

DEATH OF A NATIONAL FOLK HERO

By our agriculture correspondent

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THE DEATH of John Chapman, better known as folk hero “Johnny Appleseed,” was confirmed yesterday. Born and raised in Leominster, he left Massachusetts for the Midwest, where American and European settlers were starting farms. He is said to have carried a bag of apple seeds on his travels and became famous for planting trees across the Midwest.

Countless stories exist about the life of Johnny Appleseed, who has come to symbolize the pioneering spirit of America’s expanding frontier. He often walked miles

LONG before the arrival of Europeans, Wampanoag people ate wild cranberries that grew naturally in bogs across southeastern Massachusetts, and valued their medicinal qualities. In 1816, Henry Hall, a Revolutionary War veteran from the town of Dennis, began commercial cultivation after discovering cranberries grew better when sand had blown over them. Others adopted his technique, and the industry boomed. Cranberry bogs still nestle among the region’s towns and villages.

every day, sleeping outdoors.

He was also known for treating animals with kindness. One story goes that while lying by his cozy campfire, he noticed that mosquitoes were getting burned in the blaze. The storyteller recounts: “Johnny, who wore on his head a tin utensil which answered both as a cap and a mush pot, filled it with water and quenched the fire, and afterwards remarked, ‘God forbid that I should build a fire for my comfort, that should be the means of destroying any of His creatures.’”

There are few details about his early life, though it is known that his mother died when he was young. He planted his first apple orchards in Pennsylvania before traveling to Ohio. There, he used cider apples to make an alcoholic beverage that Midwestern pioneers could consume when there was limited access to clean drinking water.

A follower of mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, Johnny Appleseed often told stories and spread his faith to children and adults.

Chapman died in Indiana last week, aged about 70. A notice of his death said he was well known for his eccentricity and wearing “strange garb.” The notice stated: “He is supposed to have considerable property, yet denied himself almost the common necessities of life. In the most



inclement weather he might be seen barefooted and almost naked except when he chanced to pick up articles of old clothing.” Despite

his devotion to poverty, John Chapman leaves an estate of more than a thousand acres of orchards to his sister.