

The Adventures of Johnny Appleseed

Yes, Johnny Appleseed was a real live person. His name was John Chapman. He was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, September 26, 1774.

Probably the most authentic account of John Chapman and his work is found in *Historic Annals of Ohio*, published by the Ohio Historical Society in 1861. Little is known of his early life except that he loved nature and that he was markedly unselfish. His halfsister, who survived him, related many beautiful stories of his boyhood days. He loved the undisturbed forest. The sight of flowers on the open prairie was a feast to him. He looked upon all nature as his friends. He was never known to injure or to kill any living thing except one rattlesnake, and that he always regretted.

In his early twenties, John Chapman migrated to Western Pennsylvania and first settled in the frontier village of Warren, near Pittsburgh. From there he traveled west into the Ohio Valley country and in the nearly fifty years that followed he lived the life that many folks to this day relate more to legend than history.

After he came to Ohio his mission in life seemed to be to plant apple trees and teach Swedenborgian religion. Following the streams and their tributaries he stopped and planted apple seeds wherever he found suitable ground for a nursery. He enclosed these spots with fences made of brush. Each year he returned to care for the growing trees and to plant new nurseries. When settlers came he urged them to plant trees and advised them as to what varieties to plant. His favorite apple was later found on nearly every farm in the region traversed by this pioneer nurseryman.

He kept ahead of the settlements and each year planted apple seeds farther west. In this way he covered most of Ohio and came far into Indiana. For more than forty years he kept steadily at his work, and doubtless, there is no other region in the United States where the early settlers planted so many fruit trees as were grown in Johnny Appleseed's territory.

His frequent visits to the settlements were looked forward to with delight and no cabin door was ever closed to him. To the men and women he was news carrier and oracle. To the children he was friend and playfellow. He taught the boys to make sleds and wagons. To the little girls he brought bits of ribbon and bright calico. He appreciated the loneliness of pioneer life and made it brighter wherever he could. He always carried a leather bag filled with apple seed and was constantly planting them in open places in the forests, along the roadways, and by the streams. He soon was known as the "apple seed man", and later his real name, John Chapman, seemed to disappear altogether and the name "Johnny Appleseed" was the only name by which he was known.

Johnny Appleseed is described as a man of medium height, blue eyes, long, light brown hair, slender figure, wiry and alert. He wore but little clothing and that, for the most part, was obtained by trading apple trees to the settlers for cast-off garments. Usually, while traveling through the

forests his only garment was a coffee sack with holes cut for his head and arms. He said clothes should not be worn for adornment-only for comfort. He went barefoot most of the time, even in winter. He was a strict vegetarian, eating no meat or fish. He believed it was wrong to take life in order to procure food. This, no doubt, added to his zeal in urging people to plant and grow fruit. He rarely sought shelter in a house, and when he did would always sleep on the floor before the fireplace with his kit for a pillow. Except in very bad weather he preferred to sleep in the open forest.

The latter part of his life he lived with a relative near what is now Mansfield, Ohio. It was while he lived there that the war of 1812 was fought, and many of the active scenes of this war occurred near his home. For more than forty years Johnny Appleseed traversed the forests and prairies of Ohio and Indiana caring for his trees, teaching farmers apple culture and assisting them in planting and caring for orchards.

He had several nurseries in northern Indiana. One day he heard that cattle had broken down the fences around one of them near Fort Wayne. He started there on foot to put it in repair. The weather was cold and disagreeable-snow was falling. At night he stopped at the home of Mr. Worth for shelter. It was readily granted him. He declined a bed and prepared to read and pray. He read from his Bible, then prayed for blessings upon all men and nations and for comfort for all who were crippled and distressed. He prayed for universal happiness and peace, then lay down to sleep. In the morning, pneumonia had developed and a few days later he died as he had lived, at peace with all the world. Mr. Worth and neighbors buried his body in the David Archer graveyard, 2 1/2 miles north of Fort Wayne. His grave is unmarked.

The story of Johnny Appleseed is retold to keep alive the memory of this pioneer and his work in developing fruit growing in parts of the Middle West. It is a simply story, but it seems fitting to tell it once more, because Johnny Appleseed did something, something worthwhile. He improved the land he walked, and a century of progress and improvements has not entirely erased his work. The farms and orchards of Ohio and Indiana bear testimony of his worth and intelligence.

It does no harm, once in a while, to look into the dim past and try to see the beginning of the fields, cities, homes, roadways and other conveniences we now enjoy. It awakens a sense of gratitude towards those who wrought for us. Johnny Appleseed brought us the apple tree and taught our forefathers how to grow and develop it. The retelling of the story of his work is a simple tribute to his memory, the placing of a flower on his grave, as it were, by those who are now trying to extend the work he began a hundred years ago.



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