

To: Friends of Old Apples  
From: Tom Brown

January 12, 2013

### Apple Search---2013

The past year was a rewarding one for apple discovery because I potentially found the apple that started my apple search about sixteen years ago---the Harper's Seedling apple. In the very early years of my apple search I found an excellent apple in Wilkes County called a Streaked June near the home of Sherrill Pardue. I grafted it and planted a tree in my orchard. Years later when I checked back, the original tree had died. The apple name never really made sense because this "June" apple ripened in late August. Even though I might not initially find an apple such as the Harper's Seedling, I keep thinking about it and continue to compare apples I encounter to the descriptions I have. This year I had many well-colored Streaked June apples; I realized that it fit the description of my long-lost apple. I then took some of the apples and showed them to the one remaining person who remembered the apple, Ricky Evans; he said "Yes, it looks just like the Harper's Seedling". Ideally I would like to have three identifications, but the apple discovery process is often a race against time and while I was looking for the apple, two people who remembered it passed away and the memory of another has greatly dimmed. Other apples found include the following: Appalachian Limbertwig (probably), August Beauty, Aunt Sally, Big Boy, Big Red, Bitter Sweet, Black Ammit, Carter County, Cheese (England), Corder, Ell Star, Ernest Blair Well Apple, Fall Astor, Fired, Haycock, High Top Sweet (green), Lady Williams, Pitney, Pumpkin Sweet (lg., yellow), Red Astor, Rose Sweet, Ruusin Ball, Striped Virginia Beauty, Summer Sweet, Summer Treat, Tendersweet, Thinskin, Vandever, and Water Luscious.

**My Favorite Place**---the most wonderful place to search for heritage apples is Wilkes County, North Carolina. My apple journey started with searching for the Harper's Seedling apple near my home in western Forsyth County, NC. I next spent extensive time about an hour west in Iredell and Alexander Counties where I had my first success in finding lost apple varieties. [I grew up in western Iredell County.] Many people had mentioned Wilkes County apples, so I decided to investigate. Wilkes proved to be the true "Mother Lode of Heritage Apples"; the complete list of the 400 apples mentioned as having been in Wilkes County is at the end of this newsletter.

Wilkes County is one of the larger counties in North Carolina, located in the northern Piedmont region, at an elevation of 1,300 feet. The County is a hilly basin with a surrounding crescent of mountains, the Blue Ridge Mountains at the west and north and the Brushy Mountains to the south, which is the location of several commercial apple orchards today but had an incredibly larger apple production in the early 1900s; "hills covered with apple trees".

I initially approached the Wilkes Journal-Patriot to see if they would do a newspaper article about my searching for old apples in Wilkes County. They were kind enough to do so and I received over 20 responses. I later realized that responses such as this, if followed up, gave me portals into the community. The typical person who responded had an apple they wanted identified or they remembered an old apple that they would like to find. One man who contacted me, Hershel Green, said that he had a Buckeye Beauty apple tree, an apple variety once sold by a Tennessee nursery in 1928. Finding a lost apple variety this easily is very rare. Usually I have to go through many successive people contacts before a special apple emerges.

**Surprising Shepherds Crossroads**---One of my early letters was from Nellie & Mary Dimmette who lived in the Shepherds Crossroads community. Nellie was an older apple grafter who had three or four apple trees. One was a Horse and another was an apple that I later identified as a White Top, plus a Sweet apple which was originally given to the family by newly released slaves. To the casual observer,

the Shepherds Crossroads area would not have looked like a good place to search for old apples; it was mostly open farm land with a few scattered apple trees. Here I fortunately met Ebert Billings. In any area, people contacts go more fluidly if they can be made with a respected member of the community, this also greatly helped in Wilkes County. Ebert was a retired minister and he seemed to know people in every household for miles around. Such assistance allowed me to quickly inquire about apple trees. Ebert's family did have some old apples themselves: Queen, Pound Pippin, Springdale, etc. With his help I found the following: Sugar Ball, Pear (apple), Yellow June, Sour June, Pike, White Sweet, Ladonium, Blood Red Crab, Summer Cheese, Winter Spice, Horse, White Limbertwig, May, Burnskin, Yellow Meat, Oat, etc.

