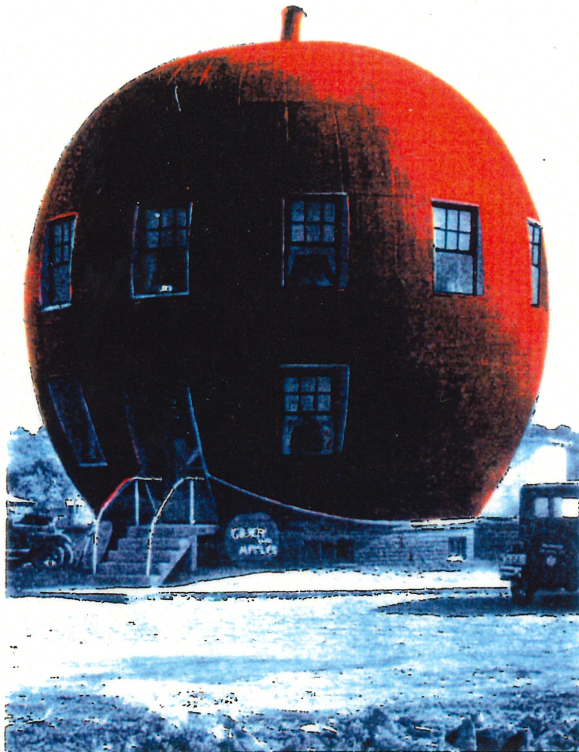


# APPLES

—as Hunt Brothers  
grow them — —



## THE BIG RED APPLE

On U. S. Highway 36

Largest Apple Ever Grown

30 feet high

100 feet in circumference

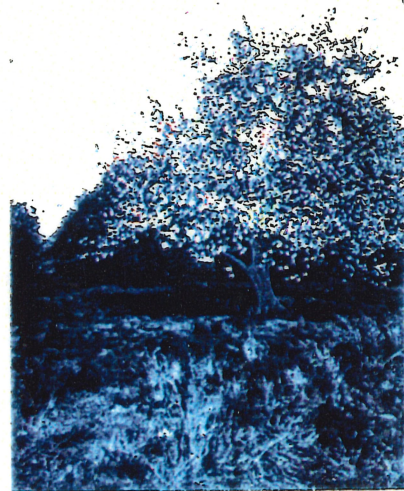
Eight miles west of St. Joseph, Mo., near Wathena, Kan.

Our transportation facilities are the very best; six of the largest railway systems reach us, Burlington, Rock Island, Santa Fe, Missouri Pacific, Union Pacific and Great Western.

Our orchards are nearly all located on hard surfaced roads, which enables us to give service either into cold storage or for shipment. We have a large acreage of young orchard just coming into bearing which together with the intensive care we give our orchards both as to spraying, pruning, cultivation and fertilization will insure our apples of higher grade than usual during the next few years.

Established 24 years ago in the fruit growing enterprise, the orchards of Hunt Brothers now comprise over 600 fertile acres of 40,000 bearing trees, with an annual yield of thousands of bushels of the well known leading varieties: Jonathan, Delicious, Winesap, Ben Davis, Gano, Black Twig, Grimes Golden, Wealthy and other.

Our rich loess soil produces the best flavor combined with high color and long keeping qualities.



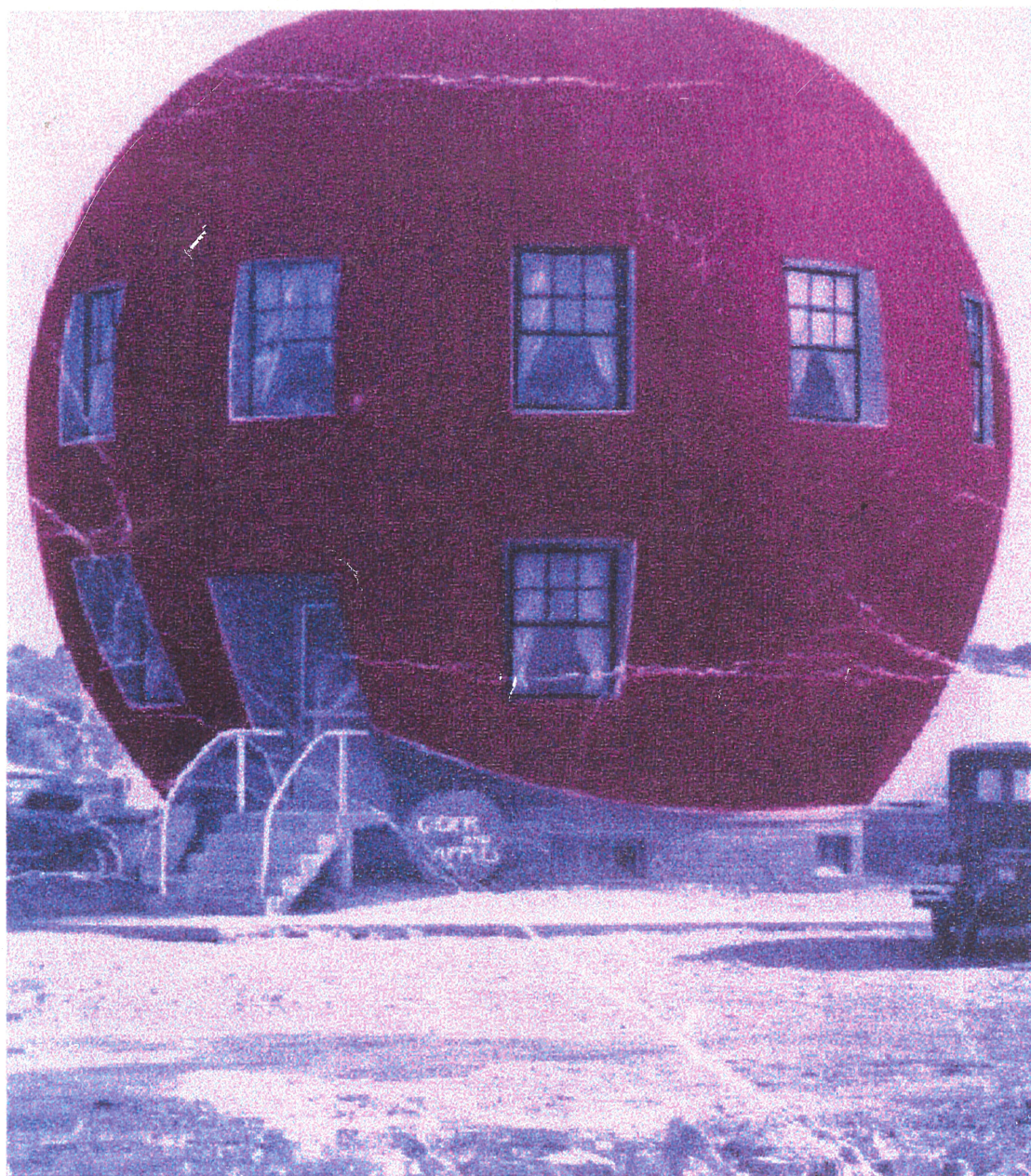
*View of a Hunt Brothers Orchard  
in the heart of the magic circle.*

