

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

January 25, 2000

Apple Search---2000

It was an early Saturday morning and through sleepy eyes I saw our two dogs, Keiko & Chaco, beside our bed waiting to go outside. It was a special day one that everyone excitedly anticipated all week, including the dogs; a trip to the Fairgrounds Farmers Market. But first the dogs needed their morning walk and to be fed; the walking was done with Keiko and Chaco on leads to lessen the chance of early morning barking which could disturb the neighbors. Keiko (Shepard/Lab mix) had arrived in 1995 as a stray that showed up on our front porch on Thanksgiving weekend. It had been many decades since I had a dog, so I quickly went out and bought some dog food and instantly had a new friend and companion. My wife, Merrikay, named her, remembering that dog name from many years earlier.

A year and a half later we returned from an April vacation in New Mexico and there was an urgent call on our answering machine. It was from our neighbor Deane Walker who said, "A very friendly German Shepard dog showed up in our neighborhood and I have been feeding him, but another person is getting ready to call Animal Control to get him picked up; please consider giving him a home. He would be a great companion for your dog." [It was actually a good time to add a dog because I had just completed a 4.6 acre fenced dog lot.] I quickly went over to see the dog and was impressed with the large docile, friendly and beautiful dog. I had a happy smile on my face as I walked home leading the dog. Keiko initially growled at the new dog during feeding time, but by day-three his friendly manner had won her over and the two were "best buddies". We named our new family addition, Chaco, for the Chaco Culture National Park we had just visited in New Mexico. [Pueblo Bonito "Great House" in Chaco Canyon, with its approximate 700 rooms, was the largest structure in the United States until the late 1800s. That area was occupied by the Chaco people from about 850 to 1250.]

By 7:00 am it was time to get the dogs into our '95 Subaru station wagon, which we called the "Doggie Wagon"; Chaco, being the perfect gentleman, would allow Keiko to jump in first. On departure we would stop at the end of our driveway and retrieve our morning newspaper and then head out to the K & W Cafeteria in Winston-Salem. At the K & W we parked on the north side of the building outside of a window with an empty dining booth which allowed us to observe the dogs while dining to make sure nothing happened to them; of course we had put down all the windows in the car just a crack. The K & W breakfast was far superior to anything else offered in the area, its long serving bar was filled with unique breakfast items: a wide array of juices, fruits, salads, eggs prepared to your specification, pancakes, waffles, oatmeal, French toast, many breakfast meats, breads, pastries, pies, and a favorite often chosen, their apple dumpling; all this plus coffee, hot chocolate, tea and other beverages. We read the Winston-Salem Journal newspaper as we savored our breakfast and enjoyed our cups of coffee. We saved a little of our breakfast meat as a treat for the dogs.

Then we drove five miles to the Dixie Classic Fairgrounds where one of the agriculture exhibit buildings was used for the Farmers Market. When we parked, the dogs were raring to go and do something, so we put them on leads and took them for a short walk outside. I took Chaco and Merrikay took Keiko. They loved smelling everything and their noses were busy the entire time. Then we put them back in the Doggie Wagon. With excited anticipation, we took our bags into the Farmers Market. There we loaded up on vegetables, potatoes, fruits, homemade desserts, and pastries for breakfasts, lunches, and suppers, enough to last a whole week. When we got home, Merrikay cooked everything that could be cooked: mashed potatoes, butter beans, Crowder peas, baked butternut squash, summer squash casserole, steamed Swiss chard, and stuffed bell peppers. My all-time favorite was the ripe tomatoes which I could make summer-time tomato sandwiches with. Frequently we invited friends over--and sometimes Merrikay's parents--to enjoy a wonderful Farmers Market meal! These were not only wonderfully tasting meals but also very healthy meals.

One man, Maurice Marshall, sold heritage apple trees from his home in Stokes County, NC, but in late summer and early fall he would pick apples from his orchard trees and sell them at the Farmers Market. I looked forward to his arrival every year. The apples were totally fascinating to me; names, shapes, colors and tastes which I never encountered in grocery store apples. Maurice would often have twelve to fourteen

different apple varieties for sale and I would purchase many of his apple offerings. Once I asked him to suggest apples for a pie, he said, "Try these two." I went home and made the most delicious apple pie ever. I had forgotten the apple names and the next week he had different apples and did not remember what apples he had suggested the previous Saturday. I never did figure out the amazing pie apple combination.

