



Text Version of Audio Story: Johnny Apple

I think first-grade teachers are wonderful people. I have nothing against first-grade teachers. As a matter of fact, some of my best friends are first-grade teachers. However, with that said, if your first-grade teacher read you a storybook about, or even told you the story of, Johnny Appleseed, more than likely, she had it all wrong.

You probably have images in your head of a barefoot drifter with a pot on his head — sort of a hobo-looking guy who wandered aimlessly, a man whose life was void of direction.

Nope, not even close.

Johnny Appleseed was a real fellow named John Chapman. Johnny was born in the fall of 1774 in Massachusetts. His father was a minuteman at Concord and was later an officer in the Revolutionary War. Little can be found on his boyhood years, but we do know that his mother died when he was very small. His father remarried and, under that union, the family continued to grow.

We can really start to pick up on Johnny's life in his early twenties. It was then that he migrated to the little frontier town of Warren, in western Pennsylvania. And it was from there the legend of Johnny Appleseed begins to grow. An aimless drifter? No. He was always on the move but certainly not without direction. A hobo? Not at all.

What Johnny Appleseed Chapman was, before he was anything else, was a highly intelligent, if not brilliant, businessman. He was a Type A personality driven to succeed. His business model was simple. Go into the frontier of western Pennsylvania and beyond to Ohio and Indiana. Go into that wild, unsettled Indian territory in anticipation of the fact that white settlers would soon be on their way. Plant apple trees, and when the homesteaders arrive, sell the orchard to an enterprising family who could run it as a business.

Over a span of fifty years, John Chapman repeated his business model over and over again. Buy a tract of land, clear it, build a fence to keep out the deer, plant apple seeds and watch the trees grow into an orchard, and then sell it. Some historians believe he did okay for himself. Others believe he became very wealthy in the process. One thing we know for sure is that John Chapman, a bachelor, was not a material fellow. He was

constantly on the move; no grass grew under his feet. And, as such, he did not spend his money on possessions. He certainly, regardless of whose opinion you believe, had more money than he needed.

He was a generous fellow who saw fit to helping his fellow man and often gave money to charitable pursuits. Often what money he didn't give away, he would bury in various locations on the frontier and return for it, if he needed it. More than likely, little pockets of treasure are still out there, buried in the ground by Johnny Appleseed.

He was a good-natured fellow. Indians and settlers, alike, adored him. The rapport he had on the frontier often made him a middleman in not only settling disputes, but helping to avoid them.

Johnny, in all those years, was a man of robust health. And then one day, in his early seventies, he came down with pneumonia. It would end his life. It was in death that his legend would grow to what it is today. More than likely, the gregarious, good-natured, generous, businessman/peacemaker John Chapman would get a chuckle out of how he is remembered in history.

I'm the American Storyteller.