



PHOTO: *The Penelope Winslow apple tree on
Apple Tree Hill, South Shore Road, North Haven*

ISLAND APPLE TREES

EXPLORING ORCHARDS
WITH APPLE HISTORIAN
JOHN BUNKER

NORTH HAVEN, MAINE
October 2019

SPONSORED BY THE
NORTH HAVEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
& THE NORTH HAVEN GRANGE

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Notes compiled by Lydia Brown
and photographs courtesy of the
North Haven Historical Society
and Gil Foltz

JOHN BUNKER, APPLE HISTORIAN

VISIT TO NORTH HAVEN :: OCTOBER 11 & 12, 2019

Sponsored by the North Haven Historical Society and the North Haven Grange

Notes compiled by Lydia Brown. Corrections and additions welcome.

Photographs courtesy of Gil Foltz and the North Haven Historical Society.

John Bunker

John Bunker is an apple historian, gardener, and orchardist. Ever since he came to Maine for college, John has followed an obsession with apple trees and spent years talking to old timers and traveling the state in search of old trees. In 1984, he started Fedco Trees, a cooperative in Waterville, Maine. Beginning in 2014, John created the Maine Heritage Orchard in Unity on 10 acres of a renovated gravel pit adjacent to the grounds of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners. The orchard is home to nearly 300 varieties of apple varieties traditionally grown in Maine, some on the verge of extinction. The orchard includes two varieties that probably originated on North Haven, the Aunt Penelope Winslow and the Cora's Grand Greening. This year, John published his latest book, *Apples and the Art of Detection*. John lives in Palermo, Maine where he and his wife Cammy Watts have Super Chilly Farm and run an apple CSA, called Out on a Limb CSA.

Orchard visits on North Haven

During his time on North Haven, John Bunker visited trees at the following sites.

- ❖ Site 1, Crabtree Farm, South Shore Road
- ❖ Site 2, Eleazar Crabtree House, Crabtree Point
- ❖ Site 3, Pulpit Harbor public landing
- ❖ Site 4, John Brown Farm, North Shore Road
- ❖ Site 5, Carver Farm, Oak Hill

The description of the site visits include notes with comments from John Bunker, Gil Foltz (North Haven resident and apple lover), and Gene Cartwright (farmer and cider maker at Whaleback Farm in Lincolnville, Maine). The current landowners of each site are listed with the description of the site visit.

Further information about apple varieties mentioned can be found through books and online sources such as:

- ❖ Fedco Trees, www.fedcoseeds.com/trees. In addition, the printed annual Fedco Tree catalog is a valuable resource, full of excellent descriptions, recipes, and artwork
- ❖ Maine Heritage Orchard, www.maineheritageorchard.org
- ❖ John Bunker & Cammy Watts website, www.ouonalimbapples.com

SITE 1 :: OLD CRABTREE FARM, SOUTH SHORE ROAD

Landowner: Town of North Haven (2019)

Visited one tree east of the driveway to ferry crew quarters

John estimated this tree to be at least 170 years old and maybe close to 200 years. He also estimated it was probably once 15 times the size it is now. Although completely hollow, the tree was still bearing fruit and Gil Foltz remarked he had never seen such big apples on the tree.

About the fruit – it is lumpy around the apex and has a bit of a crown. Its green coloring has some blue tint. John identified the fruit as Baldwin and noted when ripe, the fruit will be entirely brick red. Baldwin was discovered in Wilmington, Massachusetts in 1740, became popular around 1800, and by 1850 was the standard all-purpose home and commercial variety.

A large piece of broken trunk lay on the ground and John suggested the North Haven Historical Society put it on display.

Suggestions for caring for this tree:

- Don't kill it with kindness (be careful not to prune too much)
- Trim back nearby spruce to give the apple tree more sunlight
- Mulch with wood chips



Gertrude Beverage Foltz standing beside the ancient apple tree at the old Crabtree Farm, 2019. Gertrude counts the Crabtree family among her island ancestors. Photograph courtesy of Gil Foltz.

NOTES ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THIS SITE

This land was once part of the Crabtree family farm where Captain Eleazar Crabtree and his wife Lucy Train built a large home after leaving their house on the far end of North Haven's Crabtree Point (see notes on history of Site 2). The house, no longer standing, was constructed in 1786 and was known to be one of the most impressive homes on the island. Eleazar Crabtree died in 1824 and the farm passed down through his descendants. His grandson, Eleazar the 3rd who married Harriet Kilton, was the farmer listed on the property in the agricultural census of 1850 through 1880. When the 1880 census included information about orchards, Eleazar Crabtree III reported 1.25 acres in orchard with 60 bearing trees.

