

Johnny Appleseed

John Chapman, later given the name Johnny Appleseed, was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774. John's father was a Minuteman who later fought in the Revolutionary War. John's mother died when he was very young.

John became a legendary figure when he left home and began traveling the Ohio Valley area (Ohio and Indiana) in the 1800s. People picture him as being a big and strong man, but John Chapman was actually small in stature. He lived a very simple life. He preferred walking barefoot, wearing sacks for clothes, and a tin pot for a hat. One thinks of Johnny Appleseed as being very poor but, actually, he owned a lot of land. Of course, he had his land full of apple orchards. He planted his first orchard in 1796 in western Pennsylvania.

As he traveled through Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, he would give pioneers deerskin bags full of apple seeds that he collected from cider mills in Pennsylvania. People would pay him for the seeds with money but mostly with goods such as used clothing. He would later go back to the areas where the seeds had been planted and help tend the orchards. The orchards were an asset to the economy of the Ohio Valley. Apples were also an excellent source of food for the diets of the early settlers.

Not only would John give people seeds and seedlings, but he also would tell stories about his many traveling adventures and talk about his faith. John Chapman was a deeply religious man. His church was based on the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg from Sweden. Swedenborgians were very rare in the country.

Many legendary tales are told about Johnny Appleseed. He slept outdoors and it was said when he couldn't find water, he would melt snow with his feet. It also was said that when he was in Kentucky, John met a tall, thin young man named Abe Lincoln headed back home after borrowing a book from someone. He gave him a bag of seeds.

John Chapman roamed the forests without any gun. He was a friend to the wild animals and a spiritual man to the settlers. The Native Americans thought of him as a medicine man because he would give herbs and plants used for healing. John Chapman was a hero and a welcome visitor to the frontier people.

He died on March 18, 1845, from pneumonia at the home of good friend, William Worth. He was buried in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, under a tombstone that reads, "He lived for others."



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Map Study

Johnny Appleseed traveled from his home in Massachusetts throughout the Ohio Valley region.

