

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XIII

10-7-91

No. 40

FIRST APPLE TREE

Local Orleans County legend tells of how in 1805, an apple was given by a traveler to a young girl, Rachel Lovewell. The seeds were planted near the shore of Lake Ontario, and from them grew the first apple tree north of Ridge Road.

Rachel recounted her story to her numerous children and grandchildren. A grand-daughter living in Albion related her version to a newspaper reporter in 1936. The following account is just as it was printed at that time:



RACHEL'S STORY

"She was a large boned women with a plain face and wore her hair pulled straight back caught in a hard knot at the back of her head and her dress was of drab homespun. She was the type of woman well able to cope with pioneer living and her knack of cookery made her home a stopping place in the community of Manilla, now called Oak-Orchard-On-The-Lake.

Born in Ontario County in 1795, she was the daughter of Henry and Rebecca Lovewell, who took a parcel of land from the Holland Land Company at Manilla in 1803 moving there along with the family of Matthew Dunham.

The first winter with its intense cold was a strenuous one for the seven families in the pioneer community. Conversation during the winter months often centered around the promised arrival of Sailor Jack from Canada and his sloop loaded with wheat for planting, salt and sorghum.

When the ice cleared the harbor, the sail of his boat was sighted. For days Rachel, Billie Walsworth, his sister Mary, and Reuben Root had watched for the boat.

Excitement ran high in the pioneer community at the landing of his sloop. The next morning Sailor Jack called Rachel aside giving her a large yellow apple. The little girl, we surmise, enjoyed every bite of her apple, running down to the bluff overlooking the lake for her treat and afterward burying the core.

Two years later she remembered the apple core when when she heard at the Dunham turning mill that the Brown family was going the plant an apple orchard. Running to the bluff she found a spindly green shoot growing where the core had been buried. Her father called into consultation pronounced it an apple tree, the first to be planted in Orleans County.

In 1809 Matthew Dunham, Jr. also planted an apple orchard, and five years later Rachel and

Mathew were married. The year their daughter, Sarah, was born, the apple tree blossomed.

Apples from the tree were small and tart but made good apple pies and were passed around to the housewives after it was discovered that a piece of the apple in any kind of jelly made it firm.

In 1871 Lake Ontario waves undermined the sand bank on which it grew. The tree, by that time well known as the first apple tree in Orleans County, tipped at a right angle and for a number of years shaded the place where Rachel Dunham's grandchildren and their playmates, clad in gingham, went swimming.

Rachel Dunham died in 1875. Her grand-daughter only faintly remembers her grandmother but recalls the swimming parties and tells of climbing out on the trunk of the apple tree wich overhung the lake and watching the sailors unload a ship which had been grounded near the harbor.

When the waves washed the tree into the water, neighbors and relatives took pieces of wood to have made into trinkets and Col. Miles of Kuckville made canes from several of the branches. A picture frame of wood today frames a photograph of Rachel Alice Dunham and a cane and a paper knife all made from the tree are retained in the beckwith family. A gavel made from the first apple tree is in the possession of the State Lodge of Knights of Good Templars. A chair also made from the tree was at one time owned by the Dunham family. The spot were the apple tree grew and the log cabin of Rachel Lovewell is now over a quarter mile in the lake from the shoreline."

This vintage photo of Rachel Lovewell Dunham (1795-1875) was taken c. 1861 for the Orleans County Pioneer Association. Rachel was then 66 years of age. Rachel's photograph hangs locally in the Carlton Town Building and family members have other prints; one of which is reputed to be framed in the wood from "her apple tree."

A special thanks to Lysbeth Hoffman, Carlton Historian for the above story and photo.