

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

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Apple Search---2023

The year 2022 featured some retreat from the most serious consequences and restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. I exhibited heritage apples at four festivals in North Carolina and Virginia; but this was far less than my normal pre-pandemic schedule of exhibiting at about fourteen festivals per year.

I spent considerable time searching for the Peggy apple in three West Virginia locations. The Peggy apple's story started when a white man and several Indians killed two young girls (Peggy and Betsy Morris) in what is now Nicholas County in 1792---the last Indian massacre in West Virginia. An apple tree was planted at their gravesite and became known as "the Peggy apple tree;" locals reportedly grafted from it.

A Lincoln County WV contact referred me to a family who had a Peggy apple tree thirty years earlier in Fayette Co. With their assistance I was able to locate a likely area in Clay County where the original tree cuttings could have originated, but numerous trips to that area resulted in no mention of the Peggy apple. I was also told of a long-ago apple picking trip to southeastern Nicholas County where an apple tree was seen which was possibly a Peggy; three trips to the area failed to locate a tree which matched the description given to me. One hindrance to finding the Peggy apple is the lack of a very good description.

Every time West Virginia is mentioned or if I see a WV hat or T-shirt, I ask the person if they are from WV and if they reply "Yes;" I then ask if they have heard of WV apples I am searching for: Up-Side Down, Fall Beauty, Smoke Hole, or Peggy apples. Such an inquiry to a NC store clerk resulted in mention of two Peggy apple trees 40+ years earlier in Mercer Co. In a Saturday trip to the area, my wife and I were able to finally locate the site; but there was no home or trees remaining. The Peggy Apple Search Continues.....

In my searches for apples, Moonshine is often mentioned and this year I would like to share some of the stories people have told me. In some cases I have altered the people's names and locations because often this involves old illegal activity and mention of other people who cannot tell their story version.

Escape Driving---My Mom who was living in Florida told me a few stories of my grandfather, Criste, who died about 1935. One she told was his description of the way to drive fast in a dense fog was to watch the road stripes out of the driver's side window and make sure you stayed right next to them (you couldn't see anything in front of you, but you could see them), and just drive fast. Basically, the driver is staring at the stripes on the road beside the car and using them as a guide and not even looking ahead, because the fog is too dense. Of course, this is a stupid way to drive, since you could run into any obstruction, but my grandfather ran moonshine and often had to escape from the revenuers. And so that's how he drove in the fog at night when pursued by the law. I would assume that the authorities didn't have a death wish and weren't motivated to drive that crazy, which is why he never got caught.

I used his technique one time, though I didn't drive fast, when I was driving up a mountain in dense fog and slush. It worked quite well, but I can't imagine doing it while driving fast. **MP**

[I once greatly feared for our safety when I was driving with my wife, Merrikay, over a mountain range in Iceland and encountered extremely dense fog. The road was narrow and newly black-top paved, with no center-line or edge paint marking, and a large drop-off on the right side. I had to drive in the center of the road; luckily we never met an on-coming car, if we had disaster could have resulted. Tom Brown]

Ker-Pow Chicken---As a kid we had eight acres of fruit trees, from apples to cherries; including about fifteen apricot trees all of the same type. They were called Perfection they were as big as a large peach. No one wanted to ever buy them from our fruit stand except a few people who wanted to make jam. We always had a huge portion of the crop left over, so dad and I would make a few hundred gallons of one of the best wines we had ever had. One year we distilled a few barrels of apricot mash, it was amazing! Dad used it for everything (I think he thought it would cure everything.) One day he decided he would use it to marinate a chicken. So on one chicken he used about half a liter of his apricot brandy. It had time to vaporize in the oven and there was an explosion that sounded like a bomb went off. We ran to the kitchen and found the

chicken in the roaster lid was gone and the rack it was on was bent. We were busy drinking the brandy which made us slow to see all the damage. We took a look at the poor chicken. It had broken ribs and looked like it had jumped on a grenade to save its buddies! So we sat at the table drinking till mom got home. When she did we were well lit. So we tried to explain what happened. When we were done talking; she pointed across the kitchen without word. As we turned around to see what she was looking at, dad and I realized at the same time that the oven door was missing. And there it was lying on the floor where it had fallen after putting a considerable dent in the cabinet doors. When dad got her a new oven, she named dad's recipe Ker-Pow Chicken. Well at least we were unharmed, but that's another story. **TB**

Freeze Distillation---A fellow by the name of Doc Wooster from Illinois used to make large quantities of pear wine, pears being plentiful and when they get ripe they tend to get ripe all at once. So he made lots of wine. Then came winter and it can get real cold in Northern Illinois where Doc lived. So one winter, with all this wine, he dumped massive quantities of the wine into an old feed trough that he placed outside in his yard. This was in the middle of a bitter cold spell, temps daily ranging down well below zero. The water in the wine would tend to freeze in those conditions but not the alcohol. So each morning Doc would take the ice off that wine filled trough and he left that wine to sit in that trough for days, each morning throwing off the ice. Then he bottled what was left; Doc called it Pear Schnapps...lord have mercy was it ever strong! I swear you could have used it to peel paint off walls! **JM**

