

OUR ORCHARD NO LONGER HAS ANY APPLE TREES

THE END OF AN ERA, WRITES TED BROWN



TED BROWN
Column

Over the past years, I've been monitoring the old apple trees in the orchard, asking myself, "Do I take it down? Or leave it for another year?"

Now there's one remaining apple tree in the orchard. And that's not saying much - it has a single branch that bears some fruit, covered with blight spots.

I'm guessing that final tree is about 150 years old.

It's a bit ironic that we still refer to it as the "orchard" in spite of the fact the apple trees are all gone.

But old habits sometimes die a long, slow death.

In the mid-1800s, the expression "mixed farming" was quite accurate, as farm families were incredibly diverse when it came to farming.

Every farmer cropped hay, grain, and turnips, and raised cattle, pigs, horses, sheep and chickens.

And being self-sufficient, they usually had a woodlot, a huge garden, and an orchard.

I have no idea when our orchard was planted, but I'm guessing it would be in the 1850s, likely planted by my great-great grandfather James Brown, or his son,

my great grandfather John Kerr Brown.

It was well established when I was a little kid. The old apple trees were planted in rows on a hilly part of the farm, which wasn't conducive to growing other crops.

In the part of the orchard directly across from the house, I recall a dozen or more trees, with more down the hill behind the house.

The orchard was fenced, and our young cattle (yearlings) would graze the grass between the rows of apple trees for the summer. One year, I recall one of our young cattle choked on an apple that had fallen off the tree, and she died of asphyxiation.

That marked the end of cattle grazing in the orchard, so our ponies were able to graze, since ponies and horses chew apples, whereas cattle swallow them whole.

As time went by, another apple tree would die, or a windstorm would uproot one. Before long, the surviving apple trees in the orchard were few and far between.

We actually had "names" for some of the trees. Some were referred by their variety, like the crab apple tree, the harvest apple tree, and we had one pear tree, but its fruit was so hard that the only thing we could use the fruit for was pear sauce.

We had apples for eating, cooking or applesauce. One tree was supposedly great for cider; I can't speak from experience, but my neigh-

bour did try to make cider with a makeshift press constructed from a car jack ... I was never sure of the outcome of that project.

We also had one tree called "Jane's tree," and I only have sketchy details of the origin of that name.

My grandfather's eldest niece was named Margaret Elizabeth. Some called her Maggie, but my grandfather called her "Jane."

I have no idea where the "Jane" name came from, but he always called her Jane. I believe she was visiting with her parents and somewhere in the conversation, my grandfather told the wee little Maggie/Jane/Margaret that she could have an apple from that "tree down the back lane." From then on it became "Jane's tree."

The name stuck.

Over the years, Jane's tree has been showing the ravages of time, significantly damaged during the 2013 ice storm. It's the remaining tree down the back lane, but likely not for long.

Using the front-end loader, I approached the remaining apple tree in the front orchard. It looked pretty sad.

There was no need to cut it down, I simply pushed it over with the loader - its root system was that shallow.

The deed was done in minutes, and the orchard does look much tidier.

But it was a sad moment, the end of an era.

And now, our "orchard" no longer has any apple trees.

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THE WAY WE WERE



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