Utah Valley Orchards

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AC: Why is the story of Johnny Appleseed significant?

GD: Well I think Johnny Appleseed is significant in America for two sets of reasons: one of them is the real historical reason, that Jonathan Chapman, the Johnny Appleseed guy, would go out on the Frontier Settlement, and he would girdle the pine trees so we would kill them, he’s sort of wrap a metal wire around them and kill the pine trees, and then he would plant apple trees there. And then he’d move on, so when people moved into that area, there was already a nursery in place where they could get fruit, especially apples which were really important because they drank a lot of hard cider and apple juice and stuff like that. And so Johnny Appleseed was both sort of this person who was civilizing the wildernesses right, I mean he’s getting rid of the wild pine trees that were out there and replacing them with horticulture, with fruit trees. And also at the same time, he’s making a living for himself, I mean Johnny Appleseed came to be quite a large landholder because he would go on the edge of settlement and he’d set up these nurseries and then they would be known as his nurseries, so in sort of the real historical sense, he’s spreading apples and orchards through Ohio and Illinois and Indiana, and by so doing, making it possible for New Englanders to continue to move west. But then he’s important as sort of the mythical level as well. You know, the first article that was written about Johnny Appleseed that came out in 1871 had a picture of him, and it’s the picture of Johnny Appleseed that we all remember from Disney movies—you know, he’s got a pot on his head, and he has pants that are sort of worn off about mid cuff, and he just walks around with a bad slung over his shoulder, strewing appleseeds all over the place. And the story about Johnny Appleseed goes that he would go, and when he would stay with some poor family on the wilderness, he would do things to earn his keep. So he would preach to them, he was a Swendeborgian Minister, so he would preach to them this sort of odd, Swedish gospel, and he would also do tricks for them to entertain them. He had very thick flesh on the soles of his feet so he would poke pins into his feet to show them you know, what rough sort of Frontiersman he was. And all those things sort of built into the myth of this Frontier Guy, Johnny Appleseed with a pot on his head and he’s a little half-crazy, but he’s out doing good things to sort of civilize the nation. So Johnny Appleseed is significant as a historical figure and he’s also significant as a mystical figure, or a mythical figure because it wraps in the American way of thinking about itself, that Americans are sort of individualists, that they are always sort of seeking for the Frontier, and when they get on the Frontier they want to improve it, they want to make it better, they want to spread the culture of America, in this case the culture of apples and orchards, across the United States. So Johnny Appleseed resonates for all those reasons, and he continues to resonate today. Kids know who Johnny Appleseed is, and when you think about it, it’s kind of an astounding thing, that when they think back over the historical figures, that they know Presidents right? They know George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and they know some famous people, like they might know about Amelia Eirhart. And then they know about this guy who was a fruit grower. I can’t think of any other country in the world that has, as one of its mythical heroes, somebody who grew fruit.

AC: And why do you think it is that the legend has continued to be popular and passed down?

GD: I think it’s in part because of the Disney film about Johnny Appleseed that people sort of people came up on. But I think it’s also because—I’m not a psychoanalyst, but this is how I would think of it—when my kids eat apples, they get to the center and there are those apple
seeds and they always want to plant them. I don’t know how many times I’ve had my kids put Dixie cups of apple seeds on the windowsill, saying, “Dad, when the spring comes, we’re going to go out and plant the apples.” And I think that’s something that appeals to people—it’s sort of in the fruit—that you get to the core of the fruit, and there in that seed, is a new life, new fruit. And if you go and you’ll put that in the ground, you’re likely to be able to recreate the thing that you just ate. And so, it’s part, I think, of human experience, this ability to recreate from a fruit a tree, and then more fruit. And then, you know, Americans continue to think of the Frontier as an important part of the American experience. They continue to have a kind of soft spot in their heart for farmers who seem to be rugged and individualistic and people who work hard and sacrifice for the well being of others, growing all this food. So, for all those reasons, Johnny Appleseed continues to resonate even in a day where hardly anybody has any experience actually growing or cultivating an apple tree, where very few people have either lived or worked on orchards, and where most of the fruit we get comes in a bag in a grocery store, that you have no idea what it’s origins were, what variety it was, what sort of work went into producing this piece of fruit.

AC: Would you say again the themes of our show in connection with Johnny Appleseed, that the beauty and civilizing man and nature.

