

APPLES AND CIDER IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA

Akira Nakada

Apples are one of the most popular fruits in the United States. Today, the word conjures the image of a sweet, red, healthy snack — but this was not always the case. Prior to the 19th century, apples were mostly hard, small, bitter, and had a variety of hues. Moreover, they were almost never food. Instead, apples were the key ingredient in apple cider, the most popular alcoholic drink in the country. Over the course of the 19th century, however, major social and economic movements such as feminism, religious revivalism, the Industrial Revolution, and mass immigration turned people away from cider and nearly drove apples out of America. Faced with plummeting demand, apple growers adapted to consumer needs, repositioning the apple from a rough, source of alcohol to a healthy, accessible fruit. This shift reflected the changing desires of the American people, providing insight into the social and economic movements that defined the 19th century.

The History of Apples and Cider

Prior to the late 19th century, people in Europe and America rarely ate apples raw. Since antiquity, there has been a distrust of

Akira Wood Nakada is a Senior at The Dalton School in New York, New York, where he wrote this paper for Shira Kohn's Topics in World History II: The Invention of Modernity course in the 2018/2019 academic year.

sour apples for both religious and health reasons.¹ During the Middle Ages, fruits were often unsanitary because of insects and rodents that swarmed marketplaces. As a result, apples frequently made people sick.² Additionally, the decline of Roman orchards after the fall of the Roman empire left massive numbers of unattended orchards full of sour, dirty apples.³ The apple's role in religion also damaged its reputation. While the text of *Genesis* identifies the fruit that caused the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise as being from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—without specifying what it looked like—Western painters frequently depicted it as an apple, linking the demise of humanity to the consumption of apples.⁴ This association cast doubt upon the fruit throughout Europe and the United States, contributing to a general suspicion of eating apples.

Despite the suspicion of apples as a fruit, apple trees remained popular throughout colonial America as a source for alcoholic apple cider. From 1804 to 1904, the United States Department of Agriculture recorded 14,000 different varieties of apples.⁵ Compared to the 80 to 90 varieties of apples produced today, the range of apple varieties reflected the apple's popularity throughout the country. Many of these varieties were too sour, small, or hard to eat, but they were perfect for making cider. In the year 1800, the average adult in the United States drank a total of 32 gallons of apple cider annually, or 1.5 cups per day, while only drinking 7.2 gallons of spirits and 0.6 gallons of wine.⁶ This consumption was 28% higher than the average per capita consumption of Coca-Cola—the most popular soft drink in the world—in the U.S. in 2012.⁷ Total U.S. beer consumption, the most natural contemporary comparison to alcoholic apple cider consumption, was only 20 gallons per person per year as of 2016—almost 40% less than the annual consumption of cider in the early 19th century.⁸

Americans embraced cider across class boundaries. The first three Presidents, George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, all produced cider on their farms. Washington went so far as to donate a glass of cider to each of his supporters on elec-

tion day, and Adams drank a tankard of cider each morning for breakfast.⁹ While Presidents produced and drank cider, so did the common man. In fact, “There [was] no farmer or even cottager in New England without a large apple orchard.”¹⁰ One in ten farmers in New England owned a cider mill,¹¹ while in New Jersey, cider was made in vast quantities.¹² Farmers produced so much cider that they used it as a currency to pay for tailors, lawyers, doctors, and their children’s education.¹³ Cider even extended beyond national borders. Although originally a European drink, Native Americans quickly adopted cider, demonstrating its popularity. After hearing a missionary’s tale of Adam and Eve, a Susquehanna chief responded, “It is indeed bad to eat apples. It is better to make them all into cider.” Cider’s popularity transcended geographical, class, and cultural boundaries, becoming an important part of the lives of every American.