I did have some very limited experience with old-timey apples. I grew up in western Iredell County, NC on a small farm and we had seven old apple trees. One was a very badly leaning Pound apple tree of which Mother used the apples to make pies; its apples were large, green with a red blush, and very tart. The others were six very tall apple trees of unknown variety; the apples were medium in size, light yellow with red stripes and less sour which Mother used to make applesauce. For our fall church camp retreats, we would clean up our cider mill, gather fallen apples (each with a worm or two) and make five gallons of delicious cider.

In further talking to Maurice I learned that he had discovered a few of the apple varieties himself. This caused me to ask if there were any apples he was looking for in Forsyth County, "yes" there was he said, "a Harper's Seedling," an apple from my area in western Forsyth County. I then casually started looking for the apple, checking out a few of the scarce older looking apple trees near my home, between Clemmons and Lewisville NC, and talking to a few of the senior citizens of the area; they did mention a few old apples they remembered, such as Bull Nose, Maryland, Spice & Roscoe but there was no mention of the Harper's Seedling.

The apple had once been in the area because in 1915 a Harper (Seedling) apple was sent to the USDA by the Reynolds Nursery (the home of its owner is 3 miles from my home); a watercolor of the apple was painted and now is in the National Agriculture Library (Beltsville, MD). Since my initial on-the-ground approach was not successful; I decided to try a different approach---use media to reach a greater number of people. At that time there was a Thursday supplement section in the Winston-Salem Journal, called the Clemmons Journal which focused on the communities of Clemmons and Lewisville. I asked a reporter from the newspaper if they would do an article about my looking for the Harper's Seedling. They agreed and an extensive article was published on July 29, 1999 about my trying to find a Harper's Seedling apple tree or information about it. The article resulted in 12 to 14 responses; the most frequent being, "I have an old tree I would like to be identified," but no one mentioned the Harper's Seedling; but later others were found who did know of it.

I then decided to try another newspaper, the Yadkin Ripple, a small weekly newspaper in the adjoining county to the northwest. I chose this publication because the Harper's Seedling was sold in Yadkin County from 1886 to 1903 by the Cedar Cove Nursery (N. W. Craft, Proprietor). This historic nursery was located 12 miles from my home near the Shore Post Office. In their nursery catalogs it was described as follows: "**Harper's Seedling**---A new and very interesting apple; originated on the premises of the late Edgar Harper of Forsyth County, N. C.; combining perhaps more good qualities than any other one of our Fall apples (unless it be the Magnum Bonum or Merit). Medium to large size; roundish oblate; red, with white specks; flesh yellow, tender crisp, juicy, rich, excellent flavor; vigorous grower, productive bearer and bears young. October to January. Price 25 cents." [Note: This was being sold at a premium because their typical apple tree price was 15 cents for a standard tree and 20 cents for a dwarf tree.] The Cedar Cove Nursery also sold fifty other apple varieties, many of them very rare, such as: Sine Qua Non, Sugar Ball, McCullers' Winter, Hall, and May.

The Yadkin Ripple did include an article about my looking for the Harper's Seedling on August 5, 1999. I received two responses but none knew of the Harper's Seedling.

By then I had some idea of how to approach a newspaper and get them to do an article about my looking for old apples. My childhood location of Iredell County was two counties to the southwest; so I approached the counties' flagship newspaper, the Statesville Record & Landmark, and asked if they would do an article about my looking for old apples in Iredell County. At that time I had zero credentials as an "apple hunter" and I had never found a single old apple variety, but they still very generously agreed to feature my looking for heritage apple varieties in Iredell County by publishing an article on September 10, 1999. [This was my "last casting of the net on the water" because without the article I would have most likely discontinued my search since I knew of no other options.] What was unknown to me initially was that there had been two historic fruit tree nurseries northeast of Statesville: the W. H. Crawford Nursery which listed over forty apple varieties in their 1910 & 1916 catalogs, including McLean and Winter May and nearby there had been an even older

nursery, the C. W. Kessler Nursery, which was active in the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Mr. Buster Holton later told me that one of the Kessler apples was the Vandever June, “one of the most versatile apples known”; named for a Mr. Vandever of Alexander Co., NC. During my interview with the Record & Landmark, I did not mention looking for the Harper’s Seedling because it was not known as being in that area.

