

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

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Apple Search---2011

My apple search effort was somewhat limited during 2010 by extensive time spent on a new orchard, but longer term, the orchard will aid in the apple preservation effort. The apples found this year include: Barnhart Beauty, Bush Sweet, Cannon, Cheese (med., oblate, yel.), French, Goat, Granny Sweet, Green Milam, Hackworth, Johnny, NC Keeper (flat), Pearmain (small, red), Pound (lg, yel, oblate), Republican, Ring Jaw, Rusty Back, Rusty Coat (med., sour), Smokey Twig, Sour Jon (summer), Sweet Graft, & Wagener.

This year I would like to share with you stories involving “apples of legend”. I will first begin with an apple whose description sounds like a myth---the Upside Down apple. Several years ago I was talking to Danny Harvey (a heritage apple expert from Ashe Co., NC) and I asked him if there were any apples he would still like to find, he said “yes” and that he had looked for the Upside Down apple near Camp Creek State Park, WV. Supposedly this apple tree was propagated by putting water sprouts in the ground upside down; the growing part sounded iffy, but Danny is a “straight shooter” who would not shoot bull to a person. In any event, I spent two part days looking for the apple near Camp Creek SP with no success. As time went by, I would ask every one I met with West Virginia roots if they had heard of the Upside Down apple. The answer was always “no” until this year when I asked a man from Boone County; he said “Oh, the old Upseedown” and he proceeded to tell me where a tree was possibly still located, his explanation for the name was that the apple looked like it was growing upside-down. I traveled to Boone Co. and found no trace of the apple or no one remembering it, but on that day I did find a Barnhart Beauty, a different Pearmain apple, French apple, and old-time pear locals called the Quince. The legend of the Upside Down apple continues.

The Curse of Micah Rood---In 2009, I received an email from Martha Bradshaw a historical preservationist from Connecticut who was trying to locate a Rood or Mike apple, which according to legend had once been in her state. The story begins in 1693 near what is now Franklin, Connecticut [there are many versions of this story]. A lazy and suspicious man lived in the community named Micah Rood; he made a poor living on his miserable patch of rocky farmland; his one source of pride was his apple orchard.

The people in that era lived a rather austere, isolated existence, so it was an important event when travelling peddlers arrived with their bags of fascinating wares. Hank Karner, with his thick German accent, arrived in Franklin from Philadelphia with his goods for sale. Hank had sold most of his wares in other communities; this meant that he was carrying considerable cash and had some remaining jewelry. As the day drew to an end, Hank asked if anyone knew where he could get lodging, the nearest Inn being hours away. Someone suggested the near-by home of Micah Rood. That was the last time Mr. Karner was seen alive; the next day his body was found beneath one of Micah Rood’s apple trees, his head split open and his pack goods were scattered. Everyone thought Micah Rood had killed the peddler, but there was no absolute proof of his guilt, so Micah was never charged with the crime. The next year, something amazing happened in the orchard, the blossoms of that apple tree were crimson instead of their usual white color and each apple had a “drop of blood” near its core. Micah Rood became even more reclusive and morose, neglected his farm and died a few years later. The Rood tree, or Mike apple tree as some called it, was reportedly grafted widely in the area; “no eastern Connecticut orchard was complete without it”. There was a New York Times article in Dec. 23,

1888 that told about “bloody-heart apples” from the back-woods community of Franklin being sold in Windham, CT markets. The apples had a cherry-red skin, they were delicious, and had a large red globule near the center, like a drop of blood. Another description says it was a sweet apple, flecked inside with red, and ripe early fall.

I looked on the internet and through my extensive collection of reference texts, but could not find anything about a current source of the Rood apple. Time passed; then it occurred to me that I had found a Blood apple in Yadkin Co., NC, years earlier; its description very well fits that of the Rood apple: scarlet blooms, blood-red skin, streaks of red inside, sweet, and ripe early fall. The original tree is now gone but I have it grafted at my home. I tracked down family members, who were previous owners in the 1970s, but they did not know where the Blood tree came from; it probably dates back to an earlier Arnold family. Hopefully a future chance contact will lead to a Rood or Mike tree.

Peggy Apple---Fred Brown (Mt. Sterling, KY) emailed me that I should look for the Peggy apple, previously in the Nicholas Co., WV community of Lockwood.

In the late 1700’s Henry Morris became the first permanent white settler in the western part of Nicholas County where he built a log cabin on Peter’s Creek. Henry and his wife, Mary, had two young daughters named Betsy and Margaret (Peggy). This was an era when bear, elk, and buffalo were in the area and Indian raids caused emergency retreats to forts (three times for the Morris family). Henry had fought in a closely contested battle with the Indians (General Lewis & Chief Cornstalk, the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774); Henry participated in a rear attack which was crucial to the victory.

A white hunter showed up at the Morris cabin and since white visitors were rare, he was allowed to stay for the winter in which he hunted with Henry. Later Henry described his visitor to another who suspected that the hunter might have been a notorious frontier renegade who had supposedly killed many whites. When Henry returned home he ordered the man to leave. The “mysterious hunter” later returned and angrily confronted the family, but Henry forced him to leave. As he was leaving, he tried to steal one of their bear dogs; the girls called the dog back and the hunter threatened them. Later when Henry was away from home, the two girls were out trying to drive the cows home; they were attacked and killed. One girl lived long enough to say that they had been attacked by two Indians and a white man; they were the last whites killed in the area by Indians (it was 1792). The girls were buried together in a coffin made from heavy slab wood. Henry planted an apple tree where Peggy fell and it became known as the Peggy Apple.

I decided to go to the Summersville (WV) area to see if I could find any trace of the Peggy apple from 200 years earlier; this was a very long shot; but my mantra is “If I am not finding an apple, it is not that it does not exist; instead it is because I am not hunting hard enough.” That day I spent about five hours going up and down country roads, stopping where I saw large apple trees, and following up leads to larger orchards. I found one person who had heard of the Peggy apple and a Mr. Keener, west of White Water Road, who told me of a beloved sweet apple that had been lost forty years earlier. I plan to return to Nicholas County in 2011 and see if I can find this important historical apple.

I wish you and your family a prosperous and happy 2011.

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