The Benefits of Cider

Consumption of cider in the United States during the late 18th and early 19th centuries stemmed from multiple factors. For one, cider provided a safe alternative to contaminated drinking water before the existence of modern filtration systems. American cities rarely had sewers, so they discharged wastewater into the soil, contaminating groundwater and leading to diseases such as cholera.¹⁴ Water contamination in the 19th century was so bad that, in 1879, the City Health Commissioner of Baltimore reported that “of the 71 wells and springs surveyed, 33 were filthy, 10 were bad, 22 were suspicious, and only six were good.”¹⁵ Milk was not a viable alternative as it could contain contaminants that cows picked up from their drinking water.¹⁶ At a time in which water contamination prevailed, alcoholic apple cider provided a valuable alternative. According to a study from the American Chemical Society, fruits rarely pick up contaminants from the soil. Thus, even if orchards are watered with contaminated water, the fruit remains safe to consume.¹⁷ Furthermore, the ethanol (alcohol) produced by fermenting apple juice kills bacteria and acts as a preservative.¹⁸ Alcohol kills bacteria by dissolving the bacteria’s lipid cell walls,

and rendering the bacteria harmless to cider consumers.¹⁹ Thus, cider remained sanitary even when water was not, making it a safer choice of beverage.

In addition to protecting people from disease, cider provided valuable nutrients, including sugar and vitamins. In the early 19th century, sugar in the U.S cost 24 cents per pound,²⁰ around \$3.40 in today's dollars and six times the amount people paid for a pound of sugar in 2015.²¹ Even those who could afford this price had to live near enough to a port or railroad to be able to purchase sugar at all. Because apples could grow next to any farmhouse, however, cider provided a cheap and accessible source of sweetness. Furthermore, cider provided much-needed vitamins including vitamin C and especially B₁₂, which "would have been valuable, if not actually lifesaving, in . . . colonial America, in the middle of winter."²² In fact, Americans valued cider so much that, in 1825, children frequently drank a watered-down version for breakfast.²³ As a cheap source of vitamins and sugar at a time in which health standards were low and such nutrients were rare, cider became increasingly valuable.

The demand for both the health and alcoholic properties of cider pushed farmers to grow more apples, while the ease of growing and the durability of the trees flooded the market with cheap supply that further spurred demand. As the most popular alcohol in America during the 19th century, cider presented a huge consumer base for farmers looking to supplement their income. One book written in 1817 stated that, for farmers, cultivating fruit trees promised "immediate comfort, and eventual emolument."²⁴ Not only did apple trees sell, but they were hardy enough to grow almost anywhere and required little maintenance.²⁵ The money that the cultivation of apple trees provided led people of all backgrounds to plant orchards, further expanding the supply of cider. Thus, the combination of safety from bacteria, sweetness, and salutary benefits made cider practically a national beverage throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, causing the market for apples to boom.

The Apple as Symbol

While cider provided many benefits, the apple's relationship with the new American frontier provided the key to its popularity. After gaining its independence during the Revolutionary War, the new nation sought to expand its borders. Throughout the 19th century, millions of Americans moved out west to fulfill this purpose, venturing into the wilderness to tame the new frontier. This process, dubbed Manifest Destiny, defined the national identity of the fledgling nation. Even those who did not participate directly identified themselves with the ideology of expansionism, elevating the importance of the frontier even further and cementing it as a central feature of the American experiment.²⁶

Apples and cider thrived on the frontier, becoming so valuable that they came to represent more than a simple fruit: the apple became a symbol of frontier life. Able to grow in different climates and terrain, apple trees could thrive even where other crops would not grow. The nutrients and sugar of cider granted a special place for apples in the hearts of frontiersmen who needed all the energy they could get to survive harsh conditions. Additionally, apples reminded Americans of the central myth of the country. Because apples are heterozygotes, each apple that grows from a seed is unique and, like each American in the land of equal opportunity, had a chance to thrive on its own merits. Thus, the apple orchard served as a "blooming meritocracy," where the best rose to the top. Furthermore, as heterozygotes under extreme selection conditions, apples imported from other countries adapted quickly to American soil and transformed to match the tastes of planters, making each generation more American.²⁷

