



THE APPLE CORE

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE JOHNNY APPLESEED SOCIETY



Volume 2, Issue 3

August - September 2021

The Johnny Appleseed Museum: Restoring a Treasure

September 26, 2021. As reported here last issue, historic Browne Hall—built as a professor's home, and later a dormitory and classroom building for Urbana University—is now the permanent home of the Johnny Appleseed Museum and Education Center.

Originally, there was some hope that the building could be refurbished and re-opened by John Chapman's 147th birthday, September 25th. However, it turned out that the roof needed more immediate attention than expected, as did repair of some masonry damaged by the improper flow of rainwater from the roof.



As the picture shows, the roof and gutter work is now done, and masonry work is on the way. In the mean time, scouts from the local BSA troop were brought in to begin the work of moving the piles of boxed books, documents and items from the collection into a clearer order. The picture above shows Foundation member Joe Besecker and one of the scouts among the tangle of boxes left from Urbana University's closing. The Foundation has decided that a thorough re-inventory of holdings, plus some interior repainting, should be completed before a re-opening date is set.

Among the first tasks to be accomplished is the hiring of a person able to direct the work that lies ahead, including the recruitment of volunteers to act as Museum hosts or docents. The Foundation is finalizing a job description now, hoping to hire in the near future.

The Cider Press and Farm Economy: Part Two

As we saw last issue, in John Chapman's day a cider mill, which ground or pulped apples into *pomace*, was distinct from a cider press, which squeezed juice from the pomace, now called the "cheese" in the press, yielding cider.



The woodcut at left shows one variation on the two machines required: the mill above, where apples are fed through a bushel-size hopper to a grinding mechanism

powered by hand, feeding pomace to the tub on the ground. Below, the press, differing little from the commercial wine

press (or indeed, the contemporary hand printing press) in which the pomace is squeezed into cider, which flows to the basin on the ground.

In early pioneer Ohio, where shipping costs were high and local factories non-existent, these two functions were still usually performed in the medieval manner: a circular stone trough in which apples were mashed by a rolling stone driven by a horse served as the mill, and a wood press using a long pole as a lever squeezed the cider. As with flour, such cider mills were located on larger farms, where the neighbors brought apples to be pressed.

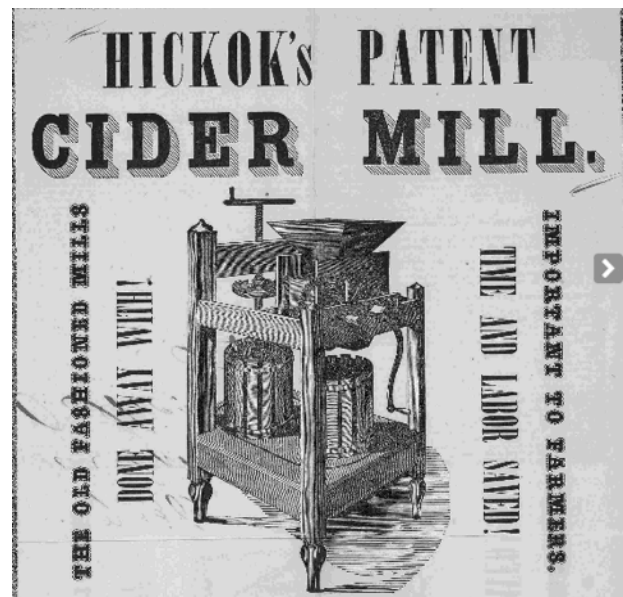
But by the mid-1840s, Ohio had become one of the most populous states in the Union, and manufacturing—especially manufacturing of farm implements—was well established. In addition, the new canals, opened in the 1830s, and the more recent boom in railroads, revolutionized transportation. Not only could farmers now get their produce to distant markets inexpensively: they could now get the mechanical products of the new manufactories shipped to nearby towns, where they could be picked up with a horse and wagon (though delivery to the farm doorstep was still a century away).

Ted DeHaan, in an interesting 2014 article on the *Farm Collector* website at:

<https://www.farmcollector.com/equipment/cider-press-zm0z14junzbea>

notes that this confluence of events somehow conspired to put Springfield, Ohio at the center of a cider-press revolution. As he tells it:

Many of the key ingredients for success were readily available in Springfield. Abundant water power, metals, coal, a talented work force and a seemingly endless old growth forest of white oak were helpful, but something more was needed to propel manufacturing into overdrive. Even the massive iron foundries and the expertise to operate them were not quite enough. A new railroad network proved to be the key to transforming Springfield (west of Columbus) . . . into [a] manufacturing giant in the late 1800s.