GD: Johnny Appleseed is a significant part of the American past, because the work that he did gives an example, it shows really important themes in the history of the United States and in the history of orchards. And those themes are, first of all: Civilization. To plant an orchard is to take a piece of land that had some other thing on it, in Johnny Appleseed’s case it was pine trees and whatever grew in Illinois and Indiana, so you take that piece of land and you civilize it, you plant something on it that man has created. It’s about Order. When you plant an orchard, you are ordering the landscape, you’re putting trees in a row, you’re sort of taking nature and fitting it into a particular box. And it’s about Beauty. People always remark in the springtime about the beauty of fruit trees, when they’re in blossom, they say there’s few things more beautiful than a cherry tree or an apple tree or a peach tree. So Johnny Appleseed I think, is an example of a symbol of all those things that are important about the way that Americans dealt with the landscape, the way the Americans shaped the landscape towards a set of values that were important to them.

AC: How do orchards represent order and beauty?

GD: I think if you look at an orchard, it just shouts “order” and it shouts “beauty.” You have rows of trees, and in any orchard that’s good for commercial growing, it’s thousands of trees, and they’re lined up, and they’re evenly spaced, and they’re equal height...there’s nothing more ordered in the landscape than an orchard! Even things that people think are really ordered that are sort of really standardized like suburban house, aren’t anywhere near as ordered as an orchard is. And out of that order comes a certain measure of beauty. It’s the same sort of beauty that you find in Geometry or Mathematics. There are regularly reproduced intervals, and in those intervals there are things that you come to expect. And then as you look closely at a tree, it’s got all of the beauties of a tree—in springtime it’s got its blossoms, and then the leaves come out in this rich green. And then, you begin to see the little fruits, and at first they’re sort of hard and small and round and green. Then as they grow they deepen in color, and by the time it
comes to fall, with the apple, you have these rich red, orangish, almost green fruits hanging down from these branches and it is beautiful. And it’s the sort of beauty that sort of resonates with people around the world and resonates in the United States. When kids are told to draw something, something beautiful, they’ll almost always draw a tree. There’s something about its shape, and there’s something about, in the case of fruit trees, what that tree gives off, that just touches the way that people think of beauty on a really deep level.

GD: Johnny Appleseed was not an isolated figure. If you look back at the people that Americans know in the early history of the United States, most of them had orchards. So, Thomas Jefferson had huge orchards at Monticello, and he was fascinated by fruit, and he would cross breed different types of fruit. George Washington had orchards, and sometimes when he would go home to his home, that was the first thing he would ask about, how his fruit was doing. Even somebody we associate really with the wilderness, like Henry David Thoreau, lived a life surrounded by orchards, and would write again and again about the significance of fruit in his experience. So these are the sort of famous people who had orchards, and then you just have to think that there were thousands of regular people who had orchards. Some of them had orchards just as part of a self sufficient farm. They might have twenty acres in which they had vegetables and grains and stuff planted. And then they’d have a few trees around their houses. Others of them had acre upon acre of fruit trees. So orchards were spread throughout New England, throughout the middle American, and then as it sort of spread west, through the old Northwest, throughout Illinois and Ohio and Indiana. And then later, with the advent of really good irrigation, everywhere in the United States, people were planting orchards. So it wasn’t just isolated in this one strange figure, Johnny Appleseed, it was a widely practiced way of making a living. You plant fruit trees and you have something that will feed you and your family for year upon year. You plant grain, and it lasts only one season, you plant a fruit tree and you can establish a life in a particular place.

AC: Are there additional comments you want to make on what orchards meant to early American society?

GD: I think it’s worth noting that for many early Americans, orchards had spiritual meanings as well. And especially fruit trees did. So for the transcendentalists, like Thoreau and Emerson and other people in New England in the 1830’s and 40’s, fruit was the perfect symbol of man’s relationship with God because each fruit, in that little seed, contained all of the future of that tree. They would compare fruit to human beings.

AC: Can you say that again? (sound problem)

GD: so, for many Americans, fruit has spiritual meaning. So the transcendentalists for example, in New England, would look at a piece of fruit, and they’d look at that seed and inside that seed, they saw the entire future of that fruit. You know, you plant it, the tree grows up, fruit comes on that tree, it sort of reproduces itself. And they would compare that to human beings, they would look at a child and they would say, “In that human being, is the potential for greatness. And that potential for greatness is in all people.” Other people drew other religious metaphors from fruit trees. So, for example, many Protestants would emphasize teachings in the scriptures about, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And so the fruit tree then, planted by the side of a church
or in somebody’s yard was a physical reminder that by their fruits ye would know people. And so you could sort of judge the quality of people, many people thought, by the quality of the fruit that they’d produce. And that was both physical, in the sense of the actual fruit growing on a tree, and also metaphorical, the things of human beings produced, you could judge them by.

AC: Why is Provo Bench an ideal location for orchards?