As apples cemented their place in the hearts of people on the frontier, politicians began to use the symbol of apple cider to curry favor with the common man. In the presidential election of 1840, Republican nominee William Henry Harrison ran "The Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign." Harrison believed that, by associating his campaign with cider, he would garner support from working class people across America, suggesting the power of cider as a symbol. Even the pairing of the words "log cabin" and

“cider” demonstrates the connection between apples and other aspects of rustic frontier life. Harrison also used cider to portray the Democratic nominee, Martin Van Buren, as elitist. His campaign published a comic depicting Van Buren enjoying a “beautiful goblet of White House champagne” with his pinky outstretched. The same cartoon showed Van Buren rolling his eyes at a “simple mug of log cabin hard cider.” The comic intended to distinguish Harrison as a man of the people rather than a privileged plutocrat like Van Buren who disregarded the lower classes. Although George Washington and John Adams freely associated with hard cider, suggesting it crossed class lines, the rise of the frontier irrevocably tied cider with its humbler consumers, making it the perfect symbol for critiquing an out-of-touch President. The symbolic importance of cider was so great that Harrison’s campaign unseated the chosen successor of the first populist President, Andrew Jackson, a hero of settlers on the frontier.²⁸ In fact, Harrison’s symbolic use of cider even papered over a strange irony: Harrison was the son of a Virginian planter and former governor, while Van Buren was the son of an innkeeper who could not afford to send his son to college.²⁹ That cider was such a powerful symbol demonstrates the role that the apple played as a symbol of frontier life.³⁰

There is no better example of bond between apples and the frontier in America than the legend of Johnny Appleseed. Born on September 26, 1774, in Massachusetts as John Chapman, “Johnny Appleseed” trudged through the streams and forests of frontier America planting apple trees. During this time, the Ohio Company of Associates offered 100 acres of free frontier land to anyone who planted at least 50 apple trees on that tract. This policy sought to exclude transient squatters just passing through or speculators amassing land for sale, as the cultivation of apple trees demanded a decade-long process, demonstrating that settlers had a long-term investment in the Ohio frontier.³¹ Moving out ahead of the waves of settlers streaming west, Chapman planted seeds that grew into trees full of fresh fruit by the time others arrived. Then, he sold the trees he had cultivated to people who could use them to apply for land grants to start their frontier farms. The apples he planted were rarely edible. Instead, settlers used them

for apple cider. Over the course of fifty years, Johnny Appleseed planted hundreds of thousands of apple seeds, providing frontier people with cider and tying the apple to the frontier.

For all his generosity, Johnny Appleseed was a curious person. He lived a frugal existence, choosing to remain homeless and walking around dressed in nothing but a coffee sack on his body and a pot on his head. Appleseed preached a non-mainstream sect of Christianity, called Swedenborgianism, created by a Swedish noble who claimed to have visions from Jesus demanding he reform the church.³² In accordance with his belief in the presence of God throughout nature, Johnny Appleseed once punished his foot for stepping on a worm by removing his shoe from that foot while walking across the rocky wilderness. He travelled barefoot so much, in fact, that his feet became impervious to pain, allowing him to perform stunts such as walking on hot coals or sticking needles in his feet for the benefit of entertaining children. While many of his eccentricities were harmless, even admirable, others were disturbing, such as when he made marital arrangements with the family of a ten-year-old girl.³³

Despite his oddness, people welcomed Johnny Appleseed everywhere he traveled. Throughout his journey, he befriended people of all social classes, from town leaders to poor farmers, and even homeless wanderers. As he traveled, his reputation grew as fast as his orchards. Across the country, people told stories of the eccentric planter who gave them nutrients and sweetness in the form of apple cider. After he died, major political figures hailed him as a hero. Civil War hero General William Tecumseh Sherman said of Appleseed, "We will keep his memory green, and future generations of boys and girls will love him as we, who knew him, have learned to love him." Sam Houston, a Governor and Senator, was rumored to have said, "Farewell, dear old eccentric heart . . . Generations yet to come shall rise up and call you blessed." Although this story may be apocryphal, Houston's prediction proved true.³⁴