War Entrepreneur---During WWII, my paternal grandfather was stationed in Japan after their surrender. He always told us that he didn't see much action, being part of some of the crews sent in to clean up after a battle. He and his buddies found a way to pass the time during their long days. He was a Missouri country boy with too much time on his hands. They learned that many of the Officers from both the US and Japan had developed a fondness for liquors from the "enemy's" country. So, they started selling bootleg Saki to their superiors and bootleg whiskey to some locals. As far as I know, they never got caught, or at least they were never reprimanded. But, I always thought it was funny that my grandpa, who never touched liquor around us kids, was a bootlegger in the war; he was one of the best men I've ever known. **CA**

Behind the Iron Curtain—The following story was told to me by my mother about her father (my grandfather) his name was Adam Mojzeszek, he was a truly incredible man and a legend still in the small town of Zywiec, which is mostly known for its brewery. This story took place around 1962 in Communist Poland. Adam was a well-known building construction overseer and a respected community member.

The town was full of people making various moonshines from all sorts of ingredients. Members of the Party knew all about it but kept quiet because they made good money on the side from selling the booze. During Communism food shortages were very common, so to eat properly you had to trade with neighbors and alcohol was a very sought after commodity to trade with. Most people had a network of people so they could trade for bigger items like livestock. In Zywiec, everybody knew everybody and unlike America, Polish homes are architecturally very close together, so by simply smelling the air you would know if booze was being made close by. Such home brewing was prohibited by official Communist rules.

There were occasional crack-downs on illegal home booze making. In early 1962, things began to escalate and after a scandal of Party members making moonshine came to the newspapers. The officials made an announcement that they were going to search every household in the small town with sniffer dogs! My grandfather was prominently known in the community but not an official Communist Party member. On the night before the planned search there was a knock on his door. The officials asked who he was, he told them, they asked if he was a devoted communist, he lied and said yes. They then asked him, "as you're a respected community member, can we please stash our moonshine with you in your house, and we will skip your house during the search and ignore the dogs if they bark!" Of course he said yes and that evening the small house was filled to the brim with hundreds of barrels of moonshine! They had barrels of booze coming in official trucks with soldiers carrying it in! **PS**

Religious Moonshine---In the Appalachian Mountains a church group purchased several thousand acres for a summer camp. The site featured a nice stream with a good flow which they dammed creating a twenty-acre lake. A road was built around the western side of the lake; this led up to a level area where an assembly hall was built with a kitchen, a chapel, and many bunk-bed cabins for the campers. One older mountain family had a home on the original property purchased; the home was located on the road leading up to the camp just above where the lake started. The church group allowed the family to continue living there since they could watch over the facility during parts of the year when it was not in use.

We would frequently go there for a long weekend in the fall with our individual church youth group. This was an exciting time for my brother and me, making apple cider to take with us to church camp; we would clean up our old cider mill and then pick up fallen McLean apples from our seven large trees. With the assistance of a friend, we would make at least six gallons of cider; it was delicious even though there was a worm in every apple. [It would immediately start fermenting and taste fresh for just a few days.]

To make the lake more accessible, a path was constructed around the eastern side of the lake, allowing the campers to enjoy walking all the way around the lake. Two small streams flowed down to the lake on the eastern side and there were properly placed boards in the path which allowed easy crossing of the streams. One year two adventurous campers decided to fully explore one of the small streams, they hiked several hundred yards up the beautiful little stream toward its origin; near its source was a recently operated, fully functional moonshine still---ON CHURCH PROPERTY. **GF**

New School Needed---Local mountain residents were frustrated that their community only had a one-room school building; they knew that their children needed better facilities. A community meeting was held in which their educational needs were discussed in detail and a prominent group was selected to make a presentation to the County Commissioners. There they made a well-reasoned case why their community needed better school facilities. The Commissioners answered that the county had a tight budget that year and the one-room school was sufficient and that nothing better would be authorized.

The frustrated group returned to their community; these men and a few others later met at the school to discuss their alternatives. Someone brought several gallons of moonshine to the meeting, as the discussion continued, more and more of the moonshine was consumed. Finally the moonshine emboldened men saw a solution to their poor school facility. They removed all the desks and other furniture from the building and set a fire, burning down the building. The next month they returned to the Commissioners meeting and informed them that their school had burned and was totally destroyed; a new two-room school building was then approved by the Commissioners. **TE**

Moonshine for His Buddies---Jim was excited as he prepared for the return trip to his military base in an adjoining state. He had promised all his military buddies that he would bring back several quarts of moonshine for them. Previously he had been told by a childhood friend of a store in a state-line county where he could purchase moonshine if he spoke the right introductory words.

