

THE APPLE TREE

The apple tree stood alone on the abandoned property. It was a tree with a history for the various families that had occupied this old homestead. It was planted as a seedling years ago to provide nourishment for the family. A variety of products that were derived from it benefited the families that lived there. In early spring the tree came to life, sprouting buds that later turned into bright green foliage. Next came the beautiful white flowers which totally enveloped the tree, giving off a scent that would turn your head when walking by. The buzz of the bees could be heard, as they gathered the sweet sap from the flowers, pollinating the trees, allowing the small fruit to form. Some of this fruit would fall to the ground providing food, mostly for insects, as the fruit decayed in the hot sun. As the fruit grew so did the anticipation of the families who were to harvest it.

A tree full of apples could be used in diverse ways, with the most common being as an edible fruit. If stored properly, these apples would last for what seemed like forever. Next was the cider. The apples, full of juice, nutritious, and sweet, made a favorite beverage for the kids and adults alike. Baking was next. During the harvest, the sweet smell of apple pie and apple crisp was delightful to the senses. Apple salad was also made in a variety of ways, depending on whose grandmother's recipe was used.

In late August, when the apples were maturing, it was time for testing the fruit. The kids would eagerly climb the tree to get to the fruit. They would pick one or two apples, but no more under their parents' strict rules over the tree. They allowed as little waste as possible as the fruit was an important commodity to the family. In the latter part of the fall, right before harvest time, as the ripening fruit fell from the tree, the yearly visit from the black bear signalled it was harvest time. The sweet apples were a source of food for the bear as it struggled to find enough nourishment to build up its stockpile of fat to get through the long winter's hibernation.

Harvest day was a special event. With ladders the fruit was picked from the upper branches by hand, while the children, to their delight, were sent up into the tree to pick the fruit, and carefully throw it down to the adults below. Not all apples could be reached by hand or ladder, so these apples were retrieved by shaking the tree, allowing the apples to fall to the ground, which usually caused bruising. These bruised apples were mostly used to make cider. Soon the tree was bare, picked clean of its fruit for another year.

As late fall approaches the once vibrant apple tree looks forlorn, having lost all its leaves as it returned to its dormant stage for the winter. It had given up its bountiful harvest for the family to enjoy over the coming months. But now the tree was old and abandoned and was slowly nearing the end of its life. It had given up its glorious past, like the old house that it provided its life sustaining fruit to. Soon the apple tree will die, but even in death it will be seen and remembered for what it once was.