GD: You wouldn’t think that Provo bench was an ideal location for orchards, and many people didn’t, so the area was settled in the 1850’s and nobody moved up on the bench till the 1870’s or 80’s, and the reason they didn’t was that the soil seemed to them to be terrible. It was really rocky, lost of stones in it, and it was dry. And so you would go up on the Provo Bench, and all you would have would be the sagebrush and tumbleweeds. But then, people started to toy with the Provo River and they were able to get water from the Provo River up on to the bench. And when they did that, they saw that actually the soil, which they thought was going to be terrible, was good. All the stones in the soil made it drain well and that made it a perfect sort of place to plant fruit trees. You could irrigate, the fruit trees would get the right amount of irrigation, or water, and they could flourish in a location like that. It’s also a good place to have orchards because, since it’s up high, it gets winds, and the winds, in the spring, would blow out pockets of cold air. And that’s the thing that kills fruit in the spring, if you have blossoms come on and then it freezes, those pockets of cold air will kill the production for the year. But because of the winds blowing out of the canyon across the Provo Bench, you almost never had that problem with the freeze. So you could grow fruit there in a way that you couldn’t grow at a lower elevation because of the winds blowing out of the canyon.

AC: Do you want to say a little bit about the first settlers’ first farms?

GD: People tried farming on the Provo Bench during the summertime for many years in the late 1860’s and into the 1870’s. But they would always go back into Provo or other settlements to spend the winter because the winters were really harsh, there was nothing to break the wind and it was quite cold. The first family to move up there full time were the Cordners. And the Cordner family went up in the early 1870’s and built a very modest house and planted and then stayed out the winter. And they actually stayed out the winter there because they weren’t wealthy enough to maintain two residences, one in town, and one up on the bench. So the Cordners started, and then there was a small group of families, and originally they were planting grain and potatoes and strawberries and other perishables like that. And then it was in the 1880’s when they were starting to get water up there regularly through irrigation, that people started planting orchards. And when they started planting orchards, then the whole Provo bench was just filled in with fruit trees. And just about every major family in Utah Valley had fruit trees up there. The Knight family, Jesse Knight’s family--Jesse Knight is sort of a major player in Provo, major influence in the early history of the Brigham Young Academy—Jesse Knight had some land up there, and he had fruit as well as all the other major families in the area, planting fruit up on the Provo bench.

AC: Okay, why don’t you discuss that issue? The best crop, the values…
GD: Yeah. When the Provo Bench became a fruit growing center it didn’t happen haphazardly, it wasn’t like you know spilling milk across a table or something like that. The development of the Provo Bench was a well ordered sort of development. It happened that way because of the need for water. You had to irrigate this land. That meant you had to cut irrigation ditches into the land, and that meant that there was going to be sort of this geometrical layout of the Provo Bench. The other thing that that meant was that there had to be a well organize community. People had to take turns at the water, they had to regulate who was in charge of the water, they had to be sure that you didn’t get more water than you deserved, and so out of the desire to grow fruit grew a whole organization for the community. And that organization was built around life on the orchards. So in the springtime when it was time to prune trees early in the spring, people would come out, they’d prune their own trees, their neighbors would come over, they’d prune together in order to get everything ready for the spring. If there was a late freeze people would be out in the orchards, trying to preserve the orchards together. And then as the crops started to come on and they started to pick, there was a sort of community organization that would go on; kids from the neighbors’ houses would come over and pick, or if you had an uncle in town the uncle would come over and pick. And that was the only way that you were able to pick enough fruit to make a go of an orchard on the Provo Bench. [pause] For a lot of people what that meant then, that orchards were not simply a way of making money, they were a way of living a life. And it was a way of life that drew people together in a community. It knit extended families together. It knit neighbors together. And later on in the 1910’s and 1920’s as immigrants started to come into the valley it knit them into the community as well. At the same time, though, this orchard life could be a source of divisions, and a lot of the divisions came out of fights over whose water was whose. If you didn’t have water, you didn’t have a crop. And so people would very jealously guard their water. There were a lot of fights over water, there were a lot of lawsuits over water, there were even a couple of murders over who had control of a particular turn of water on a particular night. So it wasn’t that there was this sort of Utopia, this fruit Utopia growing up in Utah County. It was the people learned how to cooperate where they needed to cooperate, but when they had to remain separate, when they needed to go their own ways, when they had to protect their own particular property or rights they would protect that. Those sorts of values, then, became the basis for the values of Utah County: that people would cooperate, they would work together in community, they would highlight the importance of family, often religion was woven into this—wards would work together or stakes would work together. And then at the same time they knew there were going to be points of disagreement and they had to find out ways to work around those points of disagreement, or to protect the community from the sources of disagreement, be it water or stealing other people’s fruit or things like that.

AC: How was fruit shipped before the railroad came in, and what effect did the railroad have?

