

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 19, 2018

Reader's Digest "Shorts": Fifty to 75 years ago, the "Reader's Digest," a small widely-circulated magazine published monthly, usually had short bits of Americana, in addition to its longer stories. Here are three of them that I remember:

A teenager, making a mere living as an itinerant working on Ohio farms, was given sleeping quarters in a farmer's barn, as was common practice in the 19th century. The lad fell in love with the farmer's daughter. The farmer wanted no chance of a romance to develop and ordered the young man off his property. About 50 years later, when the barn was being razed, carving was noticed on one of the beams. Carved thereon was believed to be the young man's name: James A. Garfield. (For young readers who don't know, Garfield was the 20th president of the United States. Only four months into his presidency, he was shot by an assassin in the railroad station in Washington, D.C. He lived three months thereafter and died at the age of 50.)

In the Ohio valley of the early 19th century was a man named Jonathan Chapman. He looked like a bum and moved on foot from place to place, selling apple seeds where he could and giving them away where people couldn't pay. He was widely regarded as a friendly tramp and acquired the name "Johnny Appleseed." Like Garfield in the story above, he fancied the daughter of a farmer where he was staying, and the farmer ordered this bum to leave and never return. A few years later, the farmer ran into hard times, and his farm was being sold at sheriff's sale. The "bum," Johnny Appleseed, showed up, bought the farm at the sale, and immediately gave it back to the farmer who had run him off some years before.

Walking down a country road in Illinois in the late 1830s, a tall, straggly young man came upon a farmer, cutting a corner of his field with a scythe. They entered into conversation, but before long the farmer's wife called him to dinner. As he excused himself, the farmer told the stranger to stick around, that they would continue their conversation right after he had eaten. When the farmer returned, however, his scythe was leaning against a tree, and the field was neatly cut and trimmed, but the stranger was gone. A note tacked to the tree was found. It read, "I'm running for the State Legislature. I hope you will vote for me. A. Lincoln."

The *Reader's Digest* also had an article each issue that was called "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Ever Met." William S. Dutton of Avondale wrote one of these articles, which was published in the late 1940s about Jacob Noznesky of Kennett Square (1876-1950), a Ukrainian Jew who emigrated to this country about 1905 and made good. My father first knew him when he collected scrap from the paper and fiber mills soon thereafter, and a lifetime friendship resulted. In all his business endeavors, and he had many, he never cheated anyone, and before his death he owned nearly half the commercial properties in his adopted town of Kennett. He was much loved in the community and was the first Jew invited to join the Lions Club of Kennett Square. He seldom missed a weekly meeting during his final years. Jake's old Model T Ford pick-up truck is owned by the Borough of Kennett Square and is cared for by Lou Mandich, owner of the Last Chance Garage and an active FAHP volunteer.