

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Apples

The first apple tree was planted in Orleans County by Rachel Lovell near the mouth of Johnson's Creek. It seems she was given an apple by a Canadian sailor who came into Johnson's Creek in a boat. Rachel supposedly saved and planted the seeds, becoming the first to plant an apple tree locally.

The first orchard was planted by Elijah Brown at the Bridges, among the stumps and log heaps without much regard to regularity. This orchard was the nucleus of the large fruit operation now owned by his descendants known as Brown's Berry Patch.

The second orchard was planted by Mathew Dunham at Kuckville in 1809. Both of these orchards were very productive as late as 1869. The climate and soil of Orleans County are especially adapted to the growth of fruit, particularly apples, and the industry was largely developed at a fairly early date. About 1845, when the demand for winter apples in the new western states became active, Orleans County farmers began grafting their trees with choice varieties and planting new orchards, continuing to set orchards until the turn of the century.

Between 1880 and 1890 Orleans County was shipping, on an average, 525,000 barrels each year. The average price was about \$1.50 per barrel.

In addition to the large amount of quality fruit, there was a considerable amount of fruit of inferior quality that was evaporated and shipped in packages of about 25 pounds each, while the poorest quality was manufactured into cider and vinegar.

There were several large vinegar factories in the county 80 years ago. According to the 1903 Orleans County Directory, there were 46 evaporators or dryhouses where inferior fruit was dried and shipped all over the world. Each of the dryhouses employed 10 to 50 women in the paring room.

Another industry that went along with the apple industry was the making of barrels. Some of the

apples were shipped in bulk on the canal and the apple barrel made the handling of fruit much easier.

Also listed in the 1903 directory were 27 copper shops which made the barrels to hold and handle the large quantity of fruit grown in Orleans County. A great many men were employed in this part of the fruit industry and a good copper should set up 100 barrels in a day.

There were 18 commercial cider mills in the country. Some were processing vinegar and one in Albion was making cider champagne.

The photo accompanying this article shows apples being harvested around the turn of the century in a local orchard. Note the apple barrels with stenciled labels saying "Baldwin." Also seen here is a sorting rack and several apple pickers on tall ladders.

In 1911 there were 87 varieties of apples on exhibit at the Orleans County Fair. One hundred years ago every farmstead had an apple orchard for that family's own consumption during the winter.

Around 1860, the Town of Clarendon had more orchard per population than any town in the state. During the Civil War apples brought \$5 per barrel. In 1955 Orleans County had a bumper crop of apples producing 2.3 million bushels.

Before the big freeze in February 1934, there were 30,000 acres of fruit in the county. At that time the thermometer plummeted down to the minus 30s causing thousands of apple trees to burst. In 1960 there were around 12,000 acres of apple orchards in Orleans County.

Presently, there are 8,000 acres devoted to apple orchard in the county. These orchards are mostly of dwarf and semi-dwarf trees, making orchards more dense than the one shown in the accompanying photo. Because of this, production has doubled over the past quarter century. At the present time, 97 percent of the apple acreage is under seven years old.

As far as this writer is concerned, there are no finer apples grown than in western New York - not even Washington state apples - so there!