

Bethel Maine History –The Bethel Journals

December 14, 2010

Veterans Day 2005 at Lyon's Orchard



Herb Lyon looks over his Grover Hill orchard Fall 2005

Discharged from the Army in 1953 after serving 15 months in Korea, “Herbie” Lyon began the rest of his life by: getting a steady job at Brooks Bros. and becoming this area’s best known orchard farmer. This year Oxford Networks telephone book cover pictures Lyon’s Orchard in the springtime with apple trees in full bloom and a mountain backdrop on its front cover. Soon after returning to Bethel, Herb listened to his father and bought a run-down apple orchard of about 100 trees on Grover Hill. At that time, one hundred trees was a big orchard. Last Friday, Veterans Day, he could sit at his kitchen table talking with me while looking over 800 McIntosh and Cortland trees growing in 15 acres of possibly one of the most picturesque orchard settings in Maine. Overall, on Grover Hill and in West Bethel, he has 1,500 apple trees. His Swiss chalet style new home, situated at a vantage point overlooking his years of hard work, is as good looking as the orchard.

Learning tree pruning and general orchard care from his father and Carl Stearns, Herb set more and more trees, leased other West Bethel orchards and invested in spraying equipment. Soon after buying his own orchard, Herb leased Edmund Smith's 100 tree orchard in West Bethel. To sell apples and make money, Herb has used both wholesale and retail routes. Wholesale distribution followed a network that in his case ended up going through a pipeline of larger, out-of-town growers that eventually funneled into the warehouse of a Massachusetts buyer. Hiring pickers, arranging for shippers and finding trustworthy middlemen taught Herb that at season's end he had little cash to show for all his field work.



In 1968, Herb created for the lack of a better term, an apple depot, at his home on Main Street (opposite today's Philbrook Place). Here he could keep apples in cool storage and make cider. Lyon's apples were sold in a number of local stores, the best one in town was the IGA but stores in Berlin, NH, also turned out to be excellent outlets. A few years later, as his newer trees began producing, he opened his own retail store in West Bethel when he was able to buy Gilbert's Trading Post from Shirley Gilbert. In the early 1970's the West Bethel community positively bustled with a three store "plaza": Louis Paul's (Grocery) Store, Lyon's Orchard Store and Freddy's Restaurant. They were well known, had good parking, good location with plenty of visibility. The Lyons sold antiques, cider, pumpkins and, of course, apples. Herb sold all the apples he could raise and even had to buy some from out of town orchards. Later he sold the former Trading Post store and erected one on the same lot where Mountain Greenery is now.



Five years ago, marketing restrictions, labor, regulatory hassle and aging in the job led Herb to sell apples on a pick your own basis. He believes now that this is really the way to go. Never fear though, you will still find Lyon's Orchard bags of freshly picked Mac's in the Bethel Foodliner. What is his outlook for the young potential farmer? It is not very optimistic.

Recently Adaline Clough told me that she has counted 140 houses from the Flat Road – U.S. Route 2 intersection to Lyon's Orchard. Herb sees the cost of land, mortgages and buying necessary equipment as serious deterrents to any prospective, young farmer. His advice: "Get a steady job; start farming gradually and expect to work long days, seven days a week."

Herbert F. Lyon died August 29, 2006

BETHEL—Herbert "Herb" Lyon, 77, of Bethel, passed away on August 29, 2006, at his home with Beverly as his side. He fought a courageous battle with lung cancer for the last nine months.

He was born in Bethel on November 9, 1928, to Harry and Mildred (Hapgood) Lyon. Herb served in the U.S. Army from 1948 to 1952 in the Korean War and Japanese Occupation. He received medals of the Combat Infantry Badge, Korean Service Medal and was awarded the Silver Star for heroism in combat and the Presidential Unit Citation.

When returning home, he went to work at Brooks Bros. Co., peddling oil and stayed with them for a "short" 50 years. He also started his apple orchard on 15 acres, now 800 trees strong, with only half of the dozen original trees remaining now that he started with. His orchard consists of 90 percent McIntosh and the rest Cortland apples.

He loved baseball and the Boston Red Sox, which he was lucky to have seen win the World Series in 2004. Baseball was a love right from the start of his son, Jeff's little life. He coached the Bethel Little League, retiring with Legion ball.

He also served with many great friends on the Bethel Fire Department. He will long be remembered by close friend, "Sonny" and friends of Brooks Bros. days, as hosting the "Double six-pack parties" after work and on Grover Hill.

He is survived by his longtime companion, Beverly Warner; daughter, Brenda of North Conway, N.H.; son, Jeffery of North Carolina; five grandchildren, Carter, Kyle, Katlin, Kallie and Ava; sister, Libby Bane of Bethel; brother, Richard of New Brunswick, N.J.; and Beverly's children, Dan of Rumford, Susan of West Paris and Greg and Colleen of Bethel.

The Bethel Journals

Donald G. Bennett

PO Box 763

Bethel, Maine 04217