GD: The first way that people got fruit out of the valley was they would load it on the back of a horse-drawn wagon and they would either pull it up Provo Canyon towards Heber and Park City, or they would pull it into Provo and sell it on the streets of Provo, or later they would get it to the other settlements in Utah County. The difference that the railroad made was that it made it easier to get Utah County fruit outside of the local area. It was pretty early on, in the early years of the 1900’s, Utah County fruit was being sold as far away as the western slope of Colorado, and we have some people who have told us that a little bit later, in the 1910’s, fruit was going into
California and to Denver, Colorado, as well. Then when automobiles and trucks became available fruit made its way all throughout the intermountain west. There are all sorts of stories of people who would load up a truck with fruit, and they would put ice in the back and they would drive and they’d go up into the Vernal area and then they’d head up into Wyoming, into Star Valley and the other settlements in Wyoming selling fruit. And they’d make this big circle where they’d go through eastern Utah up into Wyoming and then back down through northern Utah. And so they would travel the circuit selling their fruit. And since many of the people who were selling fruit were Mormons, and they were selling it to Mormons in those areas, it was a way of, for many people, strengthening religious bonds throughout the intermountain west. You knew that you could expect fruit from Orem in Star Valley, Wyoming.

AC: On that same thing, how did Orem get its name?

GD: Well Orem’s name comes from Walter Orem. Walter Orem was a railroad magnate in Salt Lake City, and Orem was trying to get a spur off of the main railroad line so that it would be easier to get fruit from Orem onto the main line and then ship it up and down the Wasatch Front. And so prior to that time the Orem area had been known as the Provo Bench. And they were looking for some way to draw this line in, and somebody hit on the idea of naming Orem after Walter C. Orem in hopes that that would encourage him to build a spur into town. And so in the 1910’s they did, and he did. And ever since then, you know, the name of the town has been in honor of that railroad guy, and the reason they wanted that railroad guy there was so that they could ship their fruit out.

AC: How did World War II effect Orem?

GD: World War II effected Orem in a number of ways. First of all, late in the 1930’s and then into the early 1940’s Geneva Steel began to be built, and the reason that Geneva Steel was built was so that there would be a steel supplier away from the coasts, that would be safe from attack. So you get Geneva Steel going in along the shores of Utah Lake, and that brings a lot of workers into the valley who are people who don’t really have an agricultural background, they have an urban-industrial background. The second way that World War II effects Orem and the orchards in Orem is that it draws people away, especially men, you know a lot of the labor, the heavy labor was done by men. And those men were getting called away into military service. And so you have in the 1940’s lots of stories of women starting to do men’s work, you know, women being called in to prune and to pick in the place of men. Some men were actually able to get draft deferrals so that they could stay at home and take care of their orchards. The third way that World War II effects Orem is the presence of prisoner of war camps. About fifty miles south of Orem in Delta they established a Japanese internment camp and a lot of Japanese from California were sent there and then those Japanese would come up during World War II and work on the orchards. There was a German prisoner of war camp built right in Orem in 1943, and German prisoners of war would come and they would provide labor on the orchards. And so all of a sudden you have this, this small town mostly populated by Mormons with a few, you know, Japanese and a few Palestinians and a few other ethnic families, but mostly sort of white, Mormon people from England who focus on orchards, who grow fruit. And then World War II rolls along and all of a sudden you’ve got this growing industrial base, you’ve got an urban population coming into town, and then you have the presence of Japanese and Germans and
everything that those two peoples signified during the Second World War. So it really, it really
kind of turned Orem upside down. It shook up the family ties, it shook up the standard ways that
people had been producing fruit in the teens and twenties and thirties and replaced it with a
different way of producing fruit, one that I guess was more oriented towards market, it was more
oriented on a relationship between the owner and the land and his employees as opposed to a sort
of a family relationship, and one that was really closely tied into the broader events that were
happening in the nation and in the world.

AC: How did orchard life change in the 50’s and 60’s?