## Hunt Brothers Fruit Company

ORCHARDS

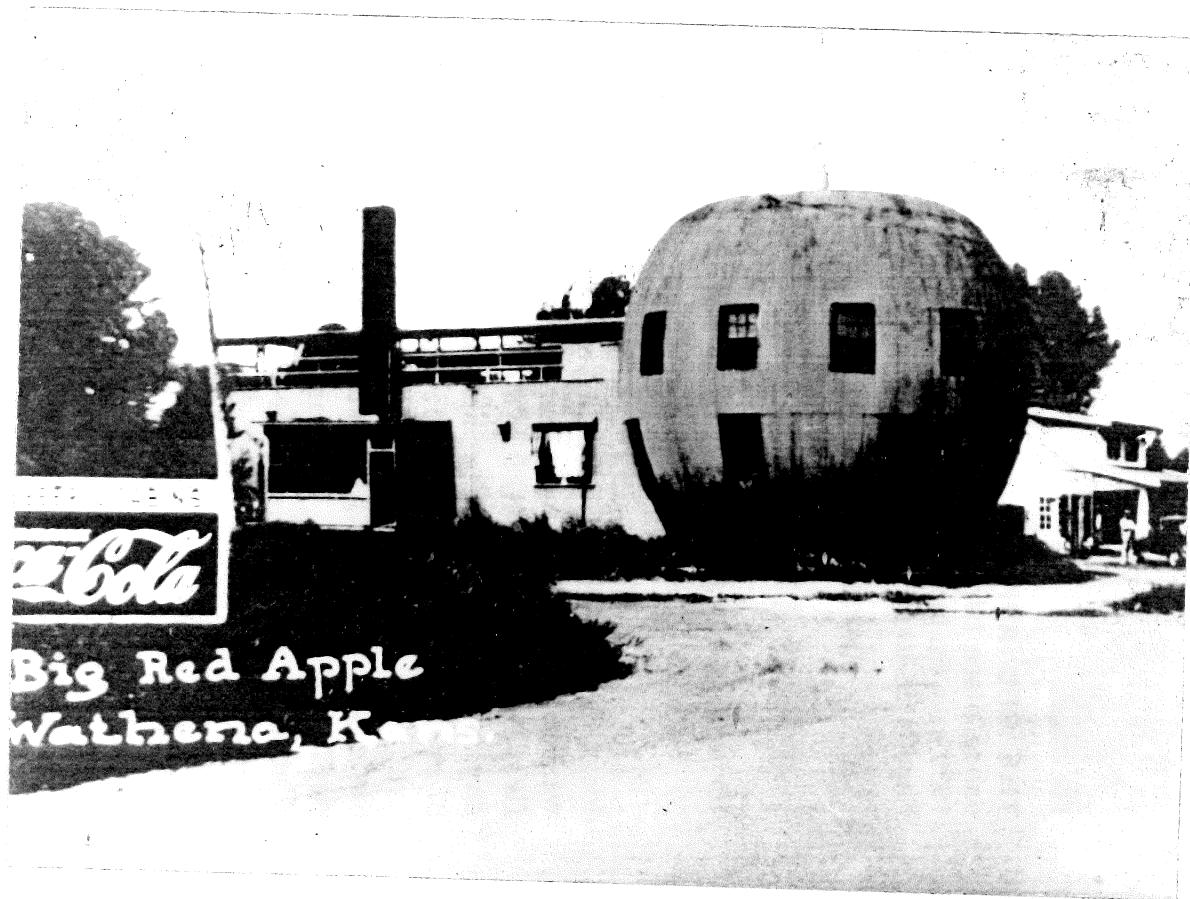
Buchanan County, Missouri Doniphan County, Kansas