By embodying the needs and demands of the frontier, Johnny Appleseed became a legend. Since his death, Appleseed

has been featured in countless poems, songs, books, and movies, including Walt Disney's film, *Melody Time*. In one famous poem, the poet Rosemary Benet defines him simply: "He loved apples."³⁵ Benet strengthens the connection with frontier apples by describing the man as both "ruddy and sound as a good apple tree" and "ripe as a pippin." Benet's admiration of Chapman is obvious, as she describes John Chapman as "God's own man," connecting him to the divine. At the end of the poem, she calls his life story "marvelous" and tells her audience to "think well" upon him. In her poem, we thus see the two aspects of the Appleseed legend: his deep connection to apples, and the admiration he inspired.

The legend of Johnny Appleseed demonstrates how central apples were to the concept of the frontier. There were plenty of religious zealots crisscrossing the American frontier, but only one became a figure of legend. Through his work, John Chapman became synonymous with apples on the frontier, earning not only his nickname but also the respect and admiration of a nation. His continued fame suggests the importance of his contribution; the apples he planted helped define the frontier that came to define the American identity. By celebrating this strange, eccentric man, Americans could celebrate all that the apple gave them.

The Fall of the Apple

As a drink and a symbol, apple cider defined life in America through the start of the 19th century, but consumption dramatically declined as the century progressed. From 1800 to 1845, Americans went from drinking 32 gallons of cider annually to less than a gallon, a staggering 98% decline.³⁶ Such a steep drop suggests a sudden change in apples or apple trees, such as a disease decimating apple crops. Yet apples remained hardy and nutritious. Instead, it was the people growing and drinking them who changed. America was moving into a new, modern century, and it no longer had a place for apple cider.

The dramatic change in cider consumption in such a short period reflects major changes in American society. The 19th century saw the rise of major movements such as feminism

and two “Great Awakenings,” as well as the Industrial Revolution and mass immigration to the United States. These movements, and the push for temperance they inspired, led to a fundamental reshaping of the perception of apples in America while laying the foundations for modern society.

Social Movements and the Apple

Feminism emerged in the United States toward the middle of the 19th century. As early as 1770, the first women’s magazines aimed to educate women on subjects such as embroidery. By 1828, these magazines had evolved, discussing a wider variety of topics such as self-improvement for women. In one magazine, for instance, the editor, Sarah Josepha Hale, wrote to women on how to “improve on their moral and intellectual character in the company of other women within their social sphere.”³⁷ These early magazines created communities of women who were focused on improving their quality of life. They formed a basis of mutual female support, culminating in the formation of organizations such as the American Rights Association, which fought for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, as well as the famed Seneca Falls Conference. Over time, these organizations grew to become the first wave of the feminist movement.³⁸

One of the main efforts to improve living standards for women was the movement to abolish alcohol. Since alcohol and drunkenness were frequent factors in domestic abuse and violence towards women and their children, feminism in the 19th century encouraged women to crusade against them.³⁹ Because of this, “Women were deeply involved in temperance agitation from the time of the American Temperance Society crusade.”⁴⁰ In fact, although society discouraged women from political involvement, “Women comprised from 35 to 60 percent of a typical temperance society in the 1830s.”⁴¹ As the 19th century progressed, women formed their own temperance societies to combat drunkenness, eventually creating the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1874.⁴² The rise of feminism, coupled with the abuse women faced

due to alcohol and alcoholism, lit a fire under American women to rise and join the Temperance Movement.

