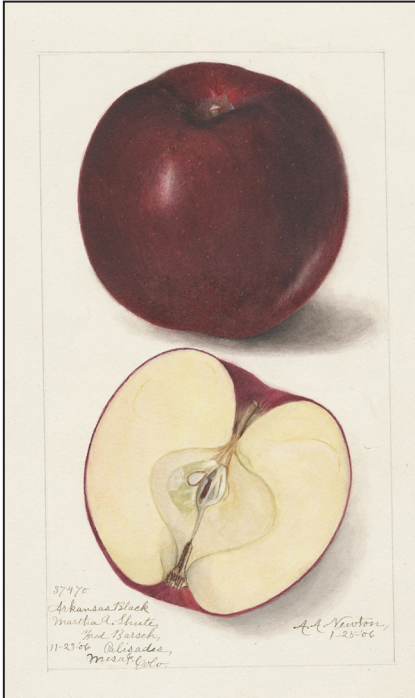


This research topic guide is best used with the Chronicling America website (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov), a Library of Congress website co-sponsored with the National Endowment for the Humanities. Chronicling America is a repository of digitized historic American newspapers from 1777-1963 and is an excellent resource for primary and secondary materials. This guide is focused on Arkansas topics but can be relevant to other states. To search in Arkansas papers, select the state in the drop-down menu. Choose the desired date range to search, then enter one or more words in the search bar and click GO.



1906 watercolor of the Arkansas Black Apple, which was first cultivated in Benton County, courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor Collection, Rare and Special Collections, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD 20705.

COMMON SEARCH TERMS

Arkansas apple, apple blossom, apple orchard, apple canning, apple seed, apple grafting, apple horticultural, apple blotch, bitter rot, apple grower, apple diseases, apple pests, apple exhibit, apple picking, apple syrup, apple association, apple variety, apple recipe, apple exhibition, apple exposition, apple plant, apple adulterated, Ben Davis, Black apple

Apples were the dominant crop in Northwestern Arkansas in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The apple industry had a significant impact not only in the Northwest but on the entire state, so much so that in 1901 the apple blossom was chosen as the state flower. By the 1930s, however, multiple factors contributed to the decline of Arkansas's apple industry and the apple boom was over.

Malus domestica, the type of apple grown for eating and drinking, was introduced to America by European colonists. In the 1800s apple trees were brought to the South, where these fruits quickly gained popularity. Multiple varieties of apple trees were cultivated, and the grafted trees sold to orchards across the South. One of the earliest mentions of Arkansas's apple orchards appears in an 1822 issue of the *Arkansas Gazette*. The newspaper reported that James Sevier Conway (who later became Arkansas's first state governor in 1836) was growing apples on his farm near Little Rock. One of the first apple orchards in Northwest Arkansas was planted by Louis Russell in 1836. Russell brought as many apple trees as he could carry from his home in Illinois to his new homestead along Yocum Creek. Other farmers in the Northwest planted apple orchards that year, including Joseph Dickson and the John E. Davidson Nursery. Soon after, John Braithwaite started a commercial orchard in the area. Braithwaite was one of the first to cultivate the Arkansas Black Apple variety.

By the mid-1800s, Arkansans throughout the state had planted apple trees on their homesteads. Newspaper advertisements for land and houses cited apple orchards on the property as one of the selling points. As orchards matured, farmers realized that apple trees fared better in Northwestern Arkansas than in other regions of the state. The Ozark plateau, with its mild and relatively cool climate, proved to be well suited to apple production.

Homestead orchards in the Ozarks grew a surplus of apples and sending the excess by wagon and boat to sell in further marketplaces. The apple industry in the Northwest became prolific so quickly that wagons and boats did not have the capacity to ship all the apples before they went bad. Railroads solved this supply chain issue. With the construction of railroad lines beginning in 1880, Arkansas apples were soon shipped across North America to markets as far as Maine and Canada. With the increased transportation, more apple orchards were planted. By 1900 the apple industry was the biggest industry in Northwestern Arkansas. At its peak, Benton County was estimated to have 40,000 acres of land devoted to apple trees, with Washington County not far behind. Combined, these counties contained two million apple trees and were the largest producers of apples in the nation. Benton County was referred to as the "apple orchard of America." The choicest apples were

sent for exhibition at local, national, and even international events, like the Benton County Fruit Fair, the St. Louis World's Fair, and the Paris Exposition in France.