NOTE: 3 trees west of driveway visited by John Bunker in October 2007. Notes from that visit identify the trees as Alexander (1) and Ribston Pippin (2 and 3).



A postcard view of the Crabtree homestead. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.

SITE 2 :: ELEAZAR CRABTREE HOUSE AT THE END OF CRABTREE POINT

Landowners, Willard Taylor & Virginia Davies (2019) / sold to Fred Dust & David Young (2020)

Visited two old trees – one near the corner of the house and one south of the house

Notes on TREE ONE, near corner of house:

A few apples were on the tree and John identified them as Tolman Sweet, one of the first varieties grown in Maine and one to look out for when finding old trees. Remarks on the fruit's taste included sweet, good, pectiny, low in acid, no tartness.

Tolman Sweet somewhat resembles Yellow Bellflower, another very old variety found on the islands. Both are almost entirely yellow when ripe. Tolman Sweet is more round while Yellow Bellflower is more conic. Fedco Tree catalog describes Tolman Sweet as "Truly an all purpose fruit, used for cider, cooking, dessert, and even animal fodder. Once popular for pickling, boiling, and baking. Especially prized in Maine for apple cake. Unforgettable peculiar sweet strange flavor."

John estimated the age of the tree probably dates to around the Civil War or earlier.

A large bump on the lower trunk is likely the site of the graft. Grafts are usually higher on the trunk but this one is almost at ground level. Below the graft, the rootstock was sending out new shoots. The rootstock of an apple tree is older than the rest of the tree by a couple years. A fun experiment could be to take scion wood from the rootstock shoots and graft it onto another tree to learn more about the rootstock variety.



Gene Cartwright examines the tree's rootstock growth while John Bunker and Gertrude Foltz stand at left. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.



John Bunker and Gene Cartwright reach for fruit as Lydia Brown looks on. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.

Notes on TREE TWO, south of the house:

The tree's trunk has many large bumps. "That's obscene!" one observer remarked. John has seen trees with bizarre bark formations and is not sure why it happens.

The tree had small yellow fruit with high aroma and high flavor. John called the tree a crabapple because the fruit was small. Prior to 1920, there was not an industry for ornamental crabapples and consequently, earlier trees are often not described. Most crabapples were used for culinary purposes and likely grown from seed rather than a graft. The Fedco Tree catalog identifies crabapples as "any apple with fruit smaller than 2 inches in diameter. Crabs bear edible fruit, some more favorable for culinary use than others."

Gil, who has a graft from this tree now growing on a tree near his house, noted the fruit made good cider although the graft was hard to take. John noted that generally small diameter fruit makes good cider.



John Bunker stands alongside the "obscene" looking old apple tree at the Crabtree House. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.

NOTES ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THIS SITE

Captain Eleazar Crabtree came to North Haven in the 1760s from Attleboro, Massachusetts and lived on the western end of the island, where he built a home in 1770 on the point of land that now bears his name. The Crabtree house, built into the south-facing hillside, was protected from cold northeast winds and offered a wide view of Penobscot Bay. Eleazar married Lucy Train of Weston, Massachusetts and together they had four sons and four daughters.

When the Revolutionary War broke out in 1775, Eleazar joined the colonial forces and served at Frenchman's Bay from August to December of 1775. Several years later, in an attempt to defend North Haven and surrounding islands from the British, Eleazar Crabtree organized a group of men into the Seacoast Company and served as their captain from September 5 to December 5, 1779. While Crabtree was away, the British reportedly took up residence in his house. Because its location on the far end of Crabtree Point provided an expansive view of the bay, the British used the house as a lookout post and spared destroying it like other island homes.

Eleazar and Lucy Crabtree eventually sold their property on the point and moved to land at the head of Southern Harbor where they built a large home. Eleazar Crabtree died in 1824 and his gravestone is located on North Haven at Seaview Cemetery.

Subsequent owners of the Crabtree's 1770 house at Crabtree Point include Samuel and Almira Crockett, Matthew and Mary Leadbetter, Lewis Herzog, Glen Lawrence & Phillips Brown Sr, Michael Williams, and Laurence Lombard.