**House-to-House Search**---In Wilkes County, I talked to anyone who would talk about old apples; even those who did not own any apple trees because their apple memories were very valuable to record. I made the Wilkes County apple discovery process essentially a house-to-house search. On the 14.6 mile Longbottom Road I investigated every single apple tree I could see from the road except three where access was complicated. I also investigated many off-road apple sites. Wilkes County is just an hour from my home so I frequently made multiple trips there a week. It was such a rich old apple area that I was disappointed if I did not find a rare apple on each trip.

One very memorable apple visit was when Albert Handy took me to see Morgan Handy who was 100 years and two months old. Mr. Handy had an incredible memory, describing to me in great detail eight apples: Cathead, White Sweetning, Queen, Golden Harvest, Clarke's Pearmain, White Harvest, Streaked Sweetning, & Candy Sweetning, the big tree in the bottom-land at Stone Mountain State Park. I eventually found all of Mr. Handy's apples. Memories such as those of Mr. Handy are very important because I record them and then when I find an apple that is a good fit, I show them to the people for identification. As an example, Press Wyatt told me about a Hayes Green apple that had been in the Vannoy area; it was very large, pointed, always green, having course texture, sour, and ripened very late. Later I was in a Robbinsville cove (212 miles away) looking at a Howard apple tree, as I started to depart; I came to a home with six apple trees. The owners knew the identity of five of them, but as soon as I saw the sixth I said to myself, "This could be the Hayes Green". Press Wyatt confirmed that it was the Hayes Green apple. Half the apples I have found were unknown apples that I had to identify myself.

**Amazing Apple Diversity**---There is something very different about Wilkes County as compared to other counties; it is the great diversity of its apples. Usually every apple tree at each house is different and they are all different at the next house. Several people have told me that their parents and grandparents took pride in having apples different from their neighbors; apparently this was a county-wide practice. As an example on Traphill Road, in about 1.6 miles at eight sites, I found the following apples: Father Abraham, Old Fashion Winesap, Quince (apple), June Harvest, Wolf River, Sweet, Stump, Rusty Pippin, Horse, Sheepnose, Houch, Dula Beauty, Mountain Limbertwig, Stripes, Darnell, Scott, Red Harvest, etc. Years ago there were many more varieties at these same locations, plus a very large orchard with reportedly dozens of apple varieties. Sustaining these old varieties was made easier by the large number of apple grafters. In talking to the older community members, I had the impression that 70 years ago every other home had a member who could graft apple trees. In Wilkes County it is unusual to see a graft line on a tree, because they practiced "root grafting", where the scion wood was grafted onto a piece of root they had dug-up, then when it was planted, the graft union was below ground level.

The Horse apples that I mentioned on Traphill Road were always a faulty looking dirty yellow/red. I observed these very unimpressive looking apples for seven years. On the eighth year, I was

astounded; the apples were larger and they were a clear bright yellow that changed to a brilliant red blush---the most beautiful apples you would see in a lifetime. Then the next and succeeding years the apples were back to their yucky appearance. This does illustrate one thing, the potential great appearance of any of the heritage apples if properly grown.

**Black Beauty**---Over twenty people had mentioned the Black Beauty apple; it was in western North Carolina plus Virginia and Kentucky. In 2001 I had collected apples from four different trees that somewhat fit the Black Beauty description; my plan was to go to Wilkes County and take the apples to four homes where the Black Beauty apples had been mentioned. My first stop was at the home of Weaver Gray who lived just across the Wilkes/Yadkin County line. It turned out that he had heard of the Black Beauty but not seen one. Weaver told me that someone had brought him some apples from the near-by farm of Junior Johnson (the legendary NASCAR driver); "The apples are on my washing machine, why don't you take some and see if you can identify them", they also fit the Black Beauty description. My next stop was in the Purlear section of western Wilkes at the home of Bud Reid, who had a dead Black Beauty tree just across the road. I presented my five bags of apples; both Bud and his wife, Patsy, excitedly pointed to the Junior Johnson apples and said, "This is the Black Beauty". Junior had built his home and Black Angus farm complex at an old farm site with twenty apple trees: Blacktwig, Winter Fleming, Long Stem, and seventeen Black Beauty trees. He allowed me to get cuttings from the trees. One year Junior said, "How about grafting my apple trees since they might not always be here".