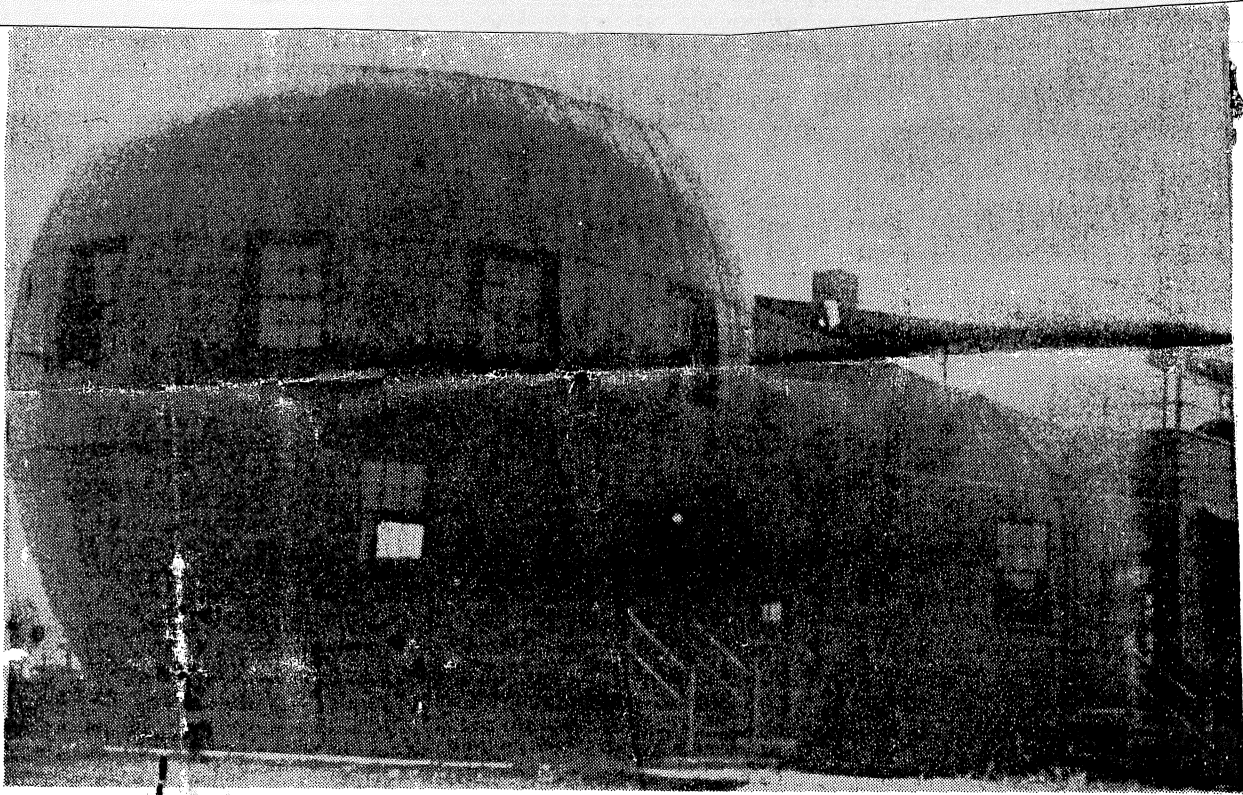




Big Red Apple 2 miles west of Wathena,  
Kansas (stories on back)







**THE RED APPLE** a popular dine and dance place back in the late 1920's and 1930's, was located in the area of Old Fleek's Market before it burned to the

SEPTEMBER 19, 1929

## RED APPLE BURNS.

### Explosion of Gasoline Stove Spread Fire to All Parts of Building.

The Red Apple, well known inn located on Highway No. 36 two miles west of Wathena, was destroyed by fire, between 8 and 9 o'clock, Sunday morning following an explosion of a gasoline burner under a coffee urn in the kitchen. The fire also destroyed a large fruit stand located to the west of the inn, but the Wathena and St. Joe fire departments saved the home of J. P. Maxwell, manager of the inn. The loss estimated to be about \$15,000 which is partially covered by insurance.

The fire was all over the inn before the fire departments could get there, and the people in the apple, including Mr. and Mrs. Charles Porter who had charge of the inn, had barely time to get out.

The Red Apple was owned by Hunt Bros., well known orchard men in this section. J. E. Hunt, president of the Hunt Bros. Fruit Co., has announced that the Red Apple is to be rebuilt on a larger scale.

This inn was one of the most popular on Highway No. 36. It was constructed to represent a large apple and local people and tourists alike paid it many visits.

ground for the second and final time on July 12, 1940. Two separate stories are reproduced below from the files of *The Kansas Chief*.

THURSDAY, JULY 18, 1940

## RED APPLE BURNS

### Well Known Landmark On Highway No. 36 Is Gone.

The Red Apple, well known cafe and land mark on U. S. Highway No. 36 east of Troy seven miles was destroyed by fire early Friday morning. The cause was attributed to faulty wiring the blaze it is said starting in the south part of the building.

The Apple was constructed in 1929 at a cost said to have been around \$20,000, and was constructed by Charles Nelson, Wathena contractor. Hunt Brothers, well known orchardists and fruit men of St. Joseph, were the owners. Mr. and Mrs. James Wild held the lease at the time of the fire and ran it in connection with a tourists camp.

The Wathena Fire department answered the call and did a splendid job of saving the buildings to the west of the Apple. This is the second time that the Red Apple has been burned. Shortly after its completion in 1928 it was destroyed but immediately work of rebuilding it was started and it was completed in 1929.

The fire Friday morning was preceded by a small blaze last Thursday afternoon, which was extinguished by the Wathena fire department.