Ad for a home cider mill/press c. 1856

The new generation of household-oriented machines combined both functions: one or more cylinders with teeth or blades ground apples into pomace, and a screw press on the same device was then used to extract the juice. While not useful for commercial purposes, these new devices allowed a homeowner with an apple tree or two to press cider for home use in season. Such simple home "cider mills" became must-have home appliances in the pre-electric era.

In the Johnny Appleseed Museum collection, we have one of these mills from the mid-nineteenth century: the cider mill originally belonging to Col. John H. James, Sr., Urbana lawyer and banker who made the original land donation for Urbana University, the first Swedenborgian institution of higher learning in the country.



The James Family Cider Press

And to bring the story full circle, it was Col. James that John Chapman—"Johnny Appleseed," another Swedenborgian—came to consult over a dispute regarding access to one of his nurseries in Champaign County in 1836, too early by over a decade for the colonel to have offered his co-religionist a glass of home-pressed cider. . . .



Jonathan apples in cross-section

Apple of the Month: the Jonathan

No, it wasn't named after Chapman (who was John, not Jonathan, in any case). He may never have seen one, but it was discovered about the time his path was turning toward the Maumee valley and Indiana. And it became a very popular variety, still prized today.

As with many older varieties, there is more than one origin story for the Jonathan. One links it to Ohio: A Mrs. Rachel Higley, migrating around 1796 from Connecticut to Ohio, brought

with her some apple seeds gathered from a cider mill. These she cultivated until they bore fruit, and she named the resulting variety Jonathan, after a young boy who came often to her orchard to sample the fruit.

The better-documented story places the origin somewhat later. In 1826 a Judge J. Buel of Albany, New York wrote a brief letter, published in the *New York Board of Agriculture Memorials* listing several apple varieties, including what was then called the "New Esopus Spitzenburgh." By 1845, Downing's *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* referred to it as the Jonathan, and described the original tree as still alive in Kingston, NY. And Hovey's *Magazine of Horticulture* for 1850 provided more background: it was first found growing in the orchard of Philip Rick, where it had sprouted from an Esopus Spitzenburgh seed. The name Jonathan was given it by Judge Buel in honor of the man who had first brought it to his attention, Jonathan Hasbrouck.

Along with the Baldwin, the Jonathan was among the most popular of the commercially-grown apples in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ironically, it was not widely grown commercially in its home state of New York, where (according to Beach's 1905 *Apples of New York*) it produced mostly every second year, with a high percentage of irregularly-shaped fruit. Beach noted, however, that "in regions farther west and south . . . it is recognized in many localities as one of the leading commercial varieties," producing annually with larger, more regular fruit.

The Jonathan is a worthy heir of its parent varietal, the Esopus Spitzenburg (as it is spelled today). The Spitzenburg is generally considered among both the most flavorful and the best keepers of American varieties, and the Jonathan shares its complex, sweet yet tart flavor, and its ability to stay crisp and flavorful in winter storage. Over the last 50 years it has fallen out of favor with commercial orchardists, who often seem to prefer the several varieties derived from it: the Idared, the Jonagold, the Jonafree and the Jonamac. But among orchards still raising heirloom varieties, the Jonathan is still a popular apple.



Jonathan Apple Blossoms

Jonathans blossom mid-season, with white or pinkish flowers. The fruit ripens in late September to mid-October, so you should find these for picking in orchards right now. In warmer zones, the Jonathan is a uniform bright red. In cooler climates, the red appears striped over a bright green base. It's an excellent eating apple, and its firm flesh stands up well to cooking, making it a favorite in pies. Or you might try this simple recipe for a Southern favorite, fried apples:

Fried Jonathan Apples

from Becky Hardin's *Cookie Rookie* site at:
<https://www.thecookierookie.com/fried-apples-recipe/>

Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 6 cups sliced Jonathan apples, peeled
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- Juice of ½ lemon
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)