I did graft him a tree of each type and when I took them back in the fall, I was shocked; the cows and the trees had happily co-existed for many years, but three days before I arrived the cows had stripped the bark from the trees (from about 1 foot high to 6 feet). The trees all eventually died.

A person might look at my long list of Wilkes apples below and say, "They are probably just Seedlings". I would strongly disagree with that thought. These apples are of good quality and had valuable uses in the community. It is my opinion, that years ago, these apples were actually dispersed over a wide geographic area. For instance the Strawberry Rome apple was mentioned in a very small Wilkes County area; but at a festival where I had one of the apples on display; a lady came by and said that they previously had the Strawberry Rome apples in Pennsylvania.

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**Wilkes County Apples Found**---Adam and Eve, American Beauty, Aspirin, Aunt Sally, Arkansas Black, Baldwin, Balsam, Baltimore Pound, Baltimore Red, Banana (3 types), Banana Sweet, Bank, Barker's Liner, Barrel, Bausel, Bellflower, Ben Davis, Benson, Bevan's Favorite, Big Limb, Billy Sparks Sweetning, Bingham, Bitter Queen, Black Beauty, Black Ben Davis, Blacktwig (Mammoth Blacktwig), Blood Red Crab, Blue Skin, Bob, Branch, Brandy, Brushy Mountain Limbertwig, Buchanan, Buckeye Beauty, Buckingham, Bumblebee Sweetning, Buncombe, Burnskin, Butter, Candy Sweet, Canning, Cannon Pearmain, Carolina Keeper, Cat, Catawba, Cathead Queen, Cheese (3 types), Church, Clarke's Pearmain, Clem Byrd, Clominger, Coffee Seedling, Cothren, Cotton, Cotton Sweet, Crack, Crack Open (Winter Green), Crouch, Curtis Cheese, Daddy (2 types), Daisy Sweet, Darnell, Davis, Doch, Donce, Doss Blushing June, Dula Beauty, Durham, Early Colton (Colton), Early Harvest, Early June (2 types), Early Pickens, Early Sweet June, Early Sweetning, Early Transparent, English Russet, Everhart, Fall, Fall Rose, Fall Sweet, Fall Sweetning, Fallwater, Father Abraham, Fernina Pippin, Flanagan, Flat, Flat Top, Forward (sweet), Forward Streak, Frog, Garden, Gibson, Golden Harvest, Golden Sweet, Golden Twig, Goose Pasture, Gragg, Granny, Granny Blair, Grave, Greasy, Greasy Skin, Green Pearmain, Green Pippin, Green Skin, Green Skin Sweet, Green Sweet, Grickson, Grimes Golden, Grindstone, Gruff, Half Acre, Hall, Harper's Seedling, Hawkeye, Hayes Green, High Top, Hillside, Hincer Queen, Hog, Hog Pen,