# Remembering the "Big Red Apple"

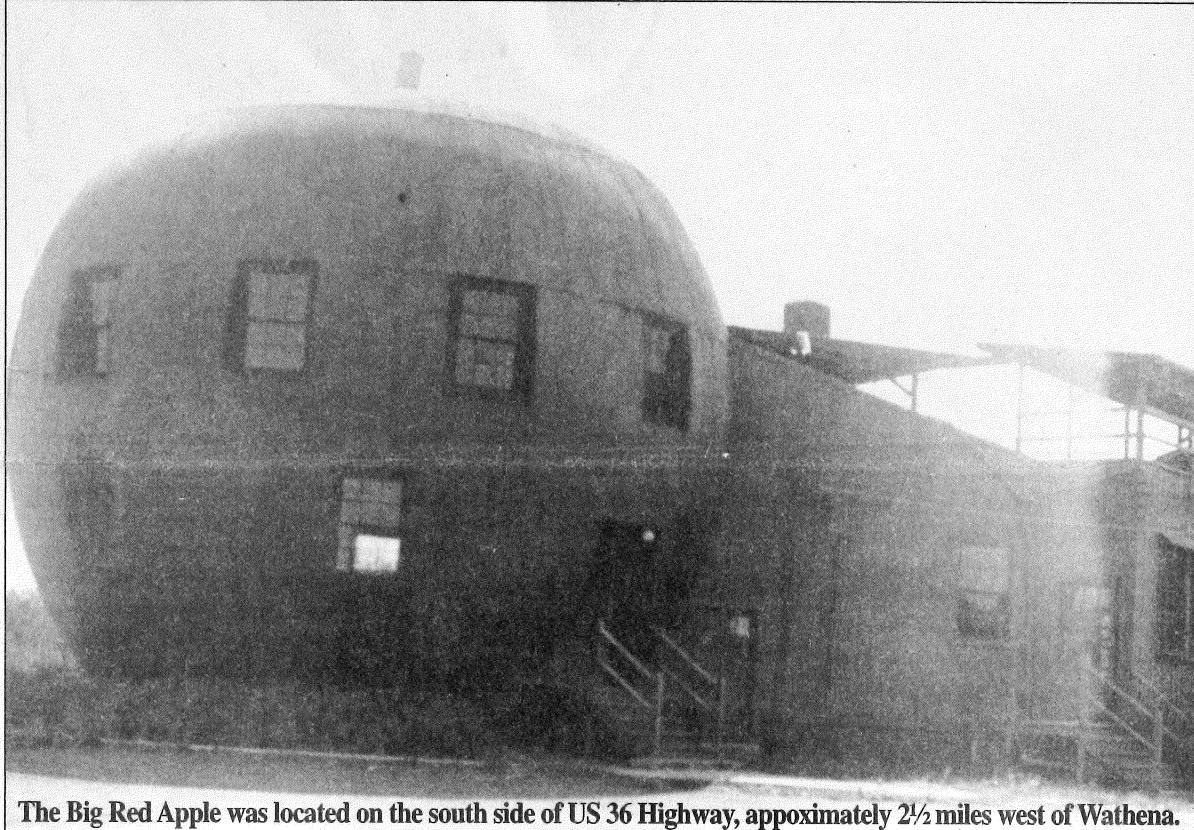
By Linden Nold  
Wathena, KS

Penned in by winter snows and with cabin fever, I dug into some keepsake items and came up with an actual photo (unknown photographer) of an old landmark of wide spread publicity, the Big Red Apple. It was located on the south side of US 36 Highway, approximately 2 1/2 miles west of Wathena. There have been other pictures and previous articles about this unique land mark, but I believe some pics, posters, post cards were redone, tinted, and mostly of the east side, where as this one is of the west side, and is of the second such structure. Both structures were owned and built by the three Hunt Brothers: Louis, George, and Fred of St. Joe, who owned the adjoining 300 acre apple orchard across Peter's Creek.

My memory arises out of the fact that my dad was employed by them as a foreman over the orchard crew and I was born in one of the houses on the property. As part of the history and wide renowned, the first structure was built of wood framing, covered by strong canvas, painted and sealed. The head carpenter and building supervisor was a well known Wathena builder, Charley Nelson. For his work, he got .60¢ an hour; skilled carpenters, .50¢; and other labor, .25¢. In conjunction with the area's apple industry, it went over big time as a road side restaurant. Trust me, I was just 4 years old when this first structure caught fire and burned to the ground, I do well remember that I saw the smoke, ran to tell my mom, she grabbed a bucket, and we ran down the hill and stood on Peter's Creek Bridge to watch it burn.

I also remember most of the following events, but was made aware of a few names, later on. Not long after, the second Big Red Apple was built by Mr. Nelson, along the same scheme, but possibly a little larger than the first, and which is pictured here. A large two story rectangular structure was added which added restaurant facilities on the first floor, and an open "roof garden" at the second story. Meanwhile, dad had changed jobs from the orchard to the just west of the apple and part of the Hunt "Complex." We lived in the house on the same site.

The main entrance to the Red Apple opened into the spacious foyer which contained tables and chairs, and a cash register on the counter on the south east side adjacent to the large opening into the rectangle addition. This housed the kitchen, additional dining area, and a private banquet or meeting room. On the west side, at the junction of this and the circular apple portion, was a built-in "dumb waiter"; a contraption operated by rope and pulley to elevate food and drink to the second floor. The kitchen was handled by a lady, always called "cookie" who was widely known for her fried chicken. Waitresses that I knew included my sister Ruth, Mildred "Sis" Moskau, and I believe Geraldine Woodbury. (I think Cliff Woodbury



The Big Red Apple was located on the south side of US 36 Highway, approximately 2 1/2 miles west of Wathena.

was the operator of the first Big Red Apple.) Besides Gerry, his other children, Byron and Virginia attended Wathena High. I do know that at one time, Baird Gurwell of the Troy area, was an operator of this second Red Apple.

