

APPLE ORCHARDS OF CLAY COUNTY

by Rena Lents Thomas

Apples came to America by way of early colonists who brought seeds from England and planted trees as they settled. By 1820, apple trees were fairly common in the United States.

But, how did they get to Clay County and surrounding areas? John **Chapman**, or Johnny **Appleseed**, as he was more commonly known, was born in Massachusetts in 1774, and died in 1845. He became identified with the development of the Midwest as one of the country's leading fruit growing areas. He spent the greater part of his life planting apple seeds and saplings throughout Ohio, Illinois and Indiana and caring for the existing orchards.

Is this myth or legend? If true, perhaps some of the earliest apple orchards in and around Clay county could have been started by Mr. **Chapman** or Johnny **Appleseed**, as he was known, as he traveled across the midwest dropping his seeds.

Another version of the Apple Orchards start in Clay County comes from the late Clay County Historian, Ernest **Elliott**. The first apple trees that he found record of were set by his Uncle, Thomas **Elliott**, older brother of his father, Isaac **Elliott**. Thomas came to Clay County in 1818 from Washington Co., IN where he had already grafted some apple sprouts.

Isaac lived in the Xenia area and was also known for his ability in grafting fruit trees.

More than 1000 different varieties of apples have been developed over the centuries but through careful selection with hybrid varieties and grafting, the number of commercially important varieties have been narrowed to about 40. They are chosen for their cooking ability, baking and just good eating.

The majority of apples grown were Jonathans, good for both cooking and eating. Also grown were Grimes Golden, Red and Yellow Delicious, Rome Beauties and many of the Ben Davis variety. Ben Davis apples were known as an excellent cooking apple.

Today, one-fifth of the United States crop consists of one variety or other of the Delicious Apple. In good years, 700,000,000 bushel are grown in the world, of which approximately one-fifth are produced in the United States.

Most of the orchards were made up of apple trees, although a few Peach trees were also grown in Clay County.

Flora, at one time, was known as Orchard City, due to the large number of fruit trees in the area, including, what is now, the city limits of Flora.

Back on April 10, 1867, an ad in the Clay County Union Paper for the Clay County Nursery read as follows:

"J. **Meyer** would call the attention of farmers and others to the large assortment of fruit and ornamental trees in his nursery in Clay City. There are over 20,000