Fortunately for me the residents of Iredell County were a great resource who valued the old apple varieties and many responded to the Record & Landmark article mentioning rare apple varieties they remembered and locations of actual trees. There was a Queen apple tree in the Sharon community, Red Potts in Jennings community, Mosey apple tree north of Barium Springs, and a Yellow Potts near Love Valley. Other apples mentioned included Crouch and Night Dropper, but these trees no longer existed. [The Potts (yellow) was listed as an “extinct apple” in the book *Old Southern Apples*, by Lee Calhoun; what was not previously known was that there were both Yellow Potts and Red Potts apples.] Other respondents were helpful in telling me about people I should contact who would know a lot about old apples. Contacting the people was such a positive and welcoming experience that I will continue to follow-up on all the suggested additional contacts in 2001. I also need to check out Wilkes County, because so many people said, “You should go to Wilkes County to look for old apples.” I wonder what I will find in Wilkes County.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the three newspapers who told of my looking for rare apple varieties.

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Harper’s Seedling Apple
(USDA Watercolor)



Merrickay & Keiko, Tom & Chaco

DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE
FRUIT TREES, VINES AND PLANTS
CEDAR COVE NURSERIES,

SHORE, YADKIN CO., N. C.

1880-'81.

N. W. CRAFT'S NEW FRUIT CATALOGUE. 7

Sine Qua Non—Size medium; pale yellow, with grey specks; flesh tender, high-flavored, excellent. July.

Summer Rose—Medium size, roundish, oblate; ground pale waxen yellow, covered with bright, crimson stripes; very tender, crisp, juicy, sub-acid. June and July.

Summer Queen—Large, conical; striped and shaded with red; rich and fine-flavored. July.

Summer Sweet—Medium size, roundish, oblate; pale yellow, sweet, prod. August.

Sweet Bough—A good summer apple; large yellow; flesh tender, sweet flavored; a strong grower. August.

Sugar Ball—Medium to large size, oblate; yellow, flesh tender, very sweet and good. Middle of August.

Yellow Horse—Large, roundish, oblate; pale yellow; flesh tender; rich, juicy, with pleasant acid flavor. Good for cooking, stock or cider. August.

Autumn Varieties.

Aunt Sally—Medium to large size; pale yellow, with gray specks; tender, sub acid. September and October.

Buckingham—Very large, roundish; yellow ground, covered with dull red stripes; flesh tender, juicy, sub-acid, moderately rich. October and November.

Baltimore Red—Very large, round; dark red, with white dots; flesh coarse, juicy, sub-acid. October and November.

Gravenstein—Very large; greenish yellow, with bright splashes of red and orange; tree vigorous. September and October.

Golden Russet—Medium size; yellowish russet; flesh firm, crisp, tender, juicy, first-rate. October and November.

Harper's Seedling—A new and very interesting apple; originated on the premises of the late Edgar Harper, of Forsyth County, N. C.; combining perhaps more good qualities than any other one of our fall apples (unless it be the Magnum Bonum, or Merritt). Medium to large size; roundish, oblate; red, with white specks; flesh yellow, tender, crisp, juicy, rich, excellent flavor; vigorous grower, productive bearer and bears young. October to January. Price 25 cents.

Magnum Bonum—Medium size, roundish, oblate; color red, with white specks; flesh yellow, tender, crisp, juicy, mild, sub-acid; excellent growth, vigorous and productive, and bears quite young. October and November.

Merit—Large, roundish, oblate; dark red when fully ripe, with white specks; flesh yellow, tender, juicy, sub-acid; very good. September and October.

Yadkin Beauty—A new, fine apple, originated in Yadkin County a few years back; of large size, round, oblate; yellow ground, covered with dark red stripes, frequently red all over; flesh yellow, fine grained, only slightly acid; liked by all who have seen it; tree very thrifty, and an abundant bearer. October to January. Price 25 cents each.