

The Life and Legend of Johnny Appleseed 1774-1845

Yes, Johnny Appleseed was a real living person. His name was John Chapman. He was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, September 26, 1774. His father, Nathaniel Chapman was one of the Minutemen at Concord and later served as a Captain in the Revolutionary War. His mother, Elizabeth Simons Chapman, died in 1776 while his father was still in service. After the war his father married again and John spent his early years in and around Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

Details of his boyhood are scanty at best. In his early twenties he traveled to the frontier country of northwestern Pennsylvania near the little settlement of Warren and from there history records his travels, his work and his legend westward throughout the Ohio country and beyond.

For nearly fifty years John Chapman helped America grow up in the frontier country that is now Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and fringes of other states. He was a firm believer and missionary in the Swedenborgian Christian faith. He was a nurseryman with a love for apples which resulted, over his life span, in the clearing of many acres of wilderness, largely in one to five acre plots, where he planted and tended apple trees to be sold, traded, bartered and given away to the frontier farmers throughout the broad Ohio country where he traveled. Johnny Appleseed died near Fort Wayne, Indiana in March 1845, not too long before another spring would have brought another bounty of the apple blossoms he loved. He was 71. Still traveling. Still tending his apple tree nurseries. Still preaching "News right fresh from Heaven". Still helping his fellowman.

When he ended his fifty year odyssey throughout the midwestern United States. John Chapman had become a living legend in American folklore. Like many of those in this deposit of Americana. Johnny Appleseed was a real person who actually lived in the days of the frontier settlement. Unlike many of his folklore counterparts, however, he really performed the heroic acts that are the substance of his legend.

During his sojourn John Chapman became known for his courage and his dedication to his fellow man, as well as for the apple orchards he planted.

Part poet-philosopher, part mystic, out of phase with the goals and aspirations of his contemporaries, but infinitely attuned to the larger harmony of the universe. Johnny Appleseed occupies a special place in the long line of dreamers, innovators, and statesman who have contributed to America's greatness.