

# 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration: The Tuttle Story

## The Story Behind the Apples

The Tuttle's experience has varied over the last 80+ years of its existence. In the 1950's families came to buy a bushel of Rambo apples from the back of Roy's pickup. A few decades later they would get their apple advice from Virginia as they picked up their bag of Grimes Golden and brought their jug to be filled with fresh squeezed cider. Some have fond memories of Raymond Roney taking them to pick an apple on a school tour. In the 1980's, pick your own strawberries was all the rave. Other families remember their annual trek to the orchard for apple picking, caramel apple savoring, pumpkin totem pole viewing, and corn maze adventuring.

Our goal throughout our history has been to grow the best quality apples (and more recently produce and flowers) and provide a great place for your family to have a quality day of farm memories. Customers tell us we've succeeded. If you want a bit more of how this fourth generation family owned orchard has evolved over the years, read on.

## An Orchard Begins

Raised by his grandparents on the Tuttle homestead, Roy Tuttle was well acquainted with farm life. His boyhood home built in the late 1800's is still standing at the orchard. Like hundreds of other Hancock County farms, the 20 acres of Tuttle land was used to raise a diversity of crops and livestock with the goal of providing for the family's needs and bringing a small income for other expenses. Virginia Tuttle Roney remarks, "In the early days, the farm had 15 dairy cows and 10-12 sows which produced about 100 pigs annually. The huge garden provided fresh vegetables for summertime eating, plus plenty to can for the winter." There were also hens, as well as a pony or two for fun.

Roy also brought in some income through selling trees for the century old Stark's Brothers Nurseries. Traveling from farm to farm, Roy sold folks apple trees to plant near the family's garden. No one needed to buy apples at the grocery store, they had them in their own backyard.

After a courtship via motorcycle, Roy brought his new bride, Tillie Giroud from Acton, IN back to join him on the farm in 1914. Five years later, their only daughter, Virginia, was born.

At a time when specialized farming was as rare as indoor plumbing, Roy Tuttle decided to go into the fruit business in a BIG way. Having gathered knowledge from his tree sales and from Purdue's Cooperative Extension Service, Tuttle's purchased their first apple trees from Stark's Brothers nurseries in 1928 to plant ten acres. Virginia recalls "I helped set every one of the trees." A big job in those days. Roy complemented his apples with a sampling of berries, as well as peaches, plums, and concord grapes, and the Roy Tuttle Fruit Farm was born.

## **The Early Days**

As the apple trees matures, bushel baskets of ripe apples were harvested from the orchards. Grimes Golden, Rambo, Red Delicious were popular varieties in those days. In 1935, the trees yielded 150 bushels of apples bringing fifty cents each on the wholesale market, along with bushels of peaches, strawberries, currants, plums, and cherries.

Dairy continued to be the major source of income for the farm along with a few grain crops. The main barn (now used as Tuttle's farm store), built in 1885, housed about 15 dairy cows. Milk was sold to Indianapolis Dairy Cooperative netting about \$1000 a year. Virginia reminisces, "I remember I had to milk the cows before I went on a date."

By the late thirties, Roy's apples were producing over 700 bushels most of which made their way to wholesale markets in Indianapolis. Like many rural farmers, the depression was a difficult time for the Tuttle's. But scraping together their pennies and selling some of their assets, they made it through. By 1941, they were celebrating their daughter's marriage to her kindergarten sweetheart, Raymond Roney. In December of that year, Pearl Harbor's bombing led Raymond into military service.

At home, the Tuttle continues to grow apples. A Purdue horticulturalist in a 1943 newspaper article remarks, "The great demand for apples (especially dried) for the armed forces presents an emergency which demands more intensive growing." The Tuttle like everyone were eager to help with the war effort.

## **Early Awards...Transition to Orcharding Full Time**

Roy Tuttle had mastered the art of growing great apples. For several years in the early forties, the Tuttle Fruit Farm was named as a Gold Medal Orchard by the Indiana Horticulture Society for having top quality apples. In 1958, Tuttle's Staymen Winesap apples took second place at the Indiana State Fair admits steep competition. Thus beginning what has become a fifty year tradition of award winning apples.

Having established themselves as an orchard, the Tuttle's left the dairy farming to focus on fruit crops. Although ninety percent of the apples were sold to Indianapolis wholesale markets, many families still savored some of the 100 bushels Roy sold out of the back of his pickup each fall. Berries were sold on the farm from a little shed located on the east side of the road. Cider was brought in during peak season from another local orchard and brought 30 cents a gallon. Tillie added to the farm efforts through raising Farm Bureau Co-op hens and eggs. In 1942, 2045 dozen were sold to local groceries.

