, as a child I would climb to the top, trying to get a little closer to heaven.

There is a beautiful piece of property here in Three Rivers and there stand the remnants of an old apple orchard. The apple trees are very few now, but as I walk by them, touch them, my mind floods with memories of younger days when the cares of this world were far away. It is a place of peace for me, walking in this little place of God's creation.

"Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so in my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:3