The upper story of the Apple consisted of a hardwood dance floor surrounded by a circular continuous bench type seat (except for the south opening.) The dance floor extended on out through this on to the roof garden. On each long side, there was an elevated, covered platform, sufficient to accommodate tables and chairs. On each side adjacent to the platforms, were inset gutters to drain off rain and debris. To the south part of the picture, you can see a small dome like projection, which was the band shell. I do not remember, but I think the big dance night with live band was on Saturdays.

I think the custom at that time was to B.O.B., out of sight, and the Apple would sell the set ups, (besides the dining and food.) I do remember that John Nelson was on trumpet; Swede Axlund, sax; Dudley Burch, piano; (sometimes Ruth Nold filled in at piano); also, Ray Murrell, who had the Red & White Grocery Store on the north side of Main St., was a pro on clarinet & sax. He later started a big band in St. Joe and was very popular for a long time. Ralph Martin was hot on the trumpet. When Harry James and his Big Band were at the Frog Hop in St. Joe, Ralph auditioned for him, was highly complemented, but not accepted because he played by ear, and could not read a note!

Marjorie (McIntyre) Judd told me what a fun time it was when she and friends from Troy and area, crammed into a car and on running boards and fenders and rode to the Big Red Apple to dance! During the same time I will always remember Walt Linville and Mary McIntyre (later married) would come driving around in his beautiful white, two seater touring car, top down, lots of chrome all around! Always well

dressed, he had dark hair, thin mustache; she very pretty, with long flowing blond hair. It was a sight right out of Hollywood for me!

To the west of the Big Red Apple, and part of Hunt complex, was a small fruit stand and market, with a couple of gas pumps on the north side of the drive. The gas "pumps" consisted of tall, metal bases with tall, large glass containers on top which had gallon lines on the glass to measure the amount being used. The gas flowed down a hose through valve and nozzle by gravity. The glass "jars" were then refilled by long, vertical handles that hand pumped back and forth. There were also a tennis court and a few small tourist cabins to the west, besides the home where we lived. A couple of times a year, 3 or 4 huge old model Packards or similar makes, loaded down with Gypsy families and their belongings, would stop and camp on a grassy area between the tennis court and Peter's Creek. Staying for 2 or 3 days, they would bucket water out of the creek for washing, etc. It was interesting to see how they used big tire casings with a tarp pushed down inside to make a basin to bathe the small children and rinse out clothing.

One time, on a nice Saturday afternoon, a black sedan pulled into the market and gas driveway. There was a driver and two men in dark dress suits got out of the back seat. (I was later told that they were from Troy, but I can't remember their names without being reminded.) They were laughing, having a good time, and obviously pretty tipsy. They bought a dozen fresh eggs from the market, divided them, and crammed some into their suit coat pockets. Yelling whoopee, they got back into the car saying they were going to throw them at Wathena when they went through! I was not angry, have never been angry, but always amused and wondering what happened and if those eggs remained intact or got smashed inside those coat pockets.

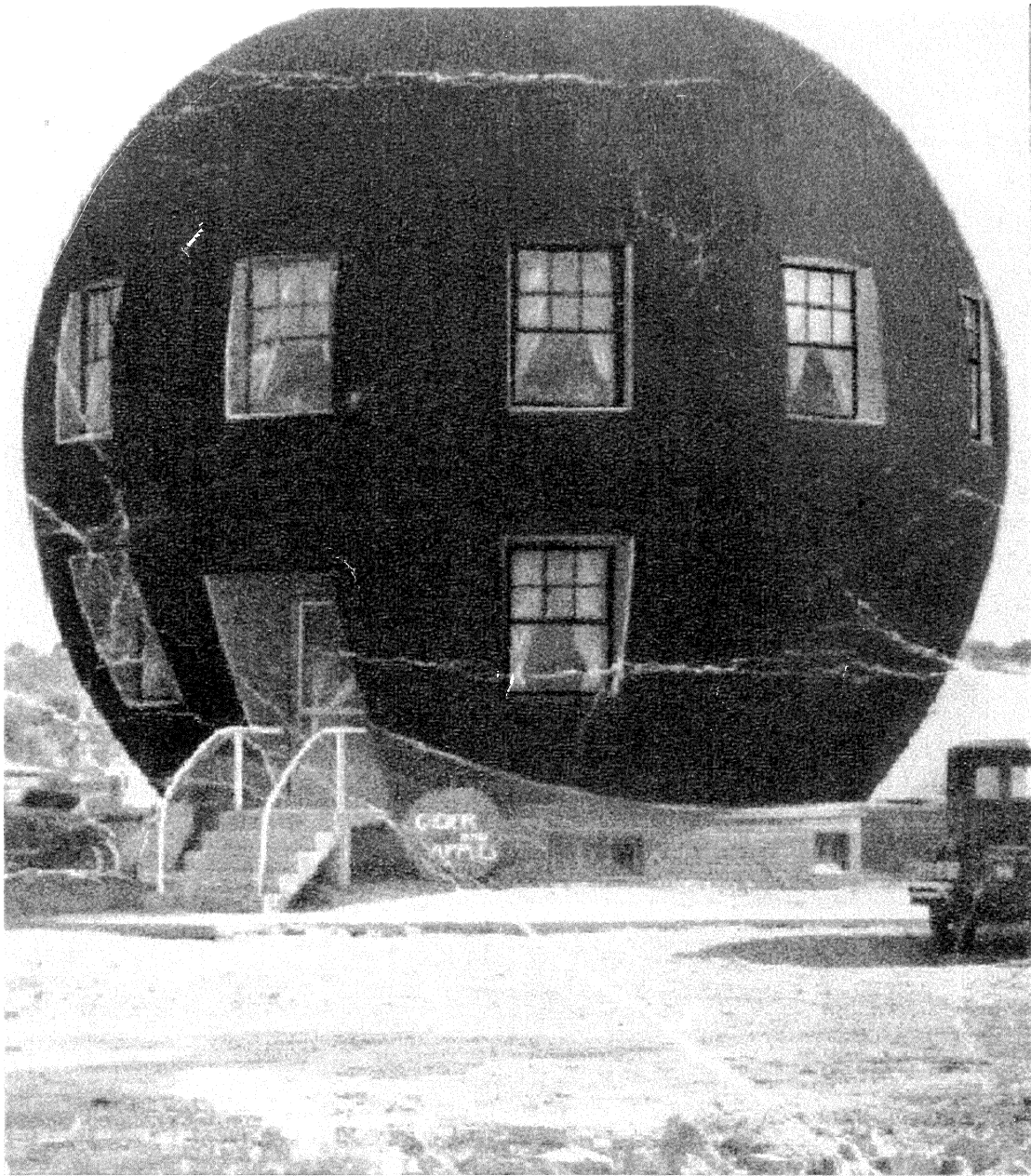
Some time later, we moved closer to town, to the Wiegant farm and orchard. I remember some of the following, but most was told to me after: The pictured Big Red Apple caught fire also. I believe the volunteer fire department's sole fire truck was garaged in the old Frankovich Garage, now the VFW Post Home. It was a 1929 Model T Ford, open cab, one seat, with a hand operated siren mounted on the right front, along with a rope pulled large bell mounted on the very front.