The Eleazar Crabtree house with three well pruned apple trees. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.

SITE 3 :: PULPIT HARBOR PUBLIC LANDING

Landowners, North Haven Conservation Partners (2019)

Visited two trees -- one south of the cellar hole and one closer to the road

This site visit was very brief. John was unable to make positive identification of fruit varieties at this time.

Gene explored along the shoreline where many seedling trees grew.

Notes on TREE ONE, south of cellar hole:

- ❖ Fruit yellow green with unusual flavor

Notes on TREE TWO, closer to the road:

- ❖ Large tree. Possibly a Baldwin but might not be.



A view of Pulpit Harbor and surrounding village, circa 1900. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THIS SITE

Throughout the second half of the 1800s, North Haven's Pulpit Harbor was the epicenter of the island's population. Farms thrived nearby, fishing schooners filled the deep, protected harbor, and homes, boat shops, several stores, a school, and a post office lined the shore. Today, with many of those buildings gone, roads diverted, and trees grown in, the area bears little resemblance to the scenes of old photographs.

The cellar hole at this site marks the former home of Xenophen and Rebecca Leadbetter and their three children, Emma, Annie, and Freeman. Nearby, the Leadbetters had several small sheds and a very large barn. Also nearby, was a store run by Ben Calderwood and a cooper shop, which provided the barrels for storing salted fish, caught aboard the harbor's many fishing vessels. Xenophen, a ship captain and owner of several different fishing boats, built a large wharf and fish house nearby.



A road building crew with horses and neighborhood kids gathered in the Pulpit Harbor village with the Xenophen and Rebecca Leadbetter in the background. Note apple trees surrounding the Leadbetter house. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.

By the turn of the century, the once thriving community of Pulpit Harbor had gone into decline, due mostly to a dramatic drop in the mackerel fishery. Stores and the local school closed as members of the community moved away. Around the same time, wealthy residents of Boston and New York came to North Haven in search of summer vacation homes. One summer resident, Charles Norton became concerned about the many abandoned buildings around Pulpit Harbor. Piece by piece, Norton purchased properties, including the Whitmore's boat shop and Leadbetter home, and then had them torn down or moved, leaving only cellar holes as remnants of the village's past.

SITE 4 :: JOHN BROWN FARM AT WEBSTER'S HEAD

Landowners Jeff Holmgren & Anita Spertus

This site visit was part of the public walk on October 11. Numerous apple, pear, and cherry trees grow at this site. Rather than examine each tree, the group stopped at parts of the orchard as John discussed various topics, outlined below.

With landowners approval, a first step in studying and identifying trees would be to

- ❖ Make a map of the orchard and measure the distance between the trees. John guessed that there are probably the remnants of the orchard's original rows. In most orchards, trees were planted 25 to 30 feet apart. Trees that don't fit into the pattern are likely seedlings. Drone photos of the orchard area could be helpful with mapping.
- ❖ Assign a number to each tree and ask landowners for permission to place a small tag with assigned numbers on the trees. John recommends making tags out of remnants of vinyl siding and writing the number in pencil (not Sharpie marker as it will fade in the sun).
- ❖ Gathering information about the trees is part of the history of a place and what historically was happening on the island. Scion wood from old trees could be collected and used to create a heritage orchard on North Haven.



Island orchard visit with John Bunker, October 2019. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.

How can individuals or organizations like the Historical Society impress upon landowners on North Haven the importance of old apple trees?

- ❖ John suggested those interested could meet or correspond with landowners to emphasize the importance of what they have and their role stewards of trees and fruit varieties that, in some cases, are irreplaceable. Some of these varieties may not be found anywhere else.
- ❖ John also suggested contacting realtors to let them know the importance of these trees as they show property to prospective buyers.

How can you tell the age of an apple tree?

- ❖ Size doesn't mean a lot or diameter. A tree can be very old but the growing conditions could cause it stay small.
- ❖ A tree that's hollow in the middle often indicates it is an older tree
- ❖ If you know the age of a tree -- for instance, if you have records indicating old Mrs. Ames planted a tree in 1900 -- then imprint the look of that tree in your mind and use it as a comparison when trying to determine age of other trees.

