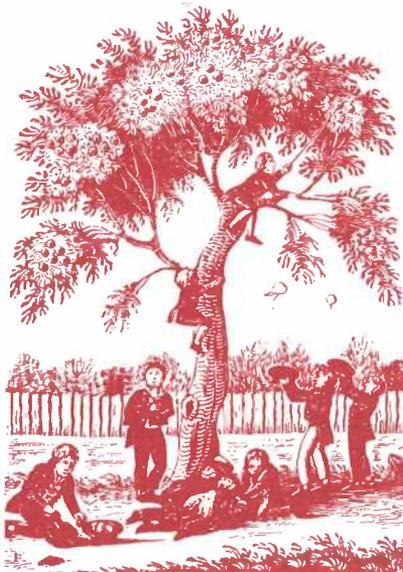


# Take a Bite Out of Vermont's Past

If we are to believe the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," Vermonters should be a healthy bunch.



The apple is not new to Vermont. Early settlers found the fruit of the native Vermont varieties small and sour and not well suited for eating or cider making. To grow more satisfactory types, later settlers brought apple seeds and cuttings with them when they moved from southern New England. These soon grew and it was not long before the Green Mountain state was bursting with new types of apple trees.

Because apple trees are hybrids (a cross between two varieties), a tree grown from seed may bear little **resemblance** to either of its "parents." The type of fruit it produced was equally **unpredictable**. Since our ancestors grew many of their trees from seed, hundreds of new varieties of apples were created.

A farmer who was lucky enough to have one of his trees yield a good eating or cooking apple would name it. Bethels, Tinmouths, and St. Johnsburys were named for the towns in which they were first grown. Apples like Cloth of Gold, Maiden's Blush, Leather Coat, and Spice Sweet were probably named for the apples' qualities. Burnt Cat, Sheep Nose, Seek-No-Further, and the English Slack-My-Girdle show us that the imaginations of these farmers were as colorful as

the apples they were naming.

Our forefathers and mothers used apples for food, drink, and medicine. Some even carved and dried the fruit to make heads for their children's dolls. Nearly every farm had an orchard and many chores revolved around the harvesting, storage and preservation of the fruit. Autumn time apple bees were one such activity. Women and their daughters gathered to pare, core, and slice apples for drying. Working together as a group helped the job go more quickly and gave people a chance to chat and catch up on the local news.

After the fall harvest, most of the apples were packed in barrels and stored in the farm cellar. The family ate them throughout the winter and spring months either raw or cooked in pies, sauces, stews and in dumplings. Small, wormy apples were made into cider. This was drunk sweet or **hard**. Some cider was set aside for the vinegar necessary to can pickles. Even apples that were bruised and rotting had a use. The livestock got them.

Today most of us buy apples at a store. The available varieties are limited. Many of the types named by early Vermonters are now lost to history. Red Delicious and McIntosh have replaced the once common Wolf River, an apple so large (over a foot in **circumference**) that one apple was often all you needed for a pie. Few nowadays have bitten into a Peach Apple or tasted the sweet and fragrant Winter Banana, both popular varieties from earlier times.

To discover some of the apples once grown in Vermont, leave the grocery store's produce aisle behind you. Head out into old pastures and explore around cellar holes. When you find a **gnarled** tree bearing apples, take a bite out of a small piece of Vermont's past.

## VOCABULARY

**resemblance** - likeness or similarity

**unpredictable** - inability to tell in advance

**hard cider** - fermented "alcoholic" cider

**circumference** - the distance around something

**gnarled** - having a rough, twisted look