As apple orchards and railroads expanded, so did the supporting industries for processing and preserving apples. These trades included barrel making, apple drying, distilling, packing sheds, and ice-making. Barrels were made locally and used to package green apples in the orchards. Beginning in 1887, evaporator plants were built to dry apples and by 1891 there were over 250 evaporators in operation. The largest plant in the region was the Kimmons-Walker & Co. plant of Springdale. By 1901, the evaporator business was the largest employer in the Ozarks. The evaporator plants used lower-quality apples for drying to preserve them for later processing. Distilleries also made use of the lower-quality apples, either fresh or dried, to turn apples into cider, brandy, and vinegar. The O.L. Gregory Plant in Rogers was one of the largest distilleries in the Northwest. New federal food regulations in 1906, however, greatly affected the apple products business across the U.S. Under these new laws, using dehydrated apples in place of fresh to make apple cider and apple cider vinegar was a misbranding of the product. Companies were fined for selling ciders and vinegars made with dehydrated apples under the same label as those products made with fresh apples. Additional fines accrued for some companies as their dehydrated apples were found to be adulterated with vegetable matter and animal substances. By 1920, apple dehydration was largely discontinued. In 1895 an ice-making plant was built in Fayetteville. The ice plant offered a cold storage area for farmers to store and preserve apples without processing. The plant also made ice for the train cars that transported the fresh, good-quality apples for sale. From growing to processing and finally shipping, the apple industry employed many Arkansans in the Northwest.

Although apples brought in more money than other types of farming at the turn of the century, there were challenges to cultivating apple orchards. In the late 1800s, the Arkansas Industrial University (now the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville) began scientific studies in apple farming, and their research continues to be important to apple farmers. Groups like the North Arkansas Apple Growers' Association and the Benton County Horticultural Society brought farmers together as they worked to produce the best apples. These groups held meetings to share their knowledge about apple cultivation, including which apple varieties produced the best apples and how to care for the apple trees.

Arkansas orchards grew over 200 apple varieties, but few were popular enough to have name recognition. Some of the local cultivars that gained notoriety included the Arkansas Black, Black Twig, Coffelt, Ada Red, and Gano. Although not originating in Arkansas, the Ben Davis was another well-known apple, and it was the most widespread variety in Arkansas through the turn of the



(left) Apple evaporator plant in Lowell around 1925, courtesy of the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History/Eliza Tucker Collection (S-98-2-183) via the Encyclopedia of Arkansas. (right) Postcard of the Arkansas Black Apple variety from the 1909 Arkansas State Fair, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System.

century. After the early 1900s, farmers realized the Ben Davis produced a poor-quality apple that sold for a low price, and it was no longer recommended for planting.

In addition to determining the best apple varieties, apple farmers had to deal with insects and diseases invading orchards. Publications from farming groups and articles in newspapers document the various methods farmers used to deal with insects like moths, aphids, beetles, and scale, several of which were invasive species from overseas. Diseases like bitter rot, apple scab, and twig blight infected Arkansas apple trees. Additional factors that impacted apple trees were drought, wind, and extreme temperatures, all of which resulted in poor apple yields.

Though environmental factors governed apple yields, the decline of Arkansas's apple monopoly was due in large part to poor apple varieties combined with national changes. As urbanization across the country increased, there was greater demand for a high-quality, reliable crop supply. The Ben Davis variety, one of the most planted apple varieties, proved a liability as it produced a poor-quality apple. Additionally, apple varieties were mixed together in batches shipping out of Arkansas. This meant low- and high-quality apples were sold together, and customers did not know what type of apple they were buying from Arkansas. As the unreliable apple quality from Arkansas became known, demand dwindled. Apple farming moved to the Northern United States, most notably to the Pacific Northwest, which continues today. Further setbacks for the Arkansas apple industry included federal regulations, high shipping rates from Arkansas as compared to West Coast orchards, the Great Depression, and the Dust Bowl. At the beginning of the 20th century Arkansas apple farmers grew millions of bushels each year, supporting the most prosperous industry in the Ozarks. At the end of the century Arkansas produced less than 250,000 bushels a year.