There are numerous pear trees in this orchard. Historically farmers often grew pears from seed and made them into an alcoholic drink called perry, similar in the way apples are made into a fermented cider.

The group stopped to look at a tree off the southeast side of the house. While the existing trunk was hollow and the original upper section of the tree was gone, "newer" branches that John estimated to be 40 years old grew well. John noted that this is proof that an old tree can revive and continue to fruit. A hundred years ago this tree would have looked entirely different in size.

- ❖ John noted the owners have done a good job cutting out the deadwood
- ❖ John recommended taking scion wood from this tree
- ❖ Fruit is reddish green, hard, & tart (likely not ripe at the time of this visit)

The group stopped to look at a tree growing along a stone wall below the northwestern corner of the house. Notes on the tree:

- ❖ There is a visible graft line on the trunk, with the graft being vigorous and outgrowing the rootstock.
- ❖ Further inspection showed a large section of rootstock that had grown alongside the graft and into the upper section of the tree. No fruit on the rootstock section.
- ❖ The trunk of the tree is hollow, indicating it is an older tree
- ❖ A few fruit remained on the tree. Fruit is yellow with pink patches.

Next, the group stopped to look at a row of trees growing close together. Trees in a row could mean they are part of an orchard or could be seedling trees that grew along a fence line or building. Also, farmers used to spread cider pumice in a row and grow seedlings.

- ❖ These trees, at about 12 feet apart indicate they were probably all seedlings.
- ❖ One tree, with a wooden brace under one limb, had very spongy sweet fruit. Low acid fruit like this was historically valued for livestock feed because animals don't do well with acid apples. Sometimes, whole orchards were planted in low acid fruit for livestock feed.

The group stopped to look at a row of trees along the eastern edge of the field, running parallel to the road. The tree on the furthest north end of the row John identified as a Tolman Sweet. Two others in the row were estimated to be around 40 years old. John suggested finding out if current or past landowners had any record of what varieties were planted.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THIS SITE

Family history states that brothers, John and Oliver Brown, built a house in 1831 [some sources date it as 1828] on land that was part of the farm belonging to their parents, John and Lydia Carr Brown. As the story goes, the brothers were sea captains and wanted to build a house where their families could live together while John and Oliver were away at sea. In 1838, Oliver died in Savannah, Georgia from a tropical fever and his share of the farm went to his widow and children. Eventually, Oliver's brother, John and his wife Mary bought the remaining share of the two family homestead and passed it down to their descendants. Their grandson, Jesse Brown and wife Florence Beverage were the last of the Brown family to live in the family homestead. See further information in the accompanying profile of the farm created as a handout for the walk.



The Brown Farm seen from a distance. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.

SITE 5 :: CARVER FAMILY FARM AT OAK HILL

Landowners the Watson family (2019)

Like the nearby Brown Farm, this site visit was also part of the public walk on October 11. Instead of studying each tree, the group stopped at parts of the orchard as John discussed various topics, outlined below. John gathered some fruit samples from trees to take home for further examination.

Upon arrival to the orchard, John paced out the distance between trees and estimated rows of trees were about 30 feet apart. While he did not identify specific varieties, he estimated there were many of the same variety. He called it a winter orchard that likely once had 50 to 80 trees, with varieties of winter storage apples. An orchard of this size produced enough fruit for export. With numerous trees of winter storage apples, farmers could harvest the apples late in the fall and then pack them in barrels for shipping.

Most trees in this orchard are big but not hollow, which indicates they are old but not ancient. John estimated most trees date from 1880 or whenever the farm was at its peak. If planted during a certain time period then many of the varieties will be ones that were popular at that time.



John Bunker and Gene Cartwright at the old Carver Farm orchard visit, October 2019. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.



John Bunker and Lydia Brown at the old Carver Farm orchard visit, October 2019. Image courtesy of Gil Foltz.

The group tasted apples from various trees. The orchard includes both seedlings and grafted trees. Possible grafted varieties discussed included Northern Spy, Stark, and Red Canada. One tree in the northwest corner of the orchard had fruit with white flesh and sweet flavor that Gene noted was similar to a Famuese (also known as Snow).

Along the northern edge of the orchard, John spotted two trees that were hollow in the middle. In addition the trees were growing in a row angled differently than other trees. He estimated the trees were older than the rest of the orchard and were likely part of an earlier orchard layout.

