

The Lincoln area was first settled in the late 1820s. The first school there was called Black Jack, after the oaks of which it was built. In 1874 Joseph L. Carter set up the first store, then established the first post office July 31, 1884. The first name filed for this new facility was Georgetown, but postal authorities duly informed Carter that a Georgetown, Arkansas already existed. In a Northwest Arkansas Times article Mrs. Burlene Hilton relates her skepticism with the story that Carter simply saw the name "Lincoln" on a box of freight, since Carter "was a Republican from the north." In any event, this name was officially accepted January 13, 1885. Local acceptance, however, was more difficult to get that soon after the end of the Civil War.

A train of the Ozark and Cherokee Central Railroad arrived in Lincoln on January 22, 1902, and trains were soon hauling large quantities of dried and barreled apples. As the apple industry grew so did the town of Lincoln, which was chartered November 1, 1907.

Early Days In The Fruit Empire

Fruit production became a source of cash income for Washington County's farmers in the last few decades of the 19th Century. A reporter from Vineyard Township told readers of the Fayetteville Democrat on October 2, 1880, "Our fruit crop is immense. After drying all the fruit that can be dried in the sun and old-fashioned kilns, and three brandy stills running at full blast, there is an immense amount of summer and fall fruit rotting on the ground." The U. S. Census of 1890 reported Washington County's apple crop of 211,685 bushels was the highest in the state. By 1900 the figure was 614,924 bushels.

The settlers who had come into what we call Washington County had brought seeds and seedling trees with them. "Mr. J. Holt of Lincoln, Arkansas, had an apple tree nursery established by 1927," writes Roy C. Rom of the University of Arkansas. "The Shannon family of Evansville started one in 1830, as did J. B. Russell in 1833, near Cane Hill." Rom noted that northwest Arkansas "has a natural blend of altitude, rainfall and temperature for apple production. The soil is a stony to silty loam, loose and porous, but having a subsoil with considerable water holding capacity."

These first orchards of the 1820s and 1830s were primarily for home use. Generally the farmers wanted apples maturing from early summer until late fall. Apples not consumed fresh were dried to carry them through the winter or made into cider, apple butter, and vinegar. Some apples could be stored fresh in cellars and other cool places.

By the 1850s, apples were hauled by wagon over the Boston Mountains to the Arkansas River, where they were shipped to market on the steamboat "Governor Meigs" Prairie Grove Enterprise, June 12, 1986).

In the first years of apple growing, Washington County orchardists not only grew fruit, they also discovered and marketed new varieties. "A remarkably large number of apple varieties have originated in Washington County, Ark., and several of them have become of commercial importance," stated a 1913 bulletin published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The famous Shannon Pippin variety seems to have dated to about 1833 when a tree peddler from Indiana sold Ohio trees to farmers in the Cane Hill area. The Shannon fruit was described as "large, surface very smooth, yellow, occasionally faintly blushed with dull overcast of whitish blotches and streaks."

The Wilson June apple dates too before the Civil War in the Earles Holt nursery near Cane Hill. The nursery reverted to the wild during the war, but in the spring of 1865, 1,000 trees from the nursery were planted by a teenager, Albert Wilson, and his younger brother, six or seven, a few miles northeast of Lincoln. One tree in particular stood out, its fruit large and its surface yellowish with dark crimson stripes; this became known as the Wilson June. The Arkansas, Arkansan, or Mammoth Black Twig apple dates to about 1840 when seeds were planted by John Crawford near Rhea's Mill. It was first propagated in 1869. The large, highly colored fruit, which compares favorably with the Winesap, attracted attention at the New Orleans Exposition in 1884.

Apple Varieties

The Ada Red apple originated in about 1890 at Springdale. The Collins Apple (also called Collins' Red, Champion Red, or Champion) was a scrubby tree in 1867 when it was discovered northwest of Lincoln. The Howard Sweet was discovered at the end of the Civil War at the Holt Nursery near Cane Hill. It originated near Cincinnati, Arkansas.

Apples and tourists are still important in Lincoln. During the first weekend in October the Arkansas Apple Festival draws tens of thousands of visitors to the Lincoln square to view arts and crafts, the Apple Harvest Queens' pageant, music, a parade, and other activities.