GD: Orchards in the 1950’s and 1960’s became more commercial, and by that what I mean is
that orchard owners had to pay closer and closer attention to national trends. They needed to
produce fruit that looked uniformly pretty, that was of a uniform size, that could be easily boxed
and shipped all over the place. And they had to be able to compete with the huge expansion in
fruit production that’s going on in California and Washington and upstate New York, especially
with apples. The effect of that was that these sort of commercial relations that had started off
during the Second World War became more pronounced. So for example there was an increased
need for seasonal labor, and to augment seasonal labor a lot of the major orchard families created
an organization called the Timp Labor Association. And the purpose of that Labor Association
was to get workers, many of whom were Mexican or Mexican-American, and bring them into the
valley only at the times that they needed labor, so early in the spring when they were pruning,
and then during picking time. And the Timp Labor Association would actively go into New
Mexico and Arizona and have agents even in northern Mexico, and the purpose of those agents
was to encourage workers to come to Utah Valley. They would come to Utah Valley, they
would live in kind of temporary settlements, tents or migrant labor housing. And they would
come, they would stay, they would work, they would earn not a great wage but an enticing wage.
They would stay through the picking and then they would travel someplace else. So labor
relations became more commercialized. Growers had to look more closely to market and
towards sort of standardizing their fruit, and limiting the number of varieties that they would
produce. And you began to see some people getting out of orchards if they couldn’t make a go
of it, and other orchards expanding, getting larger so that they could take advantage of the
commercial potential of fruit growing in the area. What that meant was that the orchards in Utah
Valley became more and more closely tied to national economic trends. So if there was a huge
crop on one of the coasts, for example, that made it harder for Utah Valley farmers to sell their
fruit. But it there was a terrible crop, say it freezes all throughout the Imperial Valley of
California, then the fruit in Utah County became very, very desirable. It became a highly
lucrative way of making a living. So Orem becomes really more closely tied into national
economic trends. People have to be savvier about how they’re going to market their fruit, who’s
going to buy it, who’s going to produce it. You even start to get in Utah Valley people whose
job is not to grow fruit but they specialize in packing and shipping fruit. And so there becomes
more of a sort of fruit growing industry in the valley.

AC: What were some of the event that happened in the 60’s that led to the decline in the
orchards?
GD: In the early 1960’s there were a series of really bad years weather-wise for fruit. So there were a series of freezes, I think in 62, 63, 64, in the mid-1960’s. And that killed a lot of the crop in Utah Valley. Then the state government decided that Utah Valley land had to be revalued. People had been paying taxes on the land based on an agricultural value, but in 1967 there came a decree from the governor’s office that Utah Valley land needed to be valued at its highest commercial value. So people were paying taxes on fruit, on fruit land, but they were paying taxes at the level as if they would have had a shop on their land or houses or something like that. So that really pinched people economically. In the face of that, business owners and leaders from Brigham Young University and government owners got together, and they started to talk about the need to get away from an agriculturally based economy towards a more commercial economy. They created an organization called UVIDA, the Utah Valley Industrial Development Association. And they would have conferences and they would bring in developers and speakers and the whole purpose of these conferences was to discourage people from an agricultural life and encourage an agricultural life [HERE GARY HAS MADE A MISTAKE]. And so you’d have, you know, people who had a lot of sway: Ernest Wilkinson, who was the President of Brigham Young University, or leaders of the LDS Church who would come and they would say, “You know we can still maintain the important values that we have in this valley, you know, values of hard work and community and honesty and thrift, but we need to replace the economic basis of that. We need to have commercial development.” UVIDA was successful in getting orchard owners to sell their land and get the University Mall developed. It was successful in bringing in development along what is now 1300 South, commercial development was successful in getting light industry set up in the area. And that marked, I think, certainly the beginning of the end of orchards in Utah Valley. That happened because all of the sudden there wasn’t, there wasn’t support for fruit growing at sort of the highest levels of the community, it was economically difficult, land became much more valuable with houses on it or with shops on it than it did with fruit trees on it. And so people began to make wise decisions, economic decisions, about what they were going to do with their land. People that we’ve interviewed talk about how it was really a decision to sort of pick a better crop. Fruit was no longer the best crop that their land could produce, now their land was going to produce houses, or was going to produce shops. And that would feed their family and protect their kids and provide their kids with a leg up in the future. So starting in the late 1960’s and then through the 70’s and 80’s fruit growing declines in the Orem area and it’s replaced by, by what you would see today, by small stores, by shops, by lots of subdivisions, by commercial and residential uses of land.

[a pause; there were some problems in Gary saying “agricultural” twice]

AC: So we don’t need all that over again, but maybe another sentence or two about UVIDA encouraging industry.

GD: Yeah. So in 1967 in the face of these bad fruit growing years, in the face of changes in the taxation, a lot of local leaders get together, they create an organization called UVIDA, the Utah Valley Industrial Development Association. And its purpose is to support industry and commercialization in Utah Valley. And they’re suggesting to people through their speeches and through the way that they spend money that they need to move away from agriculture and towards residential and industrial and commercial development as the basis of the economy in Orem.
AC: How did the orchards represent a melting pot experience or did they?

