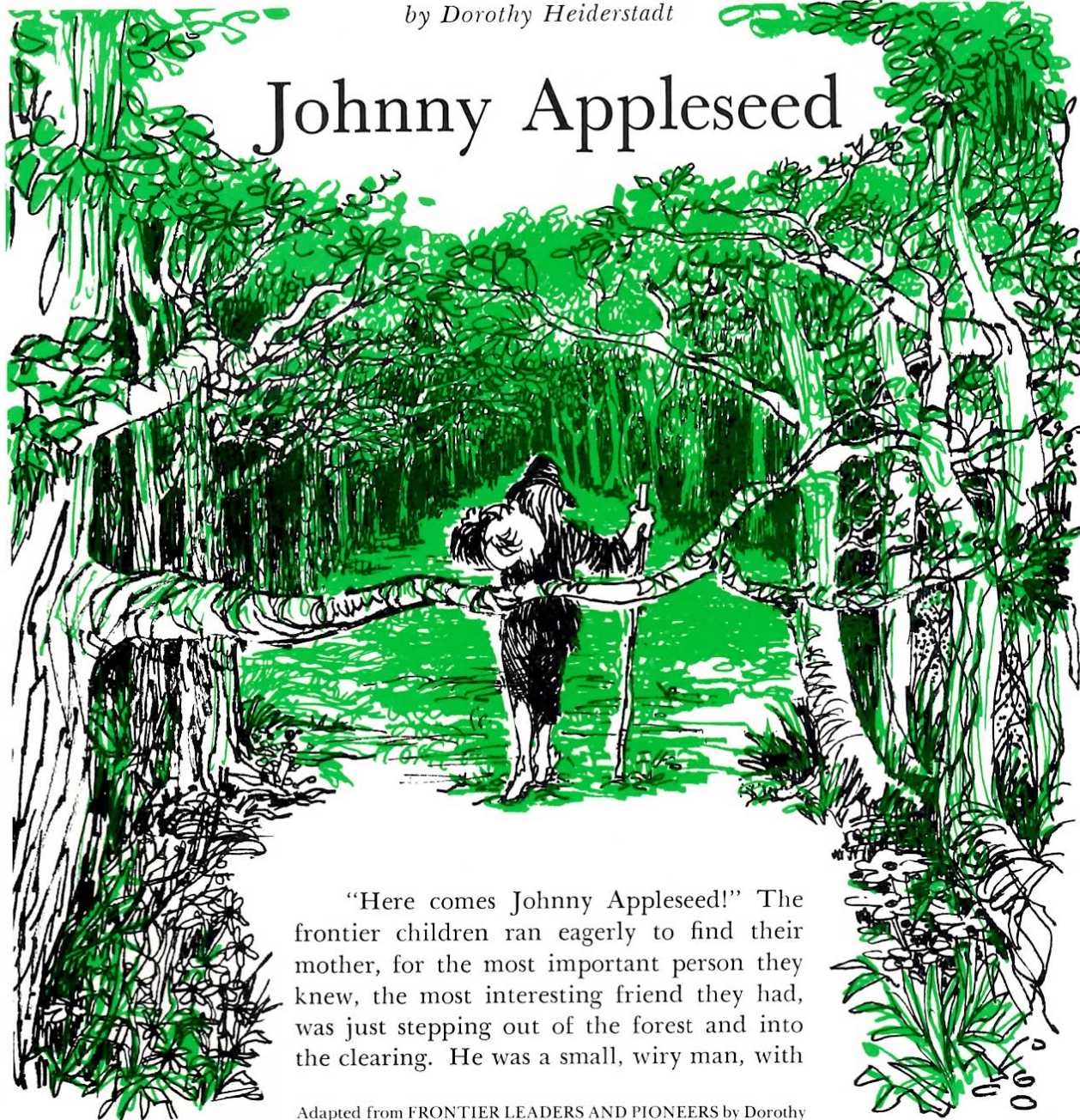


by Dorothy Heiderstadt

# Johnny Appleseed

LEVEL 5 SELECTION 90



“Here comes Johnny Appleseed!” The frontier children ran eagerly to find their mother, for the most important person they knew, the most interesting friend they had, was just stepping out of the forest and into the clearing. He was a small, wiry man, with

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ragged trousers, a sack serving as a shirt, no shoes on his feet, and a saucepan on his head.

He spent nearly the entire year wandering far from home, for he liked to travel and explore new places and meet new and interesting people. At night he slept wherever there was room: on a cabin floor, in a barn loft, a cave, or even a hollow tree.

Johnny wore his hair and beard long, but this was not considered unusual on the frontier, where there were no barbershops. His rags were not considered odd, either, for men who lived in that rugged region often wore faded, patched clothes. As for his bare feet, many frontiersmen went barefoot spring, summer, and fall, and wore nothing much more than Indian moccasins in the winter.

