

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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SOME APPLE TREE STORIES

We're all familiar with fish stories, well here are some apple tree stories about old and gigantic ones each getting better. The next three newspaper clips from around 1920 are however, undoubtedly true.

"The Biggest Apple Tree. The Ridgeway farmer who claimed to possess the largest apple tree in the county, with a waist measure of 10½ feet, must try again. L. W. Rockwell, of Hornell, has an apple tree having a waist measure of 11½ feet. It was planted in 1790 and still bears regularly."

"The Largest Apple Tree. Leon S. Joy, living about four and one-half miles northeast of Medina, N. Y. claims to have the largest apple tree in the United States. The tree is 10 feet 6 inches in circumference and has two limbs that are six feet and five feet five inches, respectively. The tree has a limb span of about 60 feet. He also has another apple tree that is eight feet eight inches in circumference."

"Another Big Tree. On the farm of Myron L. Porter, five miles east of Medina, on the state road, F. P. Thompson, a son-in-law of Mr. Porter tells us that a Cabishaw apple tree has just been cut down which measured 11 feet in circumference anywhere from the roots up to five feet above the ground. When cut up the tree yielded ten cords of stove wood. It never bore good fruit."

Local folklore which often has a great deal of credibility has it that Rachel Dunham wife of Mathew Dunham planted the first apple tree in Orleans County near Kuckville in 1809. It seems she had been given at least one apple by a Canadian sailor. She no doubt consumed it and saved the seeds which were then planted. The Orleans American reported 107 years later in 1916 that those first apple trees planted by the Dunham family at Kuckville were still bearing fruit.

This is not all far-fetched. Matthew Dunham and his family settled near Kuckville in 1804 on land purchased from the Holland Land Company. After throwing a dam across Johnson's Creek they built a factory for making wooden ware, including side chairs, which they transported across the lake and sold in Canada. They also rigged up a device for making cornmeal, a heavy pestle being operated by water power. So you see how entirely possible it was for Rachel Dunham to have contact with Canadians, especially sailors bearing apples. And now here's the clincher. Believe it or not you can still catch a glimpse of that first apple tree which Rachel Dunham planted 172 years ago. It seems that during trimming season several decades back, a farmer spotted a sapling growing from that tree which he removed fashioning it into a cane. It is that cane, a part of the first apple tree in Orleans County, which is on display at Farmers Hall in the Cobblestone Museum Complex at Childs. Needless to say, the apple tree no longer exists. The photo above, circa 1905, depicts an apple orchard scene. Note the tall ladders.