The growth of feminism during this period coincided with two religious movements known as the Second and Third “Great Awakenings.” The Great Awakenings spread across America, preaching optimism, morality, and emotional fervor in the embrace of God. Although they began with individual preachers in frontier America, the hopeful message of these revivals attracted followers throughout the country, causing church enrollment numbers to rise from 7–10% in 1800 to 33% in 1890.⁴³ The Great Awakenings focused on humanity’s “moral free agency” to determine its salvation through social involvement. This message prompted social reforms that addressed slavery, health care, protection for the mentally ill, and especially alcohol abuse.⁴⁴ The moral conscience of America banded together against alcohol, even writing songs for school children that taught abstinence for God-loving Americans. One song included the lyrics, “Great God thy presence we implore . . . Let truth and temperance prevail.”⁴⁵ By declaring God to be the solution to intemperance, religious revivalism made itself inextricable from the fight against alcohol. As the Great Awakenings swept the nation, they pushed people towards greater piety and consideration of social reform.

Feminism and religious revivalism united in the cause of temperance. The Temperance Movement in the United States began in the early 19th century to advocate for abstinence from alcohol. Advocates for the movement formed organizations, held protests, and published writings rebuking alcohol as a cause of violence and the drink of the devil. In 1826, the American Temperance Society became the first national temperance organization in the United States and, within a decade, around 15% of the population had joined, pledging not to drink alcohol.⁴⁶ While national temperance legislation had to wait until the Eighteenth Amendment created Prohibition in 1920, the early waves of temperance in the 19th century severely diminished support for alcohol.

As the Temperance Movement spread through America, the fate of cider, and consequently the apple, hung in the balance.

At first, temperance advocates targeted only high alcohol content beverages such as whiskey and other hard liquors.⁴⁷ However, as one of the most popular alcoholic drinks of the time, cider provided a perfect target. An article published in 1827 in religious journals across the country called the cider apple “the newest front” in the contest between God and Mammon.”⁴⁸ By tying the fate of cider to the soul of America in this way, the Temperance Movement ensured the demise of apple cider in America. Temperance members chopped down and burned apple orchards throughout the country.⁴⁹ The movement even influenced the farmers who grew apples. According to one historian, “By 1829, at least a few farmers had taken the advice of ‘burn them’ [the apple trees] to heart. One report circulated in several journals described a New Haven, Connecticut gentleman who ‘ordered a fine apple orchard to be cut down, because the fruit may be converted into an article to promote intemperance.’”⁵⁰ People turned against cider so completely that farmers were even destroying their own crops, sacrificing their livelihoods to support the Temperance Movement.

Although the Temperance Movement targeted all alcoholic beverages, the market for cider proved particularly susceptible because of the growing conditions for apple orchards. Chopping down an apple tree cuts off its production permanently, while slicing down a barley field just makes the barley easier to harvest to make beer and clears the way for replanting. Furthermore, apple trees can take up to ten years to produce fruit, which made it hard for cider producers to recover from temperance attacks. In contrast, crops such as barley and corn used for beer, whiskey, and bourbon are harvested and replanted frequently, which limited the consequence of burning them to the loss of that year’s harvest. This difference in growing conditions delivered a huge blow to cider and enabled other forms of alcohol to take over the already shrinking market in America.

Economic Movements and the Apple

As social movements sparked a backlash against alcohol that inspired temperance, economic movements such as industri-

alization, urbanization, and immigration furthered the cause and spelled destruction for apple cider. With factories spreading across the country in the 19th century, owners and their investors needed “a reliable and punctual work force,”⁵¹ a difficult goal to achieve if workers were drunk. Before factories, farmers usually worked for themselves, meaning they could decide to drink without fear of losing their job. However, with the advent of factories, workers labored for other people in strictly specified tasks that fit together to keep the assembly line humming. As a result, in industrialized America, “Drunkness would come to be defined as a threat to industrial efficiency.”⁵² The rise of factory labor and the need for a large, cohesive workforce pushed workers and factory owners away from alcohol, and consequently from cider.