SOME SIGNIFICANT DATES

- 1822 Early newspaper report of James Sevier Conway, (who later became the first governor of the State of Arkansas), growing apple trees on his farm.
- 1836 Louis Russell, Joseph Dickson, and the John E. Davidson Nursery plant some of the first apple orchards in Northwestern Arkansas.
- 1843 John Braithwaite plants a commercial apple orchard in Northwestern Arkansas.
- 1870 Numerous commercial apple orchards operating mainly in Northwestern Arkansas in the Ozarks.
- 1881 Apple industry grows after railroads are built through Arkansas and apples are shipped across the country.
- 1895 Almost 50 distilleries in operation using apples to create cider, brandy, and vinegar in Northwestern Arkansas. Ice-making plant opens in Fayetteville, providing cold storage and ice for shipping apples.
- 1889 Ben Davis apple becomes the most popular apple variety grown in Arkansas.
- 1900 Northwestern Arkansas produces the most apples of any region in the United States. Arkansas apples win a gold medal at the Paris Exposition in France.
- 1901 Apple blossom officially named the state flower. Apple-drying industry becomes the biggest employer in Northwestern Arkansas.
- 1900s Farmers start speaking against the Ben Davis apple variety and do not recommended planting it due to its poor-quality and low-price return.
- 1906 Congress passes the Pure Food and Drugs Act, enacting regulations on food labeling and adulteration, and hindering the previously unregulated apple drying business.
- 1919 Apple industry in Arkansas peaks at over 5 million bushels of apples produced that year. After this, production declines.
- 1920 Apple drying business dies out due to federal food regulations, like regulating the use of dehydrated apples to make cider and vinegar.
- 1927 Apple trees are damaged by disease and frost, causing an overall decline in the state's apple production and profits.
- 1930 Ben Davis apple is no longer the most common apple variety grown in Arkansas.
- 1935 Apple production drops to less than 2 million bushels a year.
- 1960s Less than 250,000 bushels of apples produced in Arkansas.

SELECT ARTICLES FROM CHRONICLING AMERICA

- "Observations on Orchards on the Apple Tree" *The Arkansas Advocate* January 1, 1831, Image 4, Column 1-3
- "A Big Apple" *Arkansas True Democrat* August 18, 1858, Image 2, Column 1
- "Columbia Pippins" *Arkansas True Democrat* September 26, 1861, Image 2, Column 2
- "Fine Apples" *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* June 3, 1895, Image 1, Column 3
- "State Floral Emblem: Argument in Favor of the Apple Blossom" *The Forrest City Times* September 14, 1900, Image 6, Column 2
- "Tribute to the Arkansas Apple" *The Newark Journal* August 26, 1904, Image 3, Column 2
- "Apple Picking on a Big Scale" *The Newark Journal* October 26, 1906, Image 7, Column 2-4
- "Handling the Apple Crop" *The Springdale News* July 23, 1909, Image 7, Column 1-2
- "'Long Live Apple Pie'" *The Carlisle Independent* October 21, 1909, Image 7, Column 2-3
- "Much Money in Apple Business" *The Nevada County Picayune* October 7, 1910, Image 2, Column 3
- "National Apple Day" *The Springdale News* October 15, 1915, Image 2, Column 3
- "Arkansas Apples" *The Spectator* October 26, 1915, Image 1, Column 4
- "Machine Cleans and Grades Fruit" *The Log Cabin Democrat* February 18, 1916, Image 2, Column 4-5
- "Community Fair a Splendid Success" *The Green Forest Tribune* October 20, 1916, Image 2, Column 5
- "Apple Ways" *The Monticellonian* May 10, 1918, Image 3, Column 3
- "Big Amount of Barreled Apples Reach Market Each Fall Impaired in Quality" *The Spectator* November 28, 1919, Image 3, Column 3-4

RELEVANT EDUCATION AND LESSON PLANS

Arkansas State Archives: Symbols of Statehood Lesson Plan
<https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/lesson-plans/13/>

Central Arkansas Library System: Arkansas Geography Lesson Plan
<https://arstudies.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/lessonplans/id/88/rec/16>

Central Arkansas Library System: Highlands & Lowlands Lesson Plan
<https://arstudies.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/lessonplans/id/71/rec/17>

Central Arkansas Library System: N is for Natural State
<https://arstudies.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/lessonplans/id/56/rec/70>

Central Arkansas Library System: Symbols of Our State: Arkansas
<https://arstudies.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/lessonplans/id/59/rec/94>

University of Arkansas: University Libraries Digital Collections: Apples Digital Collection
<https://digitalcollections.uark.edu/digital/collection/apples>

Find more of our topic guides at <https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/adnp/>.

Further information about this topic can be found in the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, courtesy of the Central Arkansas Library System at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/>.

Content Disclaimer:

Historic journalism may contain disturbing or offensive content, reflecting language, biases and attitudes characteristic of its time and place. Arkansas State Archives (ASA) topic guides are offered as aids to research in such materials and may quote or cite objectionable content. Such content does not reflect or represent the views of the Arkansas State Archives and its staff.