GD: I’m not sure the orchards represented a melting pot, but what they did do was they brought into contact people from a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds, and this at a time in the 1910’s and 1920’s when most outsiders looked at Utah as a bastion of white Mormons. So in Utah Valley, for example, there was a family, the Kader family, who were Palestinians. And their family came, and they were growing fruit, and they owned orchards in Utah Valley at the same time as all these white Mormons did. There were Greek families, there were Lebanese families, later there were Japanese families. They had kind of an uneasy but cooperative relationship with the Mormon fruit growers, after all they had to work together to make sure the water came, they were still working together to make sure fruit got picked, but they had religious differences. And so all of these sort of ethnic families would go to St. Francis Catholic parish in Provo, even the ones who weren’t Catholic. So they were Greek Orthodox families, but they would attend church there. They would attend each others’ weddings and birth ceremonies and funerals, and they provided a support system. Then in the 1940’s and 1950’s there’s an increase in the number of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers, some of whom stayed year round, some of whom came back year after year after year. So orchards were the engine of ethnic diversity in this valley. And they brought people together who wouldn’t have come together either. Sometimes those relationships were good, sometimes they were controversial, sometimes they brought about divisions on the basis of religion or race. Certainly it introduced Utah Valley to a whole set of issues that the rest of the United States was facing, but in this particular context of how you can make and sell better fruit.

AC: On that, how has the Mexican immigration laws effected orcharding?

GD: Yeah, I mean, it’s effected orcharding in a lot of ways. In the 1940’s into the 1950’s there was a program, the brasero program, that brought laborers under the auspices of the federal government in to pick fruit, from Mexico, or Mexican-American laborers from the American southwest. When that program went out there was still a need for labor, and what that meant was that some of the labor was going to be illegal labor. And so people who did not have immigration status or immigrant status would still come into Utah Valley and pick fruit, but then they faced all of the challenges that undocumented workers face in the United States—they face the threat of deportation, they face the problems of not being paid at the level that they should have been paid, they didn’t have the sort of support in the community for their rights or for their well-being. And so Orem and orchards in Orem were no different in that sense than other agricultural regions in the American west. Today much of the labor that’s seasonal labor in Utah Valley where the orchards still exist continues to be Mexican or Mexican-American labor and those issues continue to be on the forefront of relations between the orchard owners and their workers, and at the forefront of how Orem and Provo and the other communities in this area think about and deal with ethnicity.

AC: And how do those issues effect the relationship between the Mexican workers and the orchard owners?
GD: I think one way that, that the, either the illegal status or the immigrant status of the workers effected those relations was that it shifted power even more strongly towards the owners of the land. If you were an owner and you had seasonal labor, you could treat that seasonal labor with much less, much less kindness or much less respect than you would treat seasonal labor if it was your cousin, or if it was your neighbor’s kid. We have stories that people have told us, both Mexican-Americans and Anglos, about these conflicts, about conflicts over the use of language, about conflicts over religion, about conflicts over proper pay and proper, and proper respect for workers. And there are even a couple of stories of fist fights and one murder that really came out of a relationship, or the difficulties in a relationship between Anglo orchard owners and their ethnic workers.

AC: What do the Church welfare farms represent today?

GD: Well, the Church welfare farms represent in some ways a continuation of the original values that were underneath orchards in Orem. The welfare farms for example still are a place where there’s community cooperation. People from wards and stakes come to the farms, they help pick fruit, they provide some of the pruning, they provide some of the labor in similar ways, similar to the ways that labor was provided much earlier in the century. They also provide I think a final visual reminder of what this valley was like. The largest orchards left, at least in Orem, are Church-owned welfare farms.

[He has to repeat it:]

GD: The LDS Church welfare farms are also an important reminder of what Orem used to look like. The biggest orchards left in the Orem area are LDS Church-owned welfare farms, welfare orchards. Most of the rest of the orchard land has either already been sold or is likely going to be up for sale in the next few years, so it’s for, it’s quite possible that five years from now the only orchards in Orem will be owned by the LDS Church.

AC: Today how do most people relate to orchard life?

GD: Well of course different sorts of people relate to orchard life differently today. There are still a whole generation of people, people who are in their sixties and seventies, who if they grew up here grew up on orchards, grew up picking fruit, had the day to day experience of, of living on and working in orchards. Their children usually had some connection to orchards; they might have gone to their grandparents’ orchard, or they might have a few fruit trees in their backyard, or they might have spent some time working in packing plants or processing plants. Then you have this whole group of people who’ve moved into Utah Valley since 1980 or so who have been brought in by commercial development, so they’re here because of Novell or because, earlier, because of WordPerfect, or other sorts of high tech organizations. And they really have I think no sense of Orem’s past. And that’s part of the problem when your past is all agricultural, as soon as you put houses on what was farmland there’s no visual remnant of what went before. So their real only tie to orchards I think is the fruit stands that you still see along 800 North in Orem. And in the late summer and early fall in the evenings as people are driving home from work you see these huge lines of cars or parking lots full of people, and they’re stopping to pick fruit, or to buy fruit from these fruit stands. And I think they have to do it out of some nostalgic or romantic sense of, of fruit, ‘cause the fruit’s much cheaper if you stop at the grocery store on
the corner, but that fruit, you don’t know where it was grown, it’s in a plastic bag, whereas the fruit that’s at the fruit stand you can see it, you can touch it, you can, it’s ripe, it’s ripe right now, you can eat it, you can take it home and, and cut it up and serve it for dinner. And so for a lot of people who didn’t have the experience of working on orchards, or who aren’t related to people who did, it’s those fruit stands in the summertime that are their last connection to, the last connection that they know of, to orchards. Of course everybody who lives in Orem has some connection to orchards because Orem looks the way it does because it was orchard land. Orem was developed in these neighborhoods, these, these communities that popped up because orchard owners individually sold off their land. So all of the houses in one neighborhood were built in 1977, let’s say, because in 1976 an orchard owner sold his land. Orem doesn’t have a downtown because it was never a real town organized around a central place. The whole purpose of Orem in its history was to produce fruit, and so Orem looks the way it does today—it has no downtown—because of the fruit growing past that it had. Now most people don’t know that, but still it sets the parameters for the way that they travel and the way that they live their lives if they live in Orem.

