

The Apple-Seed Man

by Paula Appling



Imagine sleeping on a bed of earth with the sky as your roof. Imagine birds and wolves and snakes as your only companions for weeks. Imagine eating nuts and berries and roots that you've freshly harvested and prepared.

John Chapman chose this life for most of his seventy-one years.

John Chapman was born in 1774 in the village of Leominster, Massachusetts, just before the Revolutionary War for independence from Britain began. It was autumn, the time of year when apples are harvested and cider is made.

When he was about six, John's family moved southwest to Longmeadow, Massachusetts. The young boy probably learned his letters in a one-room schoolhouse.

In the 1790s, the United States included the eastern states and land south of the Great Lakes and west to the Mississippi River. The Northwest Territory—the land west of Pennsylvania between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers—was just opening up for

settlement. Men who had fought in the Revolutionary War were seeking new opportunities and heading west. John Chapman, now a young man, decided to join them.

John took with him little more than his knowledge of planting apple orchards and his faith.

John dedicated his life to helping people. He planted apple orchards so families who followed him out west would have food. He read to families he visited, or left books with them. He loved children and would talk to them and listen to their stories. He gained the respect of the Indians he met as he traveled the woods and rivers of the new territories.

John gathered apple seeds whenever he could. Sometimes he collected them from **cider mills**. He would separate the seeds from the apple pulp, then wash and dry them. He walked the land that pioneers would eventually come to and planted orchards for their benefit.

If John came upon a pioneer family at a time that was not right for planting, he might leave a bag of seeds with them. The children would always want to know how long it would be until the seeds turned into apples.

John planted trees wherever he went, usually in clearings near rivers or streams. He surrounded his plantings with natural fences of brush and branches to keep animals away.

Sometimes he let the trees grow right where he had planted them. But usually he'd return after two years and take the **saplings**, pack them carefully, and leave them at a **way station**, with a family, or at an inn, in exchange for clothing, food, or money. Sometimes he gave the trees away.

John Chapman planted thousands of apple trees as far west as Indiana. His unusual ways, kindness, and giving heart made him known to pioneers he had never met. You might know him by his other, more popular name: Johnny Appleseed.

Copyright © 1998 by Highlights for Children, Inc., Columbus, Ohio.

Word Bank

cider mills — factories for making apple cider

saplings — young trees

way station — a station or stopping place along a line of travel