While the needs of factories necessitated the cessation of drinking in the workplace, urbanization sparked a movement to fight drinking during free time as well. In big cities, crime rates and poverty increased drastically as immigrants and lower-class workers packed into slums. Factory owners pushed to keep costs low by paying employees as little as possible, forcing them to crowd into small, dirty apartments that sparked resentment and often violence. To avoid addressing their part in the creation of these conditions, elites blamed alcohol.⁵³ Because alcohol is often present in crimes, elites focused on it as the cause rather than examining the larger social issues, thus tying poverty and crime to alcohol and fueling the Temperance Movement.

Beyond aiding the push for temperance, industrialization and urbanization spelled out the death of the frontier.⁵⁴ From 1800 to 1900, people streamed into cities, ballooning the number of urban residents from 6% of the population to 40%⁵⁵ and redefining the country from a frontier nation to a modernized industrial state. As people moved to cities, they gave up agriculture for factory work. Furthermore, they no longer needed cider to pay for doctor’s visits because they could use the new paper currency sweeping the country in the mid-19th century.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the apple’s ability to thrive in any condition became less useful as America lost its wilderness. Even outside cities, stable farms replaced frontier huts, pushing farmers towards more flexible sources of alcohol

such as grains like barley and wheat. Even the symbolism of the apple began to fade. As the frontier disappeared, the American Dream shifted from conquering the wilderness to living a lavish city lifestyle. The primitive joys of the frontier, and its defining beverage, held less appeal to these more modern citizens.

The influx of German immigrants to the United States, drawn to economic opportunities in newly growing cities, drove the final nail into the coffin of cider. By 1845, more than one million Germans flooded into the United States.⁵⁷ These immigrants brought German lager beers, which quickly took over saloons and urban areas.⁵⁸ Early American beers were often contaminated, but these new German immigrants imported superior brewing techniques from Europe that destroyed bacteria and made beer safer. Furthermore, because they were used to drinking beer in Germany, these immigrants also provided a ready market.⁵⁹ In fact, just as annual cider consumption per capita dropped below a gallon, beer consumption increased above that mark. Within 50 years, beer took over America, with its consumption rates growing to 20 gallons per person per year as cider nearly disappeared.⁶⁰ After a century of cider's dominance in the alcohol market, beer became the new defining alcohol of America.

Rebirth

By the middle of the 19th century, demand for apples had plummeted. America's shifting society was moving away from cider. Temperance decreased demand for alcohol, thus ruining the reputation of cider, while urbanization and industrialization rendered the benefits and symbolic importance of cider useless. Consequently, cider consumption in America dropped drastically, transforming it from one of the most popular beverages, to a relic of the past. Despite the change in tastes, however, apples remained nutritious and easy to grow around the country. An alternative function for apples had to be found in order to preserve the apple industry.

While apples disappeared from the cups of America, they reappeared on its plates as Americans started eating apples instead

of drinking cider. Economic modernization and industrialization, one of the causes in the downfall of cider, actually facilitated this rise in eating apples. Nineteenth-century industrialization led to technological advances such as commercialized refrigeration and more efficient railroads, making fresh apples accessible across America. In 1851, the first refrigerated boxcars transported butter to Boston. By 1875, refrigerated trains began shipping fresh fruit around the country.⁶¹ Furthermore, the rise of food standards and inspections, first under the Department of Agriculture in the late 19th century and then under the newly created Food and Drug Administration in 1906, assuaged previous qualms about the cleanliness of fruits and vegetables.⁶² As health standards grew stricter and technological advances made mass production and distribution easier, the apple no longer needed cider in order to be safe.