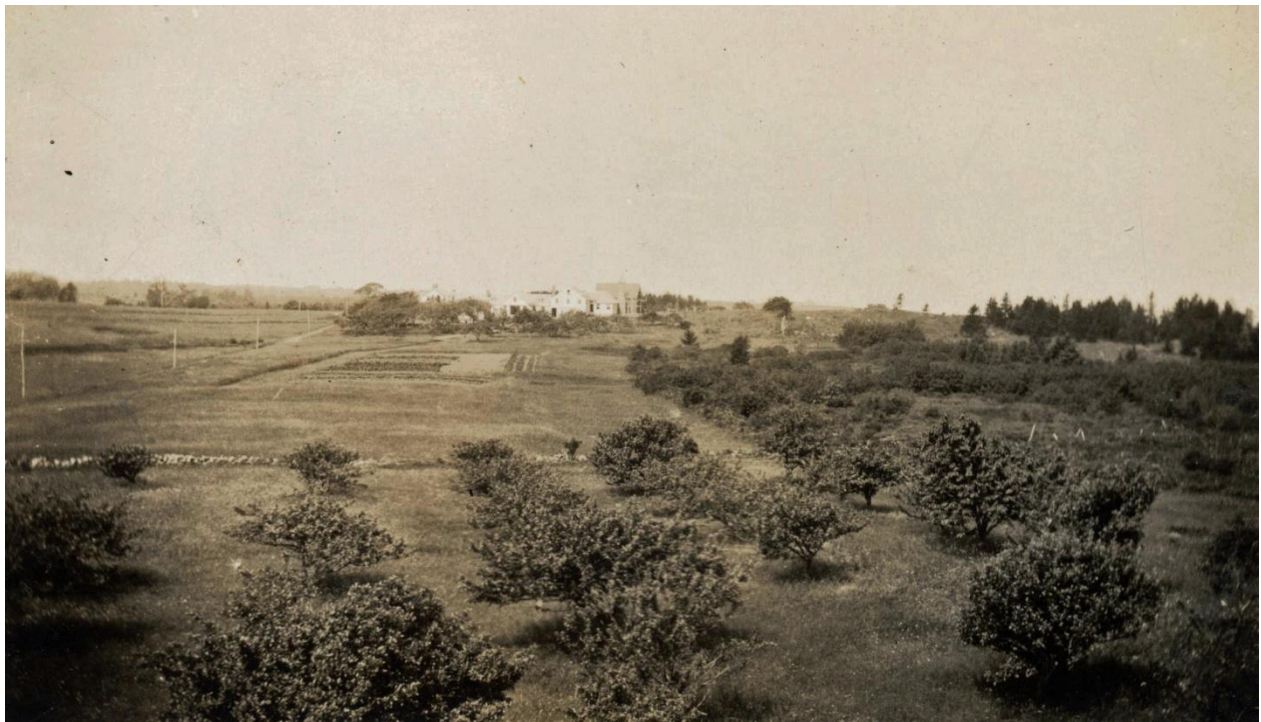
Near the farmhouse, the group stopped to look at a tree growing between the house and barn. John estimated it was a newer variety, perhaps a Spygold, developed as a cross between Northern Spy and Golden Delicious.

Near the driveway and along a stone wall, the group stopped to sample fruit from a group of seedling trees. Gene called it a cider grove with apples perfect for fermentation.

As at the nearby Brown Farm, John suggested the Historical Society contact land owners to see if the trees could be identified, labeled, and documented for historic purposes. Minimal pruning could be beneficial. Scion wood could be gathered from these trees and used to create an orchard of historic apple varieties on North Haven.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THIS SITE

Oak Hill was once farmed by the Carver family, starting with Abram and Rachel Calderwood Carver who moved from Vinalhaven to North Haven sometime after their marriage in 1831. Two of their sons, Hanson and Ira, divided the family farm. Hanson and his wife Lois Turner lived in the family's original homestead, which once stood near the site of the Watson's airfield. Ira and his wife Urusula "Lula" Waterman lived in the farmhouse that still stands and is owned by the Watson family. Both Hanson and Ira are listed on North Haven's 1880 agricultural census, each with farms of over 100 acres. Hanson reported a 1/4 acre orchard with 26 bearing trees. See further information in the accompanying profile of the farm created as a handout for the walk.



The Carver Farm and orchard at Oak Hill. Image courtesy of the North Haven Historical Society.