

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

December 8, 2003

Apple Search---2003

I want to thank everyone again for your assistance in helping me locate additional heritage apples in 2003. About 100 varieties were found even though I spent three and a half months getting badly needed changes made at our local county animal shelter where they only had a 5% adoption rate. Great apples were found with fun names like Bee Bench, Choking Sweet, Jellyflower, Sine Qua Non, Johnny No Core, Cow's Snout, etc. This search was aided by my exhibiting many heritage apples at nine outdoor festivals.

The complete list of apples found in 2003 included the following: Banana Rose, Banana Sweet, Banner Yellow, Bausel, Beauty Of The World, Bee Bench, Bell Court, Bill Thin Skin, Black, Choking Sweet, Camper, Candy, Caney Creek Sweet Limbertwig, Cheese (large, flat, yellow), Cheese (med., oblate, yellow), Cow's Snout, Crowder, Creasy Sweet, Davidson Sweet, Duncan, Dutch, Early Fly, Early June, Evans' Care Free (seedling), Flanagan, Flat Limbertwig, Foley Pippin, Forest Streaked, Forward Sour, Green Limbertwig, Gruff, Guinea, Hog, Horse (med., yellow), Huckleberry, Jellyflower, Johnny No Core, Jumbo, Kennedy, Kentucky Limbertwig, Lime, London Lady, McKaskey, Mollie, Morgan (med, oblate, sour), Mountain, Mountain Pride, Mountain Winesap, Northern Spy, Notley Pea, Oats, Old Fashioned Limbertwig, Old Fashioned Stamen, Pap, Pear, Pearmain (orange), Pinkerton, Pound (red blushed), Pound (red and green striped), Pound (large, round, yellow), Preacher, Queen, Queen Beauty, Red Buff, Red Limbertwig, Red Pippin (Swadley), Red Morella, Red Pound, Red Queen, Ruby Red Limbertwig, Robinson, Rusty Sweet (small to med., flat), Seedling Horse, Sheepnose Bellflower, Sheepnose Sweet, Sine Qua Non, Shining Pippin, Sour Sweetning, Sparger, Striped Sweet, Sugar Sweet, Summer Buckingham, Summer Winesap, Sweeny, Sweet Abram, Sweet Pound, Smokey Mountain Limbertwig, Striped Limbertwig, Sweet Limbertwig, Taylor, Tennessee Beauty, Twenty-Two Ounce, Wellington, White Fall Pippin, White Limbertwig, Williams Red, Yankee Sweet, Yorkshire, and Zell

This issue of my annual newsletter is dedicated to my friend Lawson Childers who lives in northern Alexander County, NC. I met Lawson about four years ago after someone told me, "You definitely need to go see Lawson Childers. He knows more about apples than anyone in the county. His home is beside the eight-sided house."

Lawson came from an apple growing family. When he was young, his father grew and sold apples. It was an era when there was still a wide range of very rare apples being grown, just before they were replaced by the more common varieties still known today.

The low mountains behind his home (the Brushy Mountains) tell a story of this earlier era. Today they are all covered with forest, with a few granite outcroppings peeking out. When Lawson was ten years old (about 1920), these same mountains were covered with apple trees. This was at the zenith of apple growing in North Carolina when millions of bushels were grown. One of the mountain peaks had so many of the very rare Payne apples growing on it, that it was called Payne Mountain.

What distinguishes Lawson from others is his excellent memory, curiosity, and observation in great detail. He not only knew what apples his father grew and he later grew commercially, but he also remembered many other apples which were in the community. It is very unusual for someone to know what other apples were at a neighbor's home, no less describe them in detail.

Visiting Lawson is a treat because he greets me with a cheerful smile and always has an interesting story to tell. Lawson described about forty extremely rare apples to me. As I continued my apple search, I wanted to find even more of the apples which he had told me about. This year, I decided to spend a considerable amount of time in the area where Alexander, Wilkes, and Iredell counties intersect. I wanted to make one last attempt to find these apples. I can now report that I had considerable success. Lawson's apples found this year included the following: Crowder, Yorkshire, Sweeny, Johnny No Core, Lime, Lucas, Mollie, Gruff, and Pinkerton.

Apples which he described, found in previous years include: Banner Yellow, Quincy, Payne (green), Baltimore Pound, Liddy, Lieby, Aspirin, Fleming, Chatham Sweet, Nantz, Black Beauty, Brandywine, Polk Seedling, Catawba, Pear, Mayflower, Baltimore Red, Lacy, Mongolean, Christmas, Queen, and Watts Limbertwig (many of these were also described by others). I still have to find the Spencer, Tennessee Greening, Tennessee Pippin, Boswell, Big Twig, Wine, Ice, Adam, and Letie, all of which he described.

Of the recently found apples, my favorite was the Johnny No Core. Lawson had described it as growing near an old store building, now long gone. I eventually found the apple in Ashe County. It is large, round to oblong, light yellow with some red blush, and having a wonderful flavor. The indentations associated with stem and blossom are very small. The seed bed is small and there is very little internal fiber going from the stem to the seed-bed. It was called Johnny No Core, because you can eat the entire apple.

The Yorkshire and Sweeny apples are very old English apples.

The eight-sided house which Lawson owns is really fascinating. It was built for a Bentley family in 1910. Originally, there were seven others of this style house in the county. Lawson's is the only remaining one. It features a porch which goes all the way around the home, allowing a person to observe the weather from any direction.

In my old apple search I meet many interesting people. One of the most fascinating was Joe Willis of Spruce Pine, NC. I had actually gone to his home to get a curved handle made for my father's Boy Scout hatchet. On my second visit I noticed a five-foot long metal trough on his front porch and a smaller version on his back porch. We talked about an hour, discussing his many apple trees and many other things. He has a Sugar Loaf Pippin. I finally thought to ask him, "What are the metal troughs for?" Joe replied, "To feed my raccoons." It turned out that he feeds wild raccoons every day, having seen as many as twenty-two in his yard at one time. He has a small four-room house which has a cellar under half and a crawl space under the remaining part. The raccoons have dug under the foundation and now about twelve live in the crawl space. He can sometimes hear them fighting under his floor. Each week he feeds them two large bags of dog food and a bag of sunflower seeds. Their favorite treat is cookies of which they will eat every single crumb. When Joe is working late in his handle shop, past their supper time, then they will come out and definitely let him know that it is "time to eat". One of the small raccoons will even jump up into his lap. [There has never been a rabies problem with any of the raccoons.] One raccoon was so old that his fur was nearly gray.

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