

EDITORS' NOTE: The following piece was sent to us by W. Lockeretz (Tufts University). It is from the Life Histories Collection from the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. It is a transcript of an interview of Mr. G. O. Dunnell during 1938 and 1939. At the time of the interview, Mr. Dunnell was 75-80 years old.

## The Hay, Grain, and Feed Man: G. O. Dunnell, Northfield, Massachusetts

I'm getting this axe ready to fix the fences on Christian Hill that the hurricane busted. Not that the hurricane blew 'em down but it did blow down some trees. And the trees is what busted the fences. I clim' over one. Had to, to get to camp, and I see they was more down. Couldn't do anything that night because it was getting da'k, and I had to come home, but I'm going back just as soon as the roads get settled enough so's I can.

It's a funny thing, but I don't think that, as a rule, there was as much wind over that way as we got here. What did most of the damage was the water. And, another funny thing I noticed was that of the trees that come down in the apple orchards, it was the ones that had never been grafted. Those that had been grafted stood up.

How'd I know? I know most every apple tree they is on Colrain and Shelburne mountains, and in the north part of the town of Greenfield. 'Cause I was the feller that grafted 'em, that's why! I used to go all over grafting trees. And I had ten or twelve hundred trees of my own, too, that I'd no business leaving. But people would come tease me and tell me how much extry they were willing to pay for my trouble, that I was generally on the move. Once I went to Greenfield. And I didn't get home for a week. Spent the nights there with the different ones.

'Course, they's a trick to it. But 'most anybody can put on a scion so's it'll grow. But that ain't all they is to it. You got to figure what the tree's going to be shaped like. You shouldn't get the scions growing into each other the way most people do. And you ought to fix the tree

so's somebody can pick the apples without tying a couple of ladders together or hiring a balloon.

Apple trees like to grow among the rocks - that is, most kinds do. The hills each side of our valley here are just right. All we can grow here that's any good is the Blue Pearmain. And they got such a tough skin that people don't like 'em. They are an awful good flavor, though, until they got mealy - oh, they's others; russets and early transparent and so on. But what I was getting at is the way I found the best of raising good flavored apples. Apples grow wild over in Colrain. It is just as natural to find a wild apple tree in Colrain as it is to find a birch in Warwick. I had a lot of 'em in my woods. 'Course, the fruit of a wild apple tree is no good except for cider. But the trees themselves is generally healthy. I'd find a good one, then I'd saw off such limbs as I thought should be off, and put a scion in it. If it was a fairly big limb that I figured would pinch the scion off if I didn't do something about it, I'd whittle a little thin wedge and put that in just beyond the scion, for the limb to pinch on to. What do I mean by scion? What that's a little shoot from the brand of tree I wanted. I had Baldwin scions and McIntosh scions and Porter scions, and all kinds of scions. I cut 'em in March - that's the best time to graft around here. Maybe, I'd make a Baldwin tree out of a wild apple tree, or a Greening, or a Northern Spy. Sometimes I fixed 'em so's they had different kind of apples on every limb. But that's nothing but a kind of joke. Nobody that runs an orchard wants trees with fruit all mixed up on 'em.

I said I only put one scion to a limb. I always

put two, 'cause somethin' might happen to one. They break off in ice storms sometimes. And I always put 'em one above the other 'cause I figured it's better and stronger that way. You whittle off one side the scion and stick it in the crack you've made with your knife in such a way that the live bark on the scion presses up against the live bark on the tree. And then you hold the scion in place with wax. Then you cut off all the limbs below the one that you've grafted. The sap has to go somewheres. And when it finds that the limbs have been cut off, and they ain't no place to go, except into the bark of the scions, that's where it goes. You've got to figger not to cut too many limbs off, though. For if they's more sap than can get into the scion and make it grow, it'll leak out under the wax and rot the scion off. I generally left the top of the tree pretty much alone until I found out how the scions were doing. If they were growing all right, I'd cut the top off then.

Lot of people put on two scions the way I done. But when them both growed they let 'em grow together. That makes a crotch. And a crotch ain't strong. I always cut off one scion just before they growed together. And the bark would grow over the place and make a smooth branch.

