

The First Orchardist in the Ohio River Valley

By CARL SCHURZ LOWDEN

MOST of us eat apples in one form or another, but how many of us have any thought whatsoever for that quaint figure of the pioneer period, Johnny Applesseed, who would rather go barefooted and in rags to serve his fellow man than to wear fine raiment and rest in perfect ease?

His name was John Chapman, born in Massachusetts the same year that the colonies declared their independence. As a boy, the neighbors believed him rather shiftless; but he was only trying to find himself and discover the line of work he should do. Like any other young man he visited around with his cousins, his aunts, uncles, and friends. Then one day he heard the call of the wild West. What did he do? Well, Johnny went to a cider mill, loaded his boat with apple seeds, and floated down the Ohio River with his strange cargo of waste from the presses.

That young man was the first economist the Ohio River country ever had; likewise he was its first philanthropist, also its first and most extensive nurseryman. He went in advance of the hardy pioneers, made friends with the Indians, stopped frequently, cleared ground, and planted some of the seeds thereon. He would do this over and over, again and again. He would return to the mill for more seeds, look after the seedlings, and put out new apple orchards. When the settlers arrived, they were surprised to find that somebody had preceded them and lessened the asperity of their rough-and-ready existence. Sometimes they never knew the identity of the Good Samaritan.

Johnny was a queer sort. He came to the settlement of Mansfield in the territory that is now the state of Ohio. The villagers greeted him with varying comments. His odd dress and his general dowdy appearance excited, even in that uncouth outpost of civilization, belittling stares, frowns, and ridicule. But Johnny cared not. He used Mansfield as his headquarters for a time, went about his business, cleared more ground, planted more seeds, and replenished his supply from the Pennsylvania cider presses.

While Johnny remained in the Mansfield neighborhood, a traveling missionary came to spread the gospel in this unrestricted field of labor. One day a motley crowd, with Johnny included therein, clustered around the stump pulpit of the missionary. In the course of his sermon the preacher forcefully propounded the rhetorical question:

"Where now is there a man who, like the primitive Christians, is traveling to heaven barefooted and clad in coarse raiment?"

Johnny looked down on his bare feet and the old coffee sack of burlap which served as his coat. Though he said nothing at that moment, he did not relax his steadfast attention. Presently the orator paused, and again flung forth his challenge:

"Where now is there a man who, like the primitive Christians, is traveling to heaven barefooted and clad in coarse raiment?"

The first orchardist of the Ohio River Valley arose from the log on which he had been reclining. He made his way forward, he placed a bare foot on the stump pulpit, pointed toward his rude coffee sack garment, and announced in a clear firm voice:

"Here's your primitive Christian."

At this unexpected answer to his question the preacher seemed flustered, and soon he pronounced the benediction. He had not been prepared for the occurrence. But Johnny was as much surprised at the abrupt ending of the discourse as the itinerant preacher had been at receiving an answer to his question.

The settlers of Mansfield learned to revere the rustic, eccentric fellow. They bestowed on him the nickname of Johnny Applesseed. They traded him old clothing for young trees or merely thanked him heartily; but certainly the old-time orchards were thus started and the fruit provided sustenance for their children and their children's children. The present generation so highly reveres his memory that monuments have been placed in three cities, first in a public park of Mansfield, in 1900; in Ashland, Ohio, 15 years later, and in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the next year after the Ashland event.

"What was it," asked Dr. Alfred Vivian, of the Ohio State Agricultural College, in making the main address at Fort Wayne, "that took him from Western Pennsylvania, where he might have lived a comfortable life as a nurseryman and sent him forth with his apple seeds to the ever-receding frontier? What power led him to spend those long years journeying on the waterways of Ohio through the trackless forest planting seeds? What was the motive that sent him back year after year to see that his brush fences were intact, to dress his trees, to bud and graft with stock from the choicest varieties of the East?"

"It could not have been for gain, for he seldom accepted money for his trees and every one was welcome to the trees even though he gave nothing in exchange. Was it pure love of the apple tree that prompted him to carry it into the wilderness? Some one has said that no one really appreciates a tree until he feels impelled to put his arms around it and with his fingers lovingly explore every seam and crevice of the bark. Tradition tells us that Johnny Applesseed so loved his apple trees. Was his a divine call? Did

his great love of children prompt him to have ready for the children of the pioneers that great blessing of childhood—the apple?"

Young Chapman grew up with the wanderlust within him. He was 20 years of age when he disappeared from home and went west to work at odd jobs and make his way as an interpreter. He met the Indians without fear, lived with them or near them, carried no guns of any sort, gained their friendship, and was accorded their confidence.

