

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

January 1, 2022

Apple Search---2022

The year 2021 was another one strongly influenced by the Covid-19 virus; all of my fourteen festivals where I exhibit old apples were cancelled except two and those I did not attend out of health concern. Now there is a new virus variant (Omicron) coming from overseas. There is a solution to this continuing health problem; it is vaccination---which is safe, free, & very effective. Virus concerns also limited my normal people contact in the search for old apples.

The Taliaferro apple was a favorite of President Thomas Jefferson for hard cider use. It was found on a Robinson (or perhaps Robertson) farm near Williamsburg, VA; the city which is surrounded by York and James City Counties. Unfortunately much of the property and census information from that era was lost due to the Civil and 1812 Wars. In an effort to see if any colonial historic Robinson/Robertson information could be found, I wrote to all the property owners with the surname of Robinson and Robertson in James City and York counties plus Williamsburg, over 140 people. I received about eight replies, none illuminating, with the typical reply of, "I am new to the area and have no information", a very disappointing outcome for a major effort. **Harvey?**---In my 2017 Newsletter I told about a ghost named Harvey who inhabited our childhood home in Iredell County, NC, whose presence was experienced by many people. The house burned in 2015 and then two years later the remaining wooden structure was demolished and removed, leaving just the rock perimeter walls and the three truncated chimneys, twelve feet tall.

My brother, David, who owns the home site, lives out of state and he wanted me to get some measurements from the site so he could construct a model of the home. Some of the measurements he needed involved wooden components such as porch columns, a few of which were salvaged and were stored at another site. To inform me of the measurements needed, he greatly enlarged a picture of the original un-burned house; to his surprise there was an image in one of the right-side windows, could this be Harvey?



The hat in the image appears to be the 1920's style of Irish men's walking hat.

Harvey is a good, harmless ghost, but initially I was careful to not bring any items from the burned home site to my home in Clemmons; thinking that a ghostly presence could possibly come with them. After the passage of a couple of years I did bring to my home a few items from the burned home site, including a three-foot section of a floor beam. Unfortunately I did not store it properly and there was some water exposure causing deterioration. Eventually I took the wooden beam to our Construction Materials Landfill and "tossed it." Upon returning from the landfill, I heard unmistakable footsteps downstairs; the next day I returned all the remaining items to Harvey's home site in Iredell County. I have heard no more unexplained footsteps.

My cousin, Dinah, recently added some new Harvey information. As a young child she lived across the road from our home. On one of her visits, when leaving she had a strange feeling, she turned around and looked back, seeing a man in an upstairs window. She was then always afraid to go upstairs.

A Change in Fortune---To my wife, I have always described West Virginia as my "Wild Goose-Chase State", where I drive long distances to always find the apple tree I am searching for has been gone for many years. Perhaps my fortunes are changing, this year I was told about the possible location of a Cider Bud apple tree; after a four-hour drive, I arrived at the site and the Cider Bud tree was there, yeah! I believe in BIG NUMBERS, the greater the number of contacts a person can have increases the chances of a good outcome.

Spanish Influenza

As the United States continues to struggle with Covid-19 comparisons can be made to the Spanish Flu of 1918 & 1919. This event, 100+ years ago was more deadly, killing 20 to 50 million people world-wide and one person in 150 in the USA. For comparison, in the US Covid-19 has killed one person in 400 (Dec. 2021). In the early 1900's there were no vaccines to prevent this pandemic and no antibiotics to treat secondary infections. Also there was no national leadership, with President Woodrow Wilson and the White House scarcely mentioning the pandemic, trying to entirely focus on WW1 battles in Europe. War-time media censorship caused pandemic news to be minimized in the US and Europe; Spain was neutral in the war and their free reporting resulted in the name, Spanish Flu. The following are stories I have collected from my apple contacts:

Spanish Flu Preventative Methods---In 1918 rural Gaston County, NC, the Cloninger family (Joel, Nancy, & son Blaine) lived in a farm house with five fireplaces for heating. In the kitchen fireplace there was space between the fire dogs and the fireplace wall and there an onion would be placed and covered with coals for roasting. Then it would be shared for warding off the Flu. They consumed so many onions that for many years later Blaine could not bring himself to eat a cooked onion. [In 1918, there were newspaper ads announcing Patriotic Drives against the flu; encouraging people to eat more ONIONS, considered as one of the best preventatives for Influenza. The onions were sold for about three cents a pound.] **Jay Cloninger.**

Grandma was born on January 18, 1918. She was a surprise baby as her nearest siblings (twins) were seven years older than she, and her mother (my great-grandmother) was already in her 40s. The family legend is that my great grandmother - already quite concerned with the health of this baby and the pandemic, instituted some new and sweeping rules for their household, the major one being that everyone had to strip, wash and don clean clothes on the back porch before entering the house. You can imagine this was not popular in northern Michigan during that winter season. My grandma's family believed that this effort, along with having the new baby sleep in a box behind the stove are what allowed my grandma to survive the winter and the pandemic while so many other infants perished. **Amy Smith.**

[No family members died from the Spanish Flu in either of these two families.]