Someone got in touch with the Wathena Volunteer Fire Department of which Charley Nelson was Chief at the time. His son, volunteer Phil Nelson, was the first to arrive at the garage and was the driver, along with another on the seat operating the siren crank, and two others hanging on the rear platform. They tore out heading north on 4th Street (Highway 36 at that time) both throttle and spark levers mounted on the steering column down to the max. Left at the funeral home corner, then right around Hay's corner, then north westerly around the Morgan corner and on to the McPherson corner by what is now the land fill. From there, up somewhat of an incline, toward the Springstead corner. (The higher grade was taken down years ago for the "new" highway.) Around this sharp corner and down the long hill they went at full speed. Approaching the blazing structure, the brake(s) went out and the truck shot right on past! A few spectators took out running, and a couple of vehicles went chasing after. Regardless of any effort, it would have, and did burn to the ground. Thus ended the era of the very popular Big Red Apple.

Other than that, I do well remember the remaining Hunt Brothers holdings south across the creek, an apple packing shed and cider mill with railroad spur; the orchard with four houses and those who lived there. But that is another story that may not get told!

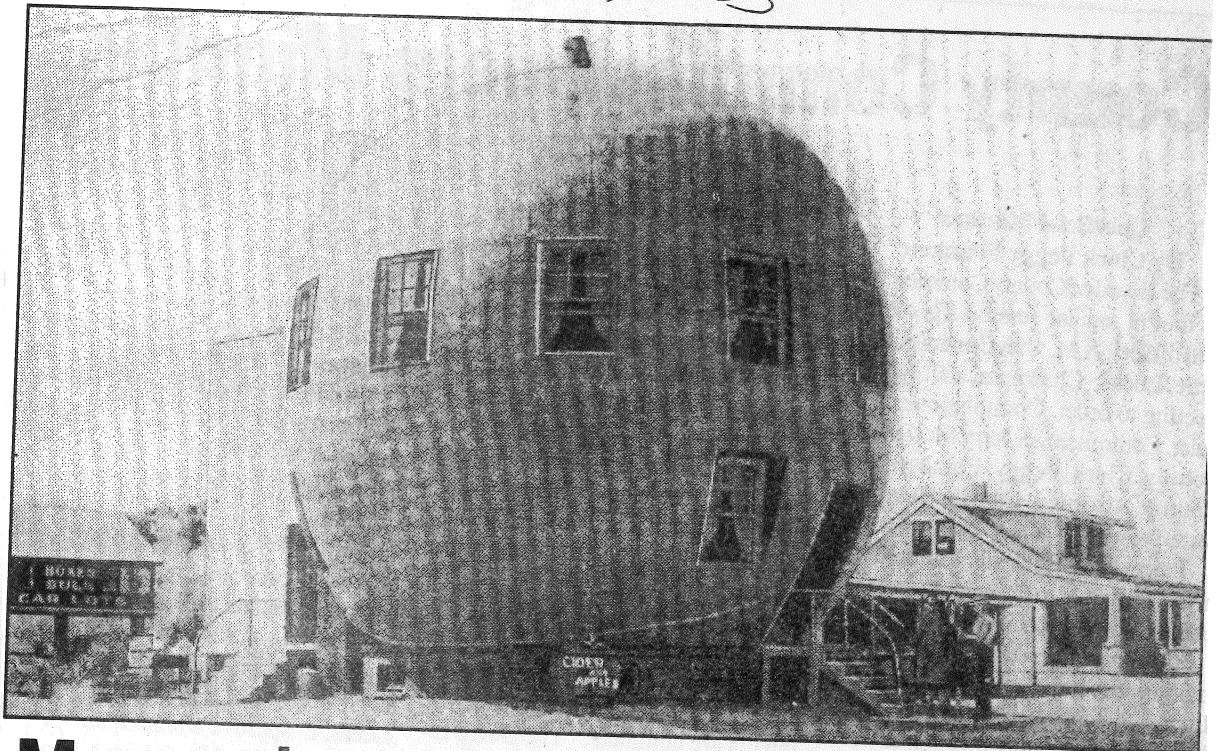
KS Chief 4-1-2010







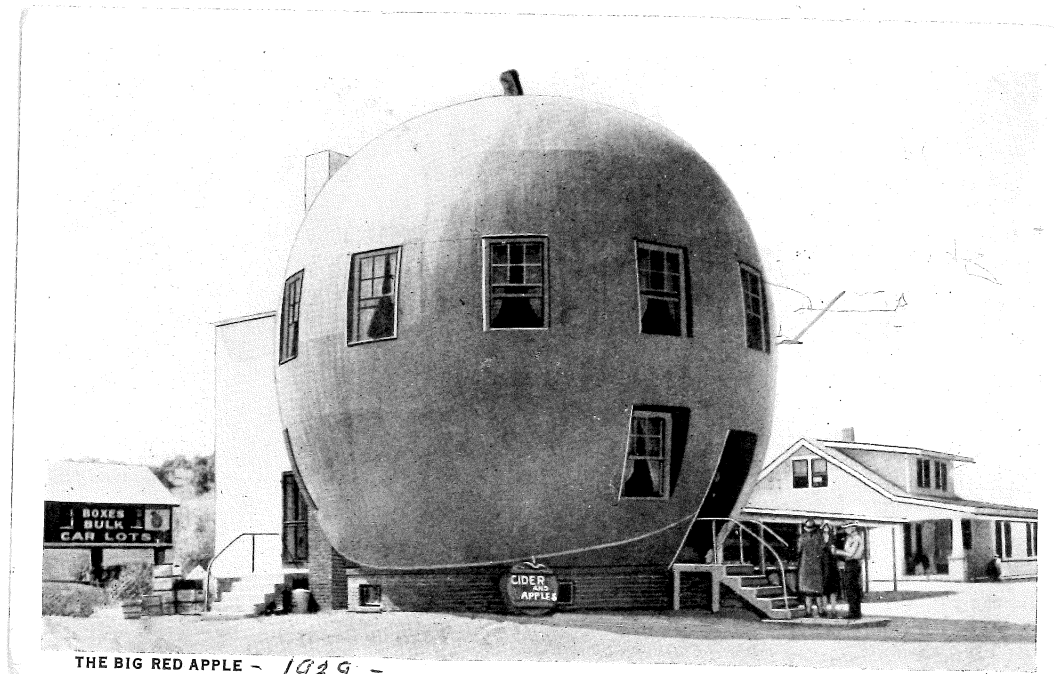
5-26-05



# Memories of the Big Red Apple

Stan Weese of Grove, Ok., submitted this old post card photo of the Big Red Apple which once stood west of Wathena in the 1930's. Stan's grandmother, Nellie Moore, received this postcard in 1932 from her cousin in Wathena who had purchased the postcard at Miller Pharmacy. The Big Red Apple was a restaurant which stood 30 ft. high at Hunt Brothers Orchard.





30 Feet high

Hunt Bros. Orchard Wathena, Kans  
stop at Miller's Pharmacy  
for high class Fountain Service

*The Big Red Apple*

30 feet high

HUNT BROS. ORCHARD, WATHENA, KAS.

*Stop at Miller's Pharmacy  
for high class Fountain Service*

POST CARD



MADE BY CURT TEICH & COMPANY, INC., CHICAGO, U.S.A.