The precise time of Johnny's decision to become an itinerant nurseryman is not known; but there is a record that in 1800 he went down the Ohio with two canoes of apple seeds. He stopped opposite what is now Wellsburg, West Virginia, cleared a portion of the wilderness, and started there his first nursery. A few

was polite and attentive in manner and chaste in conversation." It is an established fact that he must rank as a pioneer naturalist, also that he had all the mercy and kindness which one must possess to study life in the forest.

At one time he was mowing long grass on a site he had selected for an apple orchard when a snake bit his bare foot. Johnny wielded the scythe and killed the reptile, but he afterward regretted his act.

"Poor fellow," he sorrowed, "he only just touched me when I, in the heat of my ungodly passion, put the heel of my scythe in him and went away. Some time afterward I went back, and there lay the poor fellow dead."

If this man could be merciful to a treacherous snake, what would be the extent of his kindness to creatures less obnoxious?

A few years later he helped some settlers make a road, but during the process they accidentally en-

countered a hornets' nest, about the last thing a wise person wants to find. One of the insects crept under Johnny's coffee sack coat and stung repeatedly while Johnny slowly pulled it out. The men laughed, but Johnny rebuked them by saying:

"It would not be right to kill the poor thing, for it did not intend to hurt me."

To consider the motive was thoroughly characteristic of the man. The average person notes the act, judges by it alone, and then strikes without further thought. Johnny deliberated while he endured the pain, and then forebore to take revenge. An attitude of this sort has been called the measure of true greatness.

Johnny often stayed all night in the forest with a hollow log as his only shelter, though sometimes he would rest in a settler's cabin with the hard floor as his bed. He would never remain in any log already occupied; for he was scrupulously careful not to disturb any of the wild folk of the big woods. He considered it sinful to kill creatures for food, and believed that the soil provided all that was necessary for human subsistence.

This strange odd-acting bachelor was a preacher with deeds instead of words as a medium of expression. He most strenuously followed the ideal of frugality and abstinence. Perhaps as ardent as any of our present-day conservationists he opposed waste of food and waste of any kind. The many old-time apple orchards scattered through Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana, long since dead, were each a sermon of his preaching.

On the sixteenth day of August, 1812, General William Hull and his American army surrendered at Detroit to the British and Indians. Johnny Applesseed was one of the first persons to hear of the misfortune. With the Indians emboldened by the capture, he feared outbreaks; so he traveled day and night to warn the settlers of the danger of massacre so that they might escape. Some times in the dead of night he would arouse a frontier family and in a piercing voice deliver this message: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He hath anointed me to blow the trumpet in the wilderness and sound an alarm in the forest; for, behold, the tribes of the heathen are round about your doors and a devouring flame followeth after them."

The number of lives that Johnny Applesseed saved by his spectacular warnings cannot be definitely known. But the act itself was heroic and typical of the quaint traveling nurseryman, also a strong illustration of his creed of doing the greatest possible good for as many people as he could.