Once, I grafted a whole tree. And that tree stood up through the hurricane, too. Yer see, when a crust comes on the snow, or anything happens so the mice can't hunt, you're supposed to go around the orchard tromping down the snow around the trees. You tromp it down hard right around the trunk, and the mice won't get to the bark. But I missed this tree someways. Or the mouse, maybe, was a wood rat. Anyway, it ett the bark all the way 'round. It was a good tree. Had good roots, and as it would die if I didn't do something about it, I thought I better try. I cut the trunk of the tree off and put scions all the way 'round in the bark. Enough of 'em grew so I managed to raise a tree. I told the feller who owns the place about it, and he found it hard to believe for it don't look no different than any other tree to him.

Lots of people insist on growing an orchard from nursery stock, that's all right if you want to wait ten or fifteen years for a crop. But if you

want your trees to begin bearing in three-four years you want to graft a few scions on to a full grown tree. If you take your scions from a tree that has apples you like, you can be sure that you'll get the same flavor apple when the scions begin to bear. But when you buy from a nursery you got to wait ten or twelve years to find out if you got what you paid for. 'Course, they's some crook nursery men, I s'pose, but they ain't many. It's the agent who's the crook. And it's a pretty good game when a feller don't know he's been gypped until ten-twelve years. By that time the agent ain't no longer in the employ of the company, probably. And if he was, nobody would know who made the mistake and the whole thing be outlawed so's you couldn't get it into court. I don't say that a good nursery wouldn't be awful sorry it happened and make good, too. But the way they'd make good would be to give you some guaranteed new trees that you could wait for to bear for another ten-twelve years.

When Doc Brown and his brother first come they lived in houses side by side. And they planted the two back lots for an orchard. I told the Doc that this wasn't a good place to raise apples, but the Doc said, "No, no," I was wrong. That he'd had the soil analyzed down at the State College. And that they said it was good soil and all right. "All right, Mister" I says. "Now you take out your little book and you write down what I'm going to tell yer. So's you won't forget it, I says. But you see more money when you took out your pocketbook to pay for them trees than you'll ever see coming back into it from your orchard." But, oh no, I was wrong.

"What kind of trees be they," I wanted to know. "Baldwins," he says. And it seemed he had paid an extry price to get some real good trees.

I see they wan't no use talking to him and trying to help him so I forgot about it 'til several years had gone by when I saw him and his brother working in the orchard. You know, they's a pest of borers that bores holes in the trunks of apple trees right above the ground, and if you're quick enough you can ram a wire in and either kill the borer, or fish him out, but if he's bored 'round a bend or two, you are out of

luck - your tree is gone. So it pays to watch your orchard. Was a time when yer didn't need to spray your trees. But you do now - two-three times.

Well, I goes down into the orchard and asks what they was doing. They told me. And I asked what kind of trees these was. 'Baldwins,' they told me. A few of 'em are, I admitted. But most of 'em is Gravensteins. "Oh, no!" Says the Doc, "that can't be! It was a reliable firm we bought them of and they was guaranteed Baldwins - a 'specially good brand.' "Well," I says, "You still get your little book? Now, put it down, so you won't forget it, or tie a string around the trees, or somethin', and you just wait 'til they's apples on 'em and see.'

But they didn't wait. The brother sold out to a poor, little runt of a mean, miserable, cuss that I don't want nothin' to do with. But I didn't know what a kind of low-lived skunk he was then, so I tried to be neighborly. I asked him what kind of trees he had in his orchard. He says that they was Baldwins. That that was what the ministers said that sold him the place. "Well, they ain't," I says. "They is Gravensteins - most of 'em." But they ain't no good!" he says.

I told him I didn't think they was any good myself - not even for cider. He wanted to know how how I was so sure. And I showed him the difference in the leaves. He thought he had better wait and make sure before he did anything about it. That it didn't seem to him that ministers would lie. I told him he needn't wait to find that out. That everybody in Northfield knowed that ministers are the biggest liars they is, 'cause they honestly believe their lies themselves. That if he aimed to become a bonnie fidie resident of Northfield, he'd better find that out, and learn to set one against the other. That some places you needed lawyers to do business for you, but here in Northfield you needed ministers, and if you didn't have one you were all out of luck.

He was going to cut down the Gravensteins but I told him no, and showed him how to graft 'em with scions from the Baldwins. The little cuss never did it, though, he turned out to be too dumb lazy. That old fool was over eighty when he broke his hip. It mended good as new. The fall would a killed any decent person. And you know the saying, "The Good Die Young." Guess that's a fact.

