

Johnny Appleseed—Some Historic Notes

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An obscure paper printed in 1922 by the H. J. Heer Printing Co. of Columbus, Ohio gives an interesting account of Johnny Appleseed. The text was written by a Mr. W. M. Glines (1806-1887),** late grandfather of N. W. Glines, then an assistant in the Department of Horticulture, Ohio State University. The introduction by Mr. W. Paddock contains this paragraph:

"The manuscript is written with ink on a good grade of brown wrapping paper. The handwriting is remarkably clear, but the first three pages are so worn and faded as to make the writing almost illegible. No date accompanies the article, but the family states that it was probably written sometime between the years 1875 and 1879."

As pointed out in the narrative, the author was well acquainted with Johnny Appleseed and his relatives, and so was able to give a first-hand account. The story was written for a lyceum or debating society as evidenced by these opening remarks:

"You can tell one of your stories of long ago: I heard you say once that the young folks of your day used to collect together on long wintery evenings at Sady McIntoshes, Major Clarks, Joel Reigners and Captain Enoch Shepards, Calvin Sheards, Luther Shepards and other neighbors. Every one had to sing a song, tell a good story, dance a jig or have his nose smutted with the candle wick. Now we have been reading 'Howe's Ohio' and a long story in the New York Christian Advocate, commenced July first last 'The Boy Pioneer, or Left in the Wilderness' by Mary A. Roe.

The story is laid in the western part of Ohio and goes away back almost a hundred years ago. But what makes it a little strange to us is the fact that she introduces as one of the characters that mythical old man that always goes by the name of 'Johnny Appleseed.' Yet she admits in a short note in the margin that 'Johnny Appleseed' was a real character; for several years back I have been reading more or less about this mythical character. 'Howe's Ohio' speaks of him as if there had such a man once lived away back more than one hundred years ago and I read a year or two since something about him in one of the newspapers published in some of the northwestern counties of Ohio, that intimated that there had been such a man once in the wilderness and was supposed to have originated there through some emigrant family and became lost in the wilderness while very young.

"I don't like such stories. They don't begin any place and they don't end any place. They have you all in the dark about just what you want to know. Mary A. Roe's story is a very good one, but would have been better if she had left out that old myth 'Johnny Appleseed.' Now we don't know whether there ever was such a man or not. Everybody that has introduced him as a character in their stories have left him shine out as being a very strange personage and then they leave him. Well, children how would you like to have a rehash of old Johnny Appleseed. Very well, if you can only tell us where he came from and who he was or whether there was such a man. If you can't do

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that, let's bury him forever. Now Grandpa, look out for the candle smut."

The following is a condensation of Mr. Glines' account:

Nathaniel Chapman, said to be Welsh, came to America before the Revolution, and fought as a Captain in that war. He was married twice. John and Elizabeth were the only children of his first marriage. Ten children were born to the second: Nathaniel, Abner, Parley, Jonathan, Davis, Lucy, Martha, Percees, Sally and one unnamed. Johnny Appleseed's real name was John, rather than Jonathan, as erroneously assumed in some accounts. Jonathan was his half-brother. John was born in Massachusetts not far from Boston in 1768.

At about age 21 John received a skull fracture as a result of being kicked by a horse. From that time on his personality manifested the singular character that marked his entire life. A few years later he and his brother Nathaniel left home, going through the wilderness on foot to Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh, Pa.). From there they went to Orlean, New York, but after a hungry winter they returned to Pittsburgh where they were reunited with their family who had moved there. The family then decided to move again, and after a boat trip down the Ohio River, arrived at Marietta, Ohio, in April, 1798. It was a short distance from here, on Duck Creek that John started his first wilderness nursery. He got apple seeds from nearby cider presses for this venture.

From there he moved to Delaware, Ohio, and thence to Sandusky, in both of which he started apple nurseries and distributed trees. He then spent several years at Mansfield, Ohio. He collected all the apple seeds he could from local cider presses and often kept large quantities on hand to be used as needed.

In about 1822 he moved to Fort

Wayne, Indiana where he bought some land and planted another large nursery. He often sold his seedling trees to settlers and so generally had money.

Johnny Appleseed was an eccentric and his odd habits singled him out wherever he went. He often travelled barefoot even in winter, and wore a tin kettle for a hat. At times he wore a sack in place of shirt and trousers. Johnny liked to travel by water if possible. If a boat was not available, he would roll a log into the river and use it for that purpose. He never worked horses or other animals in his nurseries because he did not believe in such practice. Indeed, he would not ever burn a piece of wood if it contained ants or other living creatures. As an example of his philosophy, this story was related by Mr. Glines (1, page 9). Glines was to accompany John and Nathaniel Chapman to visit a neighbor nearby.

... "When we got ready to start, I proposed taking my gun along to kill some squirrels or rabbits; to this, Johnny demurred; he read me a severe lecture upon the subject of taking life from any living creature; he maintained that God was the Author of all life, hence it belonged to Him whenever he was ready to demand it, and in as much as we could not give life to any creature, we were not at liberty to destroy life with impunity." John belonged to the Swedenborgian religious sect and would often tear pages from his Bible and distribute them as he passed through an area.

Though he was eccentric, Johnny holds a permanent place in American history, not for his odd habits but rather for his singularity of purpose. He never varied from nor diluted in any way the one goal of making the apple available to everyone in this new country. Such energy of purpose spurned selfish considerations, and made a legend of him.