Instructions

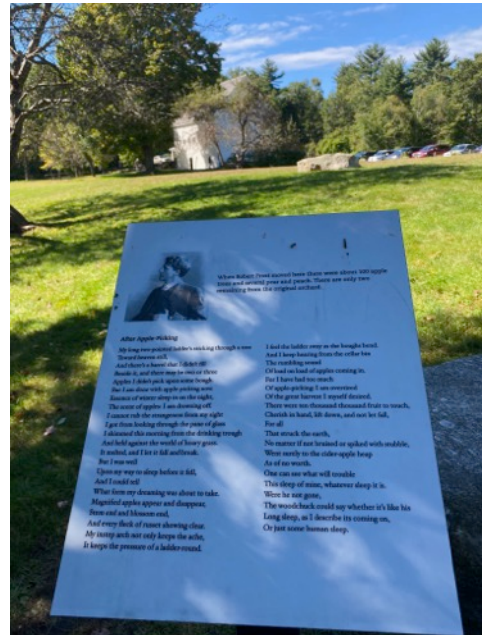
In a large cast iron skillet, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add all other ingredients and cook, uncovered, 8-10 minutes. Carefully turn the apples, with a spatula, every 2 minutes. The apples should be tender, but still have a slight bite and hold their shape.



A Jonathan apple tree

A Visit to Robert Frost's Farm

For a poet associated with rural life, Robert Frost certainly moved about a lot! The Robert Frost Farm Site, maintained in the small town of Derry by the State of New Hampshire, was his home for only about a decade, 1900–1911.



The farmhouse and apple tree seen from the hayfield

But those years produced many of the poems that would go into his first three books, and lead to his first Pulitzer prize. Some of those poems are now scattered about the property on plaques—the one in the photo is "After Apple Picking," from his first book of poems, *North of Boston*:

*... Magnified apples appear and disappear
 Stem end and blossom end,
 And every fleck of russet showing clear.
 My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
 It keeps the pressure of the ladder-round.
 I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
 And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
 The rumbling sound
 Of load on load of apples coming in.
 For I have had too much
 Of apple-picking: I am overtired
 Of the great harvest I myself desired . . .*

The farm, in fact—as the friendly docents are happy to point out—should really be called the Robert Frost Orchard, for when he moved there it had, in addition to its small pasture and a hayfield, 100 apple trees, plus many peach, pear and quince trees. Today

only a couple of the apple trees remain. On a mid-September family visit, one tree was bare; the other held about half its fruit, the rest lying on the scattered ground about the trunk. There were once nineteen varieties of apple grown here, and you can feel the work of harvesting them in the excerpt from the poem above.



One of the two remaining trees, still bearing

The house, built in 1884, was purchased for Frost and his family by his grandfather. It was restored to its original state beginning in 1974, under the watchful eye of his only surviving child, daughter Lesley. It has been furnished as it was in 1910, including the chair Frost bought himself while at Harvard, and the Royal Dalton china his wife selected. It was a major job: the property had been used as an automobile recycling site ("Frosty's") in the 1960s.

Frost is widely known as a difficult poet: dark depths often open on re-reading his seemingly bucolic verses. What is less widely known is the influence of his mother's Swedenborgian faith on his own sense of the connection of Nature and Spirit.

His mother, Isabel Moody Frost, was a Scots immigrant not satisfied with her inherited

Presbyterian faith. While living in San Francisco, where Robert was born, she found her way to the New Church, and brought her children up in the Swedenborgian faith. His father, on the other hand, was an irreligious skeptic. This tension between faith and skepticism plays a major role in Frost's poetry.

In an interview after winning his first Pulitzer prize in 1923, he said "I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But I am a mystic. I believe in symbols. I believe in change, and in changing symbols." As Jay Parini put it,

he absorbed a mystical sense of the world, an understanding of the universe that was founded on the idea that everything we see is a foretaste of things to come and that one must listen for the voice of God in unusual places, such as the wind in the trees or the ripples of lake water against the shore.

John Chapman shared with Frost this sense of what Swedenborg called Correspondence, though Chapman seems not to have shared the poet's skeptical nature.

Both would likely be saddened with the modern practice, at such historic sites, of letting all those apples fall and go to waste. After we toured the home, I went over to the great old apple tree and picked a handful of its fruit. They tasted of autumn, tart beneath the sweetness, dark-skinned and delicious. . .

About the Apple Core

The Apple Core is the official newsletter of the Johnny Appleseed Society, published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December, to members of the Johnny Appleseed Society.

About the Johnny Appleseed Society

The *Johnny Appleseed Society* is a nonprofit educational organization which seeks "to preserve and promote the legacy of John 'Johnny Appleseed' Chapman (1774 - 1845) through both educational activities, and the wide dissemination of educational materials that relate John Chapman's work and values to the world in which we live."

Membership is open to all who share our purpose. Annual dues are \$25 for voting members, \$10 for student members, and \$250 for Life membership. For more information, visit:

www.appleseedsociety.net