The purchase of four quarts of moonshine went smoothly and Jim was happily on his way. As Jim's car neared the state line, a siren sounded and a sheriff's deputy "pulled him over." The officer immediately demanded to look in the car where he found and confiscated the moonshine. He told Jim that there would also be a monetary fine; he could either pay the "fine" to the officer right then or go to court and perhaps have to pay more, get a law violation citation, and plus possibly get jail time. Jim paid on the spot and left wondering how many times those same quarts of moonshine had been re-sold. **JS**

Sherriff Lends a Hand---During Prohibition in an eastern city there was a house near the rail station which was well known to many travelers. A person could cross the tracks, then go six houses down the track, turn into an alley which descended to a basement door. Once inside, another door opened to a bar with many bottles of moonshine. There was never an interruption to their "booze bar" during Prohibition since it was the sheriff who provided all the moonshine for their operation. **AA**

Helpful Arrest---A local foothills county sheriff knew that the "Feds" would be arresting Ralph Ward for making and selling moonshine in two days. So the sheriff went ahead and arrested Ralph himself because

the State moonshine conviction penalty was less severe than if he was arrested, convicted, and sent to jail by Federal law enforcement. **LM**

Peach Brandy Disaster---Charles operated a general store in a rural mountain area; it was not the most successful business, but it provided the family with a meager living. He had a stored still which had not been used in many years. A man in the community, Miles, had purchased a large quantity of peaches assuming he could sell all of them; he soon realized that most the peaches would go-bad before he could sell them. He then started pleading with Charles to “Please, Please” use the old still to make peach brandy for him out of the fruit. Reluctantly Charles agreed and he set up the still and converted the peaches into peach brandy; near the end of the brandy run, he was raided and then sent to prison. The year-long stay behind bars was devastating for Charles and his family because it resulted in the failure of his general store business. Charles always wondered if it was Miles who “ratted on him.” **CE**

“I’ll make the First Run”---At a southern paper mill it was widely known that one of the workers was involved with moonshine. One day Ted and his friend Dillard were talking to the man and he made them a proposal. He offered to generously pay them if they would deliver a load of moonshine using his car with its concealed compartments. This sounded like a lot of money and they both agreed to deliver a load of moonshine; Dillard volunteered to make the first run. He then started out early one morning with the car fully loaded; he had only driven about seven miles when he was stopped by a sheriff’s car; the deputy quickly found the moonshine. After a trial, Dillard was sent to prison. It turned out that law enforcement in several counties immediately recognized the car because it was a known “Moonshine Runners Car.” **EK**

Wilkes County Moonshine---Moonshine was often mentioned in my most productive apple-search county; Wilkes Co., NC. One Horse apple variety from southeastern Wilkes County was claimed “to make the best tasting brandy” (there were five different Horse apples in the county) and Yellow Hardin apples from northeastern Wilkes which were said “to produce the most gallons of moonshine per bushel of apples.”

Memorable Sports Moments---Everyone has their story of a very memorable sports event. One such event was the Immaculate Reception of fifty years ago when the Pittsburgh Steelers and Oakland Raiders were in the AFC title game. Pittsburgh was 60 yards away from the goal line and had one remaining play to win the game with 22 seconds remaining. Terry Bradshaw miraculously evaded the Raiders and made a bullet throw to Frenchy Fuqua who was knocked down by safety, Jack Tatum as the ball arrived. The ball caromed backward and Franco Harris made a shoestring catch and ran 43 yards for the game-winning touchdown.

Another amazing sports event was the 148th running of the Kentucky Derby (2022) where Rich Strike at 80 to 1 odds won from the 20th position (furthest gate from the inside rail). The three-year old colt was not supposed to start, but made the field 30 seconds before the deadline when another horse was withdrawn.

My most memorable sports event centers around the NBA 1977 finals game 2 between the Philadelphia 76ers and the Portland Trail Blazers. A 76ers shot missed and Darryl Dawkins (drafted out of high school in 1975 by the 76ers) and Blazer’s all-star, Maurice Lucas, went up for the rebound. They were both massive, tough players who continued to struggle for possession of the ball as they fell to the floor. It was such an impactful encounter that they got up “fighting mad.” Darryl threw a punch at a Blazer’s player and missed, instead hitting his own teammate, Doug Collins. This led to emptying of the benches and many players joined the fighting. This was quickly followed by many fans surging onto the court and joining the melee. The TV camera went from one fight to another and then another and another. Then the camera showed one 76ers player calmly sitting at center court with his arms around his knees; it was the legendary player Julius Erving (Dr. J) whose body language clearly said, “When you children are through with your temper tantrum, I am ready to play basketball again.”

I sincerely hope that 2023 will bring happiness and renewal to your family!

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