## **Shift to Retail Sales**

The 1950's brought a shift to selling more apples closer to home. The former dairy barn was converted into a packing shed for apples. Tuttle's apples found their way onto the shelves of local grocery stores such as Strickland's in Greenfield and into kids lunches at Eden and Oaklandon Elementary Schools. More land was acquired allowing the farm to expand. New trees continued to be planted, expanding the orchards to yield about 10,000 bushels annually. A third of the crop was sold right from the farm. As the apple crops expanded, other fruit crops were left behind.

As the farm grew, more help came. A Farmall H was purchased in 1946. That same year, Virginia and Raymond's first son Tom was born. Neighbors were employed to climb the ladders and pick apples. They made twelve cents a bushel for apples and five cents a quart for berries.

Virginia and Raymond continued to play an active roll in the orchard. A second son, Mike, was born to them in 1953. Raymond, as well as being the official apple bagger, was a rural mail carrier loved by all for his gifts of tomato plants left along with the mail in the mail box each year on his birthday.

## **The Store Opens**

Encouraged by the demand for apples by farm visitors, Tuttle's opened a small farm store inside the packing barn in the early sixties. Tillie and Virginia's friendly faces would greet customers and offer suggestions on apple varieties. Mike Roney remembers, "Apples were sold in bushel and half bushel bags. No one would have dreamed of only buying a few apples." The back of the store continued to be used for sorting and packing apples. A cider press was purchased and installed in the barn to bring fresh apple cider to the farm. Located in the back of the store, the press made about 15,000 gallons a year which was sold for \$1.00 each with the option to bring back your jug and save a nickel. Pumpkins, grown on the farm, were piled outside the store's door for families to purchase. An irrigation pond was also added to the farm, so trees could have trickle irrigation.

## **Apple Patent**

Continuing to focus on apple quality and growth techniques, Roy monitored a branch of Staymen Winesap apples in the orchard for some time that seemed to be resistant to cracking unlike other Winesap apples. Taking cuttings from the branch, Roy began to test these apples and sent the branch to Stark's Brothers for further examination. Later Roy received a patent for this Stark Supreme Staymen apple. The orchard sold the patent rights to Stark Brothers in exchange for a peach orchard. Today a majority of Winesap apples grown in the US are the Tuttle's patented strain.

The 1970's brought a full embrace of the retail apple store on the farm. Tom Roney, having graduated with a BS in Horticulture from Purdue University and served in the Vietnam War, returned to help manage the orchard. Under his direction, the farm store was expanded and extended its hours. A separate barn was built for apple sorting and storage in 1972.

The orchard has expanded to include 34 acres and 24 varieties. Cider production has increased to 20,000 gallons a year with purchase of a new cider press, and most recently a state of the art ultra-violet processing unit. In 1994, Tuttle's cider

was awarded "Best Cider in the USA" by the North American Direct Farm Market Association.

## **Beyond Apples**

Tom was joined by his brother, Mike, as co-owner in 1982. Over the last 30 years, the Roney boys have brought diversity and growth to the orchard.

Over 30 acres of vegetable crops have been added including sweet corn, tomatoes, and about 15 other summer crops. In 2006, two high tunnel greenhouses were installed to extend the growing season for tomatoes. Following in the tradition of quality, Tuttle's produce annually wins many sweepstakes at the Indiana State Fair.

Over 7,500 square feet of greenhouses have been added since Virginia first began growing bedding plants at her house in the 1980's. Bedding plants, perennials, mums, and poinsettias are some of the plants currently grown.

Thousands of children have visited the orchard since Raymond Roney invited school children to the farm for field trips in the fall of 1967. The children's apple shaped name tags were used to make eight foot plywood tour trees each year. Today over 8,000 people tour the orchard annually.

In 1992, with the high demand for families to have a farm experience, the orchard placed a bigger emphasis on its fall activities. The Agrimaze and a kid's play area were added along with other events. The fall season continues to be the most popular among Tuttle's guests, but the farm market is open year round providing a large diversity of local products.

## **Future**

Tuttle Orchards continues to be passionate about bringing your family high quality produce and plants, as well as, a great farm experience. We are continuously looking to expand and grow in new ways to serve the needs of our community.