Nor was it odd for Johnny to wear a saucepan on his head, for cooking tools were an important part of a traveler's equipment, and Johnny had no horse to carry his gear. Besides, putting his saucepan on his head was a kind of joke he could share with the children.

What *was* odd about Johnny was that he went about the countryside carrying—instead of a gun—a bag of apple seeds and a bundle of religious tracts. The tracts were for giving away, for Johnny was very devout, and the apple seeds were for planting, for that was Johnny's lifework.

Johnny Appleseed had been born John Chapman, in Massachusetts in the year 1774. He grew up in a restless age, when young men who thirsted for adventure traveled west. So Johnny left his home and went to Pennsylvania, where he worked for a nurseryman. When he had saved enough money, he bought

a farm and planted an apple orchard. Soon pioneers traveling through Pennsylvania on their way to Ohio began to stop and rest in the shade of Johnny's trees. Often they asked if they could buy young trees to take with them, for they wanted to have apple orchards around those faraway, unknown frontier homes they were going to build.

Johnny tried to find out what kind of soil and climate Ohio had, so that he could give people the proper instructions for the care of their trees. No one he questioned seemed to have enough information, so finally he decided to go there to see for himself. He left his brother in charge of the farm and, taking a sack of apple seeds on his back, he traveled to Ohio. The year was 1800, and Johnny was twenty-six years old.

In Ohio he sold his apple seeds to those who could afford to buy them and gave the seeds away to those who could not. Six years later he went there again, with two canoes filled with seeds, again giving the seeds away but this time also planting orchards in wilderness clearings.

In a time when men were eagerly snatching land and driving the Indians away from it, it was strange to see this man snatching nothing, but giving instead.

For forty years he planted trees, making numerous trips back and forth from Pennsylvania to Ohio and Illinois, pruning and tending the trees and helping hundreds of settlers to establish orchards of their own. Soon there were huge forests of apple trees sweeping up and over the hills, filling the air with fragrance in the spring and filling pioneer kitchens with ripe fruit in the fall.

Johnny was a kindly, gentle person. Even the Indians, who looked with suspicion on white men, welcomed him to their lodges and thought of him as their friend. They believed that he was a medicine man, and allowed him to treat their ailments.

Johnny believed in loving all mankind, and birds and animals as well—even the insects that crawled on the ground. He never ate meat, for that meant having to kill an animal, and Johnny claimed that no man had the right to destroy life.

Animals, too, were fond of Johnny, and when he stopped at a cabin it wasn't long before the family dog and cat were lying near him or following him around. It was even said that the wild animals of the forest never tried to harm him, and that some of them actually trailed along behind him when he passed through their part of the wilderness. And, of course, children loved him, for he was gentle and slow and always had time to sit and talk to them—and listen, too.

Johnny lived for more than seventy years, always wandering, never settling down to a home of his own. He died of pneumonia—"lung fever" they called it on the frontier—when he was about seventy-three. A neighbor woman looked after him as best she could, but people who caught lung fever rarely recovered in those days.

A death notice appeared in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel*: "Died . . . in this neighborhood, at an advanced age, Mr. John Chapman (better known as Johnny Appleseed)."

"He was a poor old man, but a good soul," said a mother regretfully. The children nodded, thinking of the man who planted orchards, whom the animals loved and followed, who knew so many songs and stories and always had a new one. "I wear rags here on earth," he used to say, "so that I may wear golden raiment in heaven."

"A poor old man," repeated the mother, shaking her head.

Was he? wondered the children.

## CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. On his head, Johnny Appleseed wore a**
  - A flour sack
  - B bushel basket
  - C cooking utensil
- 2. Frontiersmen considered it strange that Johnny did not have any**
  - A beard
  - B gun
  - C shoes
- 3. The story describes Johnny as being very**
  - A religious
  - B scholarly
  - C bashful
- 4. Johnny planted his first apple orchard in**
  - A Massachusetts
  - B Pennsylvania
  - C Ohio
- 5. Johnny wanted to learn about Ohio's soil and climate so that he could**
  - A decide whether to move there
  - B write a textbook on agriculture
  - C instruct customers on tree care
- 6. The author implies that Johnny's generosity was**
  - A typical of frontier times
  - B unwise under the circumstances
  - C surprising but gratifying
- 7. The Indians looked upon Johnny as**
  - A an unwelcome intruder
  - B a helpful friend
  - C a foolish dreamer
- 8. Which of the following foods would Johnny have refused to eat?**
  - A Roast beef
  - B Buttermilk
  - C Scrambled eggs
- 9. At an advanced age, Johnny died**
  - A in a needless accident
  - B from hunger and thirst
  - C of a common disease
- 10. The last line of the story suggests that the children thought of Johnny's life as**
  - A pitiful
  - B mystifying
  - C admirable