

Johnny Appleseed

Birth: Sep. 28, 1774

Death: Mar. 10, 1845

Folk Hero and Patriot. He was born John Chapman in Leominster, Massachusetts to a father who was a Minuteman and later served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. It is not known exactly when he left New England and started his westward journey. He did not randomly scatter seeds but was a practical nurseryman. The pioneers were moving west and he realized there was a need for supplying seeds and seedlings. The homestead law required each settler to plant fifty apple trees the first year. Apples were a practical food necessity for early settlers.

John stayed ahead of the pioneers and started many nurseries throughout the Midwest by planting seeds which he bought from cider mills in Pennsylvania. He owned many pieces of land throughout Ohio and Indiana using this land to plant apple seeds, transplant seedlings and set out orchards. He sold apple seedlings to those who could afford to pay and those without money would provide housing, food or other needs in exchange.

He wandered the Midwest for over fifty years from western Pennsylvania through northern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois traveling barefoot with no more belongings than he could carry on his back. During the War of 1812, he went to northern Ohio alerting settlers of British movements and positions near Detroit while also warning them of possible Indian raids.

The man with the apple trees became an American patriot. An article in Harper's New Monthly Magazine ran an article called "Johnny Appleseed, a Pioneer Hero in 1871. He was officially labeled with his nick name. While caring for one of his orchard in Allen County, Indiana he was stricken with pneumonia and sought help in the cabin of his friend William Worth. The fever took his life at age 70. John was buried along the St Joseph River.

There are many monuments in the East and Midwest to honor his memory. Leominster, Massachusetts has the greatest claim as the city found his birth certificate in 1930 and have honored their native son in many ways: A elementary school in North Leominster bears his name. The road that passes by his birthplace is named after him where a granite marker rests on the site of the farmhouse where he was born. His bronze bust graces the entrance walk to the public library. Finally an imposing wood statue weighting 800 pounds was carved and set up inside the City Hall. Dexter City, Ohio where his family is buried has a unique monument made of thousands of rocks and stones contributed by people throughout the United States. A few miles north of Ft Wayne, Indiana is a park named the "Johnny Appleseed Memorial Park". The actual grave has been lost through development and natural recycling. Many of his trees were carried further by pioneers ending up in many western states. People in the Midwest today, point to a tree in their yard and proudly announce it as a "Johnny Appleseed" original. (bio by: Donald Greyfield)