# Big Red Apple helped put Wathena, Kan., on the map

Fruit-shaped restaurant was even featured by Ripley

By **ALONZO WESTON**  
alonzow@npgco.com  
St. Joseph News-Press

WATHENA, Kan. — Wathena was once known for growing some of the best and largest apples in the country.

In fact, it once even had a two-story-high apple.

The Big Red Apple was a restaurant and dance hall that sat just outside of this Northeast Kansas burgh on U.S. Highway 36.

People came from miles around just to see the huge, red, apple-shaped building. And it wasn't only a unique dining and entertainment spot, but a clever marketing stratagem dreamed up by James Hunt, one of the owners of the Hunt Brothers Fruit Co., to help promote the

## Tales of the MIDLAND EMPIRE



local apple-growing business.

"My dad wanted to publicize apples here so he built it to get people thinking about apples," said Fred Hunt, son of James Hunt. "It was a unique patented design."

The Hunt Brothers Fruit Co. was well-

known in the apple-growing business throughout the nation. It also has a unique history.

The institution began sometime shortly after 1876 when retired St. Joseph physician G.W. Chase and his son, Ernest, opened G.W. Chase and Son produce company.

In 1904, Mr. Chase retired from the produce business, and the company was split between Ernest and James Hunt, who had married Mr. Chase's daughter, Clara.

Ernest Chase took his share from the company and formed the now-famous Chase Candy Co., while James Hunt took sole ownership of the fruit business. It became Hunt Brothers Fruit Co. after Mr. Hunt brought his brothers, George and Luther, into the business. It, too, was a lucrative business.

"At one time Missouri had more apple trees than any other state in the union,"

Fred Hunt said. "Doniphan County, Kan., was a tremendous fruit producer, too."

It was in the mid-1920s when James Hunt constructed the Big Red Apple. The structure stood 30 feet high and was 100 feet in circumference. It had a huge rectangular dance floor on the back.

Mr. Hunt remembered that the building could hold a number of people, which it often did on Friday and Saturday nights.

"It was mainly for parties," Mr. Hunt said. "It was going good around the same time the Frog Hop was going in Missouri."