AC: You talked earlier about the values obtained from orchards, and how are these values still in the community now that the orchards are almost gone?

GD: I think there is a desire on the part of many people in Orem to maintain the values of community and order and beauty and cooperation and hard work that the orchards exemplified. But the opportunities to do that are fewer and they’re farther between. You may want to teach your kid hard work, and to do that you say, you know, “Once a week you’re going to cut our lawn, and you’re going to weed the little garden we have in our backyard.” That’s a whole different sort of hard work than the sort of hard work that kids fifty years put in, where they were up at 5:30 in the morning every morning through the whole summer picking pound after pound after pound of cherries, or if they were sorting and washing apples, or if they were packing peaches. So sure we say we want hard work, but sort of the economic basis for that hard work isn’t there. We say we want beauty, but Orem is not a beautiful place. There aren’t any major buildings, there aren’t any sort of great physical landmarks. Orem is a decent place to live, but there’s no real beauty, there’s sort of the haphazard spot by spot development. People say that they desire community cooperation, but the way that our community is set up, the way that we live our lives, the way we work our jobs discourages cooperation. I mean, your purpose when you have a big house with a big mortgage is to earn as much money as you need to pay for that mortgage and to, you know, to have your Suburban or whatever else. That’s a whole different way of thinking about the economy than the way that early Orem families did. For them, you grew orchards because sure it would provide a way of life, it would provide enough money for you, but it, but orchards corresponded with a broader vision that you had for what the good life was. And you could live day to day in your house on your orchard and you could experience day to day that set of values. Today in Orem you can’t live that way. You might hold cooperation in your life, you can do all sorts of volunteer work, but it’s not built into the land the way it was seventy-five years ago.

AC: And how does the situation here in Orem today reflect what’s going on in the rest of the nation?
GD: All over the United States communities and sections of states that had been devoted to growing fruit are facing a pinch. And that pinch comes in, comes from a couple of directions. Some of it is self-inflicted, so for example fruit growers in Washington state were looking for fruit that was prettier, it had a more uniform color, you could pack it and keep it longer so you could ship it. So they spent millions of dollars developing the Red Delicious apple, and many of the apple orchards in western Washington are Red Delicious orchards. Well it just so happens that you can pack Red Delicious apples, they’re uniformed colored, but they taste terrible. They taste like wax. And so the sales of Red Delicious apples are declining and those orchards are declining. So some of it’s self-inflicted. Other orchards are facing pressure because of development like Orem did. For example, Silicon Valley that we know today as being sort of the center of the high tech economy was before that fruit growing land. And as those high tech companies increased their profile they were replacing fruit growing with high tech. And then we have the increase of fruit growing around the world, and especially China. And as the Chinese fruit growers have produced more and more fruit at a cheaper and cheaper price, and shipped it around the world, it’s more and more difficult economically for people in the United States to grow and profit from fruit.

What do the Church welfare farms represent today?

AC: And going back to the cultural issues that that’s had, what’s the impact that it’s had on our nation…?

GD: Well I don’t want to make too big a claim. I mean it’s not like orchards have always been the most important thing in the whole United States. But I think orchards are emblematic of a different way of life, one that was widely embraced across the United States, and again it’s that way of life that emphasizes those values that we’ve been talking about. You want to civilize what’s wild, you want to order it, you want to make it beautiful. You aim to cooperate. You’re looking for not wealth but a certain modest level of prosperity. As the economic basis of that way of life disappears across the United States it’s being replaced with, or has been replaced with a whole different set of values, and that new set of values I think is more private, you focus on yourself and your family and your house and your car and your yard. It’s more closely tied to a desire to growth and increase in wealth, you know we’re always so concerned about, about making more money or having higher technology companies so that we can get higher wages. And it’s, it’s less attentive to the land and to what the land can give you. So we have places like Phoenix, Arizona which is a huge city in the middle of a desert, there’s no way it could sustain itself naturally, but it exists there because people want to live where it’s warm. All the water has to come in artificially, all the food comes in artificially. In the summertime you can’t go outside because it’s too hot so you have your air conditioner cranked up and your backyard pool cooler on Maximum Cool. That’s a whole different relationship to the land than the relationship that people who lived on and worked on orchards had. It’s, you sort of can ignore the land, you can ignore the signals that the environment gives you, and live however you want. When you are an orchard owner or an orchard worker you couldn’t do that; if you ignored the land you ignored it at your own peril.