My family is from Kansas and some of them went out to western Colorado around 1900; many of them came back but for the ones who stayed there, they largely managed to survive the Flu unscathed. I was told by relatives it was because they literally closed off the town and had armed guards making sure of that the trains would just roll by at a slow speed and drop off supplies then keep moving. [In Gunnison, CO if anyone got off the train they were arrested.] My grandpa's baby brother died in 1914 of influenza so it may be that the family was acutely aware of how dangerous flu could be. Of course you would expect everyone in that day and age would have known the same thing but perhaps not. We have been having the same debate 100 years later with little change. **A G.**

Helping Others Thru the Flu---My grandfather, Vernon Livingston, was a 25-year-old farmer in Orangeburg County, South Carolina, in 1918 when the flu pandemic swept through the state. His mother had died in 1915, leaving his father in a helpless state (with what folks later called a “nervous breakdown”). My grandfather was left to raise his eight siblings (youngest was two) and do his entire farm work. His fiancée had died in May of 1917 of pneumonia after a week’s illness (early Spanish Flu case?).

Vernon was therefore not unaccustomed to sickness and tragedy when in 1918 Spanish flu attacked his extended family. There were several of his aunts and uncles who became very sick, so sick that they could not care for their farms or their children. None of the children got the flu—just the parents.

My grandfather took care of the half dozen families by himself. They all lived close by, which made it possible. He would ride his horse Dan to the first family, where the parents were sick in bed. He would first build up the fire in the stove and put in sweet potatoes to bake. He would then go outside and chop more wood, then check on the livestock and feed them. He would milk the cow and carry in the milk. By then the sweet potatoes would be done, and he would feed the kids sweet potatoes and milk, check on the sick parents once more, and ride on to the next family farm. He did this for nearly two weeks till the adults were well enough to function again, and none of his relatives died of the flu. **Susan Pitts.**

A New Mother? No Way!---I have a story about the flu that my PawPaw (Edgar Sharp, my grandfather) used to tell. His mother died of the flu when her youngest child was 6 weeks old. My PawPaw was the oldest child, at that time about 10 years old. One of their neighbor ladies set her cap for PawPaw's father, she was an older unmarried lady, but all his little sisters did not like this lady. There were four little sisters from about seven years on down to the new baby. One day as the sisters saw this lady walking up the road to their house, they decided to stop her once and for all, they got their Dad's shotgun and took it out on the front porch and aimed at the neighbor lady, it took all three of them to hold it up! Thank God when they fired it, they missed the neighbor lady, knocked themselves all off the porch and took out a whole section of the palling fence! My PawPaw would laugh so hard when he was telling this story that he could barely finish it!! **Jodi Mayo.**

Tragedy, Confusion, & Miracle---The influenza was tragic on a personal level; a mother with two young daughters (ages 2 & 4) died when she assisted flu-sickened community members and was then herself fatally infected. Flu cases increased when WW1 troops were mobilized and were put into 100 crowded training camps. Local health officials created confusion when they ordered uneven closings and then often reversed themselves. Masks were required in some public areas but not others. Some social leaders had parties as if they were immune to the disease. A top Federal official recommended whiskey as a stimulant to combat the disease. Another 1918 home remedy involved setting cut onions around a home “to absorb the virus.”

There were some miraculous moments; in 1918 Italy a cart was carrying the flu dead to a mass burial site, when a baby’s cry was heard from among the bodies. It was discovered that the child and her mother, also in the cart, were still alive; both later lived well into old age.

Christmas Abundance---As children, our parents always gave my brother (David) and I (Tom) a bag of M&M’s each for Christmas. After the deaths of our parents, we have continued the practice of giving each other M&M’s, usually two bags, milk chocolate and peanut. These are always wrapped with just a single layer of paper, so it is easy to squeeze the unopened packages and know which contain the M&M’s. One year when my Christmas box arrived in California, David’s wife, Nancy was concerned knowing that he would be very disappointed when she realized that I had sent David no M&M’s. She went out and bought him two large bags of M&M’s so he would get his childhood favorite on Christmas morning. BUT I had actually sent David some M&M’s, wanting to do something different that year I had purchased him one of each type of M&M’s I could find (6 types) and had put them in a wrapped box. That year he received eight bags of M&M’s. **Tom Brown.**

I sincerely hope that 2022 will bring happiness and health safety to your family.

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Favorite Apple Recipes

Apple Pie

Crust:

Use your favorite recipe or prepared crust, such as Pillsbury refrigerated pie crust; two crusts are required. The recipe makes a big, thick pie, so use a glass dish rather than a smaller aluminum pan.

Filling:

8 medium apples sliced (four tart apples and four semi-sweet apples).

1 tablespoon flour

3/4 cup sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Slice the apples thinly.
2. Mix sugar, cinnamon, and flour.
3. Mix dry ingredients with the apple slices.
4. Dot with butter.
5. Cover with top crust.
6. Brush the top with skim milk; remove any milk puddles with a paper towel.
7. Slit top.
8. Bake approximately one hour, or until the liquid bubbles up through the crust slits.

Big Mama's Apple Cake

This is the recipe of my wife's grandmother, Mamie, who lived in Yazoo, Mississippi. She was respectfully called "Big Mama" because she was the top Mama in the extended family.

Ingredients:

3 cups tart apples

1 1/4 cups oil (safflower oil)

1 teaspoon baking soda

2 teaspoons baking powder

2 cups sugar

3 eggs

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

1 teaspoon allspice

1. Peel and chop apples finely; set aside
2. Pour oil, sugar, and eggs in bowl and beat well.
3. Sift flour, salt, soda, baking powder, and spices together.
4. Add flour mixture to creamed mix and add vanilla.
5. Fold in apples and nuts and pour into a tube pan.
6. Bake in 350 degree F oven for one hour or until toothpick comes out clean.

If you will search online for "Big Mama's Apple Cake", you should be able to see a picture of the cake, with icing, which was featured on the VeryVera Show, a southern syndicated cooking show. I gave them the recipe. The cake can also be finished with a glaze.