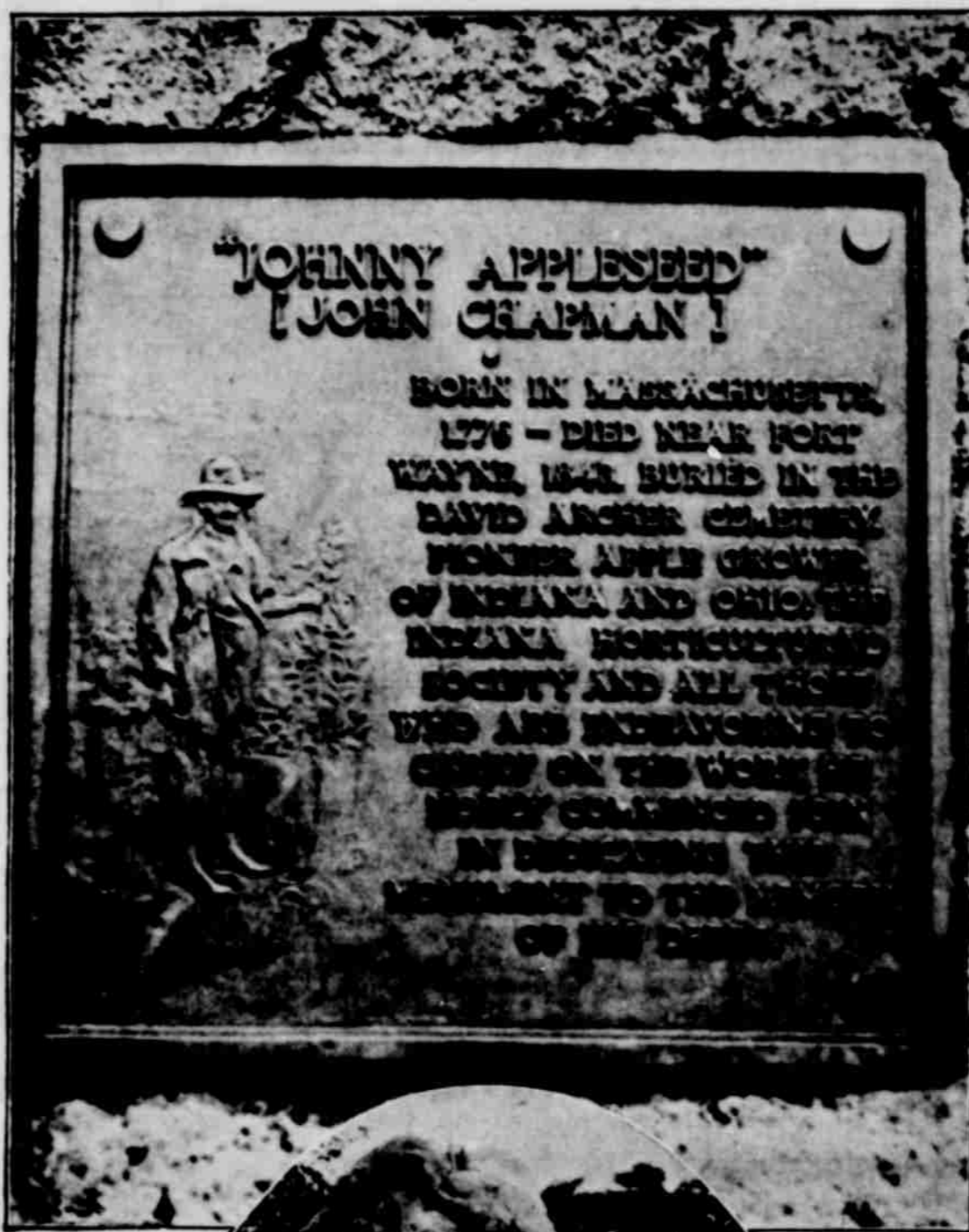
Johnny Applesseed was a picturesque character, small, wiry, restless, possessing keen black eyes, long dark hair, and a scanty beard which never made any acquaintance with a pair of shears. Occasionally he would wear home-made sandals to protect his feet when setting out on a long journey; and often he would present a striking appearance with a boot on one foot and a cast-off moccasin on the other. In summer and during a mild winter he would leave his feet bare.

The headgear of this eccentric traveler was unique. He had a tin vessel that served the double purpose of cooking utensil and cap. However, he found that this would not protect his eyes from the sun, so he devised a hat of pasteboard with a broad visor. As it was both useful and ornamental he adopted it as his permanent fashion. He wore second-hand clothing he had received for his apple trees; but in later years he cut holes in a coffee sack for his head and arms and got along very well with it as a three-in-one shirt-coat.

"It is a very serviceable cloak," he patiently explained to questioners. "It is as good clothing as any man need wear."

When almost every man carried a weapon of some sort, usually a squirrel rifle, Johnny carried none. The Indians considered him a great medicine man; they trusted him, and he trusted them.

Johnny's mission was one of peace and good will. Every seed that grew into a tree that adorned a settler's rude home was a living testament of service and brotherhood. Whenever and wherever the story of Johnny Applesseed and his work has been told, then and there were higher ideals born and better American citizenship built.



Upper—A close-up of the plate on the Johnny Applesseed monument in Swinney Park, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Lower—The whole monument.

years later he returned to the spot and gave or bartered the young trees to the few settlers that had come.

The odd man never waited for the settlers to show him a location. Always he went ahead and chose the sites on which Mother Nature had bestowed particular care; with uncanny precision he seemed able to select those where towns would be founded. When the slender trees were ready for planting, the people had arrived and were ready for them.

The frontiersmen looked on Johnny Applesseed with a kind of superstitious awe. Though he has been designated as ignorant, he was really a reader and thinker of more than ordinary ability. He knew philosophy, he often preached from the Bible; on one occasion, at least, he served as a Fourth of July orator. This occurred at Norwalk, Ohio, in 1816, the year that the sister state of Indiana gained admittance into the nation. Johnny had been described as "well-read, and