What do the Church welfare farms represent today?

AC: What do people consider as civilized, ordered, or beautiful today?
GD: I think many people want their own houses and their own yards to be civilized and ordered. And so... folks spend an awful lot of time cutting their grass, trimming their grass, laying out where their plants are going to be. I think, you know, our subdivisions are quite ordered places. So you see that in, sort of in the private areas of people’s lives: in their homes, in their yards. You know I’m certainly not suggesting that, that today people like ugly stuff, you know they used to like beautiful orchards and now today they like ugly things. But it’s a different, it’s a different, beauty at a different level. You know it’s what you own, what you control—that’s what you beautify and the rest of the community can beautify what it will if it wishes to, but you don’t have any obligation to sort of make it that way.

AC: And what is it like to live in Orem today?

GD: Orem is an interesting place to live in. On its surface it seems that there’s not a lot of there there. That there’s no, there’s no heart to the community. You know, sort of the main street of Orem is State Street, and you can drive on State Street from the northern part of Utah to the very southern part. It takes digging, I think, to come to know what’s really at the heart of Orem. It takes an effort to talk to people who’ve been around for a long time. It takes an effort to look closely at the land, to look at the signs of the past as well as what’s going on today. But if you do that I think Orem can be a good place to live. There are still people here who care deeply about the well being of their neighbors. There are people here who carry a lot of wisdom about how you can live a good life, how you can sustain a community. And if you can get tied into those people, who are quiet, I think, and sort of withdrawn and many times later in their lives, you can find in Orem a good place to live. It’s still a place that gives, I think, a good crop. Today that crop is different than it was one hundred years ago, but if you make an effort to be tied to this place, it’s a place where you can live happily.

AC: In concluding your article when you talked about this, you’ve talked about the issue of nostalgia and not necessarily being so...

GD: Yeah. One of the, one of the temptations of the present is to look back on the past and say, “Oh, it was a golden age then and today it’s so much worse.” There was never a golden age in Orem, even when people had these orchards and when they worked side by side with their family members and cooperated with their communities, it was hard and it was hot and there was a thread of economic disaster right around the corner all the time, and you could hate your neighbor and the fruit could be bad and you didn’t get along with your kids and there wasn’t a movie theater to go to and there was no air conditioning. So life was not peaches and cream. And I don’t, I don’t want to suggest that it was. But I think people today look back on orchards and they look at the fruit that they buy in fruit stands and they do it with a certain, with a certain nostalgia. Life then seemed simpler. You knew what you had to make: you produced peaches. You weren’t producing some sort of unseen software code, or some bit of knowledge that was somehow worth money. You produce a tangible thing, and so I think people today look back on that and they, and they want that, they desire that. You can see that desire in Orem both at the fruit stands and in the fact that most houses in Orem still have one or two fruit trees in the backyard, and so every summer people are out there picking their own fruit. And they get some lesson from that, certainly not the full lesson of, of the orchards, but a small lesson none the less.
AC: …Do you want to just briefly talk again about the fact that one of the remnants of the orchards is that most people have at least one fruit tree in their yard?

GD: Yeah. If you look closely at Orem today you can still see the influence of orchards. You can see it in the way that, that subdivisions are laid out, the main streets. And if you look in people’s backyards you can see it too. We’ve gone around from neighborhood to neighborhood and talked to people and looked in their yards and nearly everybody who lives in the places where there were orchards, still has a fruit tree or two. Some of them are left over from the orchards, they’re trees that just people kept around, or that they kept around on purpose. Others of them have been planted since. And I think that’s both an important sign of the influence of orchards, even today, and it’s an important sign that people desire some sort of a connection with the land.

[grumbling]

GD: Let me take a shot at that one more time. If you look closely enough you can still see remnants of the orchards, and one place where you see those is in the backyards of people. People still have fruit trees today, and as we walk around neighborhoods and look inside yards and backyards, nearly everybody has one or two fruit trees. Some of them were left over from when the whole neighborhood was an orchard; others of them have been planted fresh in the backyard. And I think people do that because they like the fresh fruit, but also because they like the idea that there’s something in their backyard that year after year with a little bit of care gives them pleasure, and in this case it’s fruit trees.