

John Chapman: FRONTIERSMAN

John Chapman was - for better or worse - a product of his times !

Quite contrary to the legendary "Johnny Appleseed", Chapman, the Man, was a visionary prior to becoming a purveyor of apple seeds.

His traditional garb, or lack thereof in the case of footgear, was not the mark of an impoverished derelict so much as it was his ticket to the frontiers of the Northwest Territory as an ascetic among the settlers and a deranged person in the purview of Native Americans.

He was by design "the Primitive Christian" spreading "news" of Swedenborgian Christianity throughout the countryside.

As such, he was as much a Utopian as was Joseph Smith or Alexander Campbell. While their mission was group-oriented, Chapman was a loner. His "mission" was a quest for Receivers rather than for Converts.

Perhaps it is no mystery that his initials "J.C." correspond to the Jesus Christ who taught by example rather than precept. While groups like the Shakers spread word about "New-Light Christianity", Chapman's goal was to help folks discover "Inner-Light Christianity".

Much like another Frontiersman - Daniel Boone - Chapman's reputation as "the Appleman" grew from a chance-encounter with Destiny.

Just as the Daniel Boone-story found genesis in the eyes of the world through publication of John Filson's history of Kentucky so too did John Chapman gain recognition as a result of reports issued by agencies of the Swedenborgians in England as well as North America.

It is unlikely that either man was an active publicity-seeker though biographers maintain that Boone was not above

seeker though biographers maintain that Boone was not above stretching "Truth" when talking about Himself during moments of convalescence !

It is written that Chapman himself was no slouch as a storyteller though the stories he liked best to tell were of "News fresh from Heaven". This makes sense in light of his self-designation as a missionary of the New Jerusalem.

That either man ever really concerned himself with the issue of personal "destiny" is of little import in comparison with the historical reality that Boone and Chapman both stand out as a result of their existence "in a given time at a given place". Their accomplishments would in all likelihood have gone unnoticed at some other time and place.

Neither man was irreplaceable in terms of Achievement. Their individual contributions to improvement of the Human Condition was negligible.

There have undoubtedly been throughout "the Ages of Man" countless Chapmans and Boones whose exploits were never touched by scribes. As History itself was born with the invention of Writing, so too are Heroes created through the medium of Print.

Let it be said therefore that by whatever name - John Chapman or Johnny Appleseed - there was once upon a time a man who plied the trails of Pennsylvania and Ohio and perhaps even Indiana delivering seedlings, herbs and ideas to fellow frontiersman. His exploits, be they Fact or Fiction, are but representations of a convergence of ideas of what constituted Life in those Times and Places.