Apple producers took advantage of these changes to redefine the apple as a health food. This attempt was so successful that the fruit began to appear on cafeteria lunch trays for children and even gained the acceptance of the church.⁶³ One late 19th century reverend claimed that “fruits . . . make for temperance” and asked, “What luxuries can compare with the luscious peach or juicy apple?”⁶⁴ The church’s embrace of the apple after two millennia of distrust shows how far the remade apple had come. By 1900, the horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey claimed, “the eating of the apple (rather than the drinking of it) has come to be paramount.”⁶⁵ While progress was swift, apple companies had one more trick up their sleeve. In 1904, they introduced a new slogan, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”⁶⁶ The once rugged and drunken apple became medication to help modern families in a modern world. Thus, by the turn of the 20th century, eating apples provided many of the benefits of cider, cheap sweetness and nutrition, without the downside of attacks from temperance advocates.

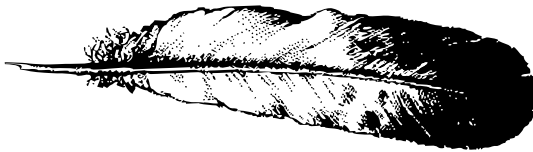
This new identity of the apple as a commercially available health food became so ingrained in the national psyche that Americans began to rewrite the legend of Johnny Appleseed, remodeling his character after the clean and healthy apples that he now represented. Johnny Appleseed was a strange man, walking

over hot coals, sticking nails in his feet, and making marital arrangements with the family of a ten-year-old girl. However, that is not the Johnny Appleseed that is portrayed in modern American books and movies. This transition began in the early 20th century, culminating in Disney's *Melody Time* in 1948, which documented the legend of John Chapman for a new generation. To fit the modern image of apples, the producers altered his story. None of his stranger eccentricities were shown in the film, and he wears normal period clothes rather than a coffee sack and no shoes. The *Melody Time* version also implies Johnny Appleseed was a traditional Christian as opposed to a follower of Swedenborgianism. The biggest difference, however, were the apples. The apples Johnny picks in the short film are identical: red, shiny, and big. Furthermore, the movie suggests that there were a dozen uses for the apples he planted, while the apples that Chapman planted had one clear use: making apple cider. Even when the short film mentions apple cider, it is referred to as "tangy," emphasizing its fruity qualities rather than its alcoholic properties. All of these changes alter the character of Johnny Appleseed, making him and his apples cleaner and more accessible, reflecting the new beliefs of audiences of the time.

As the role of apples in America changed, so too did the apples themselves. While people on the frontier ignored apple aesthetics because they smashed the fruits to make cider, 20th century consumers wanted attractive produce on their supermarket shelves. Furthermore, while even the most bitter apples could make good cider, only the sweetest were desirable to eat. In order to meet this demand, commercial apple producers consolidated varieties, leading to the rise of apples such as the "Red Delicious," which was sweet and long-lasting for transport, as well as aesthetically pleasing. Although the commercialization of apples made the fruit more accessible, it led to the downfall of thousands of varieties that did not meet consumer and company standards. Because they were less attractive and harder to mass produce, "highly flavored heirlooms were effectively cut out of the commercial trade."⁶⁷ Commercialization winnowed the tens of thousands of varieties of apples produced in the 19th century to the 80 to 90 varieties in

the U.S. today. Thus, although transformation saved the apple, the process turned them from diverse, complicated plants to ones that were healthy, accessible, and pretty.

Underneath the peel of one of the most popular fruits in the world lies a fascinating and complex story of a changing nation. Up until the 19th century, the average American consumed 1.5 cups of cider per day, but by 1850 that number had dropped below a tablespoon. This decline reflects the modernization of American society through industrialization, mass immigration, religious revivals, and feminism. These movements combined to empower the Temperance Movement, which turned consumers away from cider and nearly destroyed apples in America. However, modernization reinvented the apple as a commercial, mass-produced, health food. The apple that emerged from the 19th century no longer reflected the individualistic, pioneering attitude of new Americans building their new home in a foreign land. Instead, it became accessible, attractive, and as modern as the society it served. In its small way, the story of the apple is the story of America, a tale of growth and loss on the march into modernity.



Endnotes

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