Hollow Log, Horse (3 types), Horseshoe, Houch, House, Huckleberry, Ice, Improved Early Harvest, Improved Queen, Jack, Jenny Beauty, Jewel Smoker, John Conner, Johnalee, Johnny, Johnny No Core, Johnson Fine Winter, Johnson Keeper, Jonah, Jonathan, July Stripe, June Harvest, June Pink, June Stripie, June Sweet, Kane, King David, Kitchen, Knob, Ladonium, Ladyfinger (pointed), Larry, Late Queen, Leathercoat, Liddy, Lieby, Link, Little Limbertwig, Liveland Raspberry, Long Stem, Maiden Blush, Mammy, Mausby's Fine Winter, May, McCuller's Winter, Milam, Mongolean, Morgan's Christmas, Mountain Limbertwig, New York World, Night Dropper, Nim, No Bloom, Notley P, Nursery, O. F. Yellow Delicious, Oat, Ode, Old Fashion Limbertwig, Old Fashion Stayman, Old Fashion Winesap, Old Field, Ozark Pippin, Paragon, Patrick Red, Payne (2 types), Pear (apple, lg. pointed), Pear Sweetning, Pike, Pinkerton, Plum, Plymouth, Polk Berry, Polk Seedling, Polkberry Red, Pound (3 types), Pound Russet, Puff, Pumpkin, Pumpkin Sweet, Queen (2 types), Queen Beauty, Quince (apple), Quincy, Red Astor, Red Astrachan, Red Bird (late), Red Buckingham, Red Delicious, Red Harvest, Red Horse, Red June (pointed), Red June (round), Red Kane, Red Limbertwig, Red Pearmain, Red Potts, Red Queen, Red Streak, Red Sweet, Red Sweet June, Red Winesap, Red Winter Sweet, Reed, Roberts, Robinson, Roman Beauty, Royal Limbertwig, Rubin Queen, Rustic, Rusty Coat, Rusty Coat Sour, Rusty Coat Sweet, Rusty Delicious, Rusty Pippin, Rusty Sweet, Rusty Sweetning, Sal, Sally, Scarlet Stayman, Scott, Seedling Limbertwig, Senator, Sheep, Sheepnose, Slope, Soda, Sour June, Sour Sweetning, Speckled Red, Spice (2 types), Springdale, Stable, Strawberry, Strawberry Rome, Streaked Sweetning, Stripe, Striped Ben Davis, Striped Delicious, Striped Early Harvest, Striped Horse, Striped June, Striped Queen, Striped Sweet, Striped Virginia Beauty, Stripes, Stuart's Golden, Stump, Sugar, Sugar Ball, Summer Champion, Summer Cheese, Summer Pink, Summer Queen, Summer Rambo, Sunday Sweet, Sweeny, Sweet (4 types), Sweet Abram, Sweet Bough, Sweet Horse, Sweet Limbertwig, Sweet Potato, Sweet Pound, Sweet Queen, Tenderskin, Tennessee Beauty, Tough Hide, Transcendent Crab, Twenty Ounce, Two-Tone, Vandever June, Vanhoy, Virginia Beauty, Water Core (2 types), Water Core Sweet, Water Spout, Watermelon, Waterous, Watts Limbertwig, Wealthy, White, White Buckingham, White Fall Pippin, White Harvest, White Horse, White Limbertwig, White Pipka, White Sweet, White Top, Will, Wilson's Red June, Winter Fleming, Winter Green, Winter Neverfail, Winter Spice, Winter Sweet, Wolf River, Woody, Yellow Bank, Yellow Beauty, Yellow Hard, Yellow Hardin, Yellow June, Yellow Meat, Yellow Potts, Yellow Queen, Yellow Sweet, Yellow Sweet June, York Pippin, and Yorkshire.

**Wilkes County Apples Awaiting Discovery (not yet found)**----Ann Seedling, Ashmead's Kernel, Barnyard, Bee Gum, Ben's Favorite, Bergy, Black Mammoth, Brock, Chocolate, Corn Meal, Dad, George Little Sweet, Delawine, Fall Cheese, Granddaddy, Grandma, Kinnaird's Choice, Lady Washington (red & yellow), Ladyfinger (round), Logheap, Mealy Core, Mule's Head, Neverbloom (No Bloom?), Neverfail, New York Pippin, Nickel Apple, Old Fashion Slit, Paint, Pate, Pear (apple, small), Petty Special, Pink, Queen of Haywood, Randall, Roxbury Russet, Sclonce Core, Seven Prong, Shockley, Sidewinder (York?), Snowball, Sow, Spring, Summer Pearmain, Sun, Sweet Pippin, Swing Apple, Tommy Richard, Well House, Willow, Winter Bowman, & Winter Pearmain.

**Heart-felt appreciation is extended to all those who assisted my Wilkes County apple search.**

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