Although Doris Widemer never went into the Red Apple she vividly remembered seeing it as a youngster growing up in Wathena.

"I was just a little kid when it was swinging out there," she said.

# Big Red Apple puts Wathena on the map

Continued from Page B1

"It just looked like a very good replica of a huge red apple."

"It was a beautiful place," remembered George Jones, Jr. "The Hunts had the biggest orchard this side of the Mississippi then.

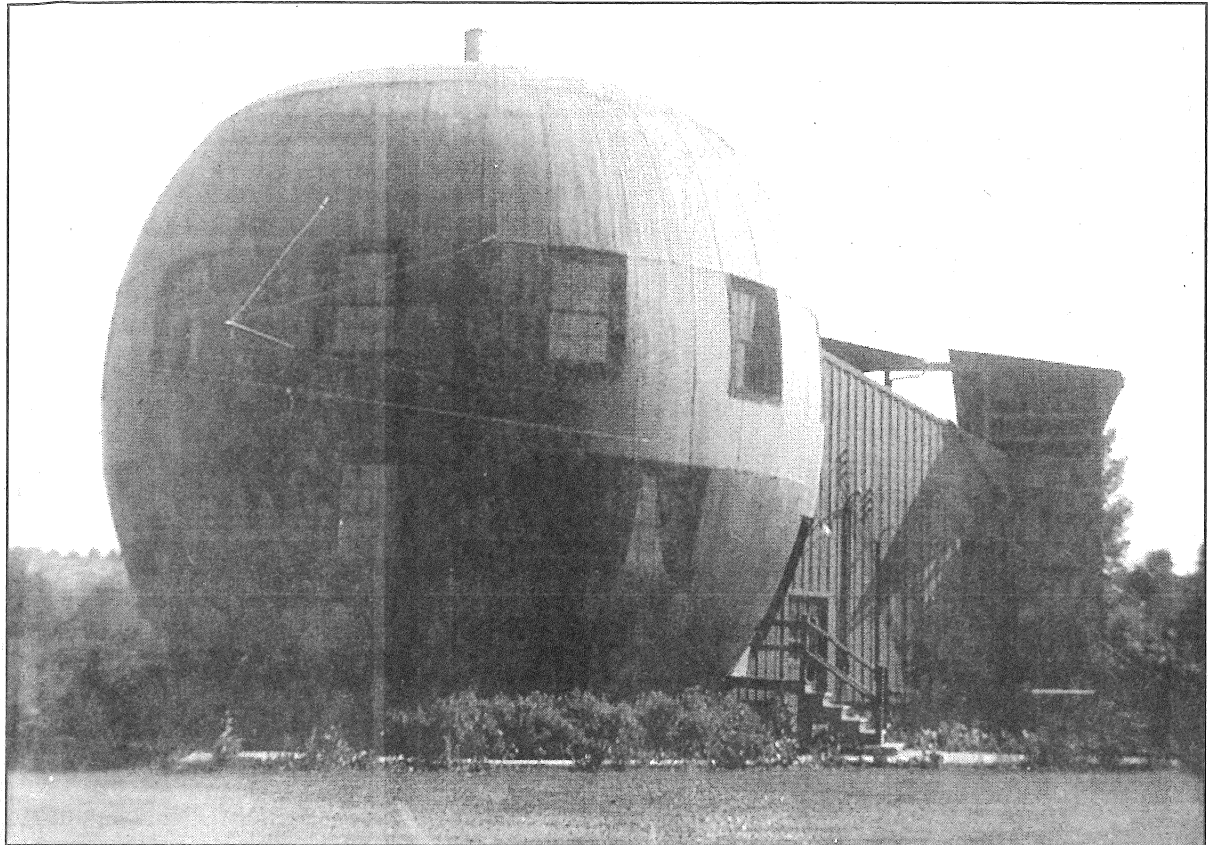
The Red Apple was even once listed in "Ripley's Believe It Or Not." It was listed in what is considered the canon of weird and unusual people and places as "The largest apple ever grown."

"It was just outstanding to see a large apple two stories high on the side of the road," Mr. Hunt said.

The Red Apple burned to the ground in the early 1930s. Another structure was built and it, too, burned in the mid-1930s. It was never rebuilt.

Fred Hunt still owns the family business, which is now called Hunt Supply Co. on Highway 36 in St. Joseph near Riverside Road.

*Tales of the Midland Empire is published weekly. If you know an unusual story, unusual bits of history or an unusual person in the area, call Alonzo Weston at 271-8574, (800) 779-6397 or e-mail him at [alonzow@mpgco.com](mailto:alonzow@mpgco.com).*



Submitted photo

**The Big Red Apple was a restaurant and dance hall in the 1920s near Wathena, Kan. At the time, Doniphan County was a large producer of apples.**



# An Architect's Clever Version of the Big Apple

**W**HENEVER a new dance craze, a popular radio or movie character or other much publicized figure is thrust into the limelight, restaurants and night-clubs, road stands and lunch wagons are immediately named after it. From Maine to California, a man motoring over state highways is confronted with signs recommending that he try the culinary delights at the "Three Little Pigs," the "Garbo," the "Charlie McCarthy" and other places named after the great and near great.

In fact one can almost tell the year in which the eating place was opened by the name given to it and transcontinental motorists have eased the boredom of their long trips by playing a guessing game with the names of the restaurants they pass along the way.

They all fall down when they pass through Wathena, Kansas, and glimpse

the Big Apple. While the dance itself is a recent one, the Big Apple, a large,

two-story dance hall and eating place shaped like an apple, with a coat of rosy colored paint and a chimney in the form of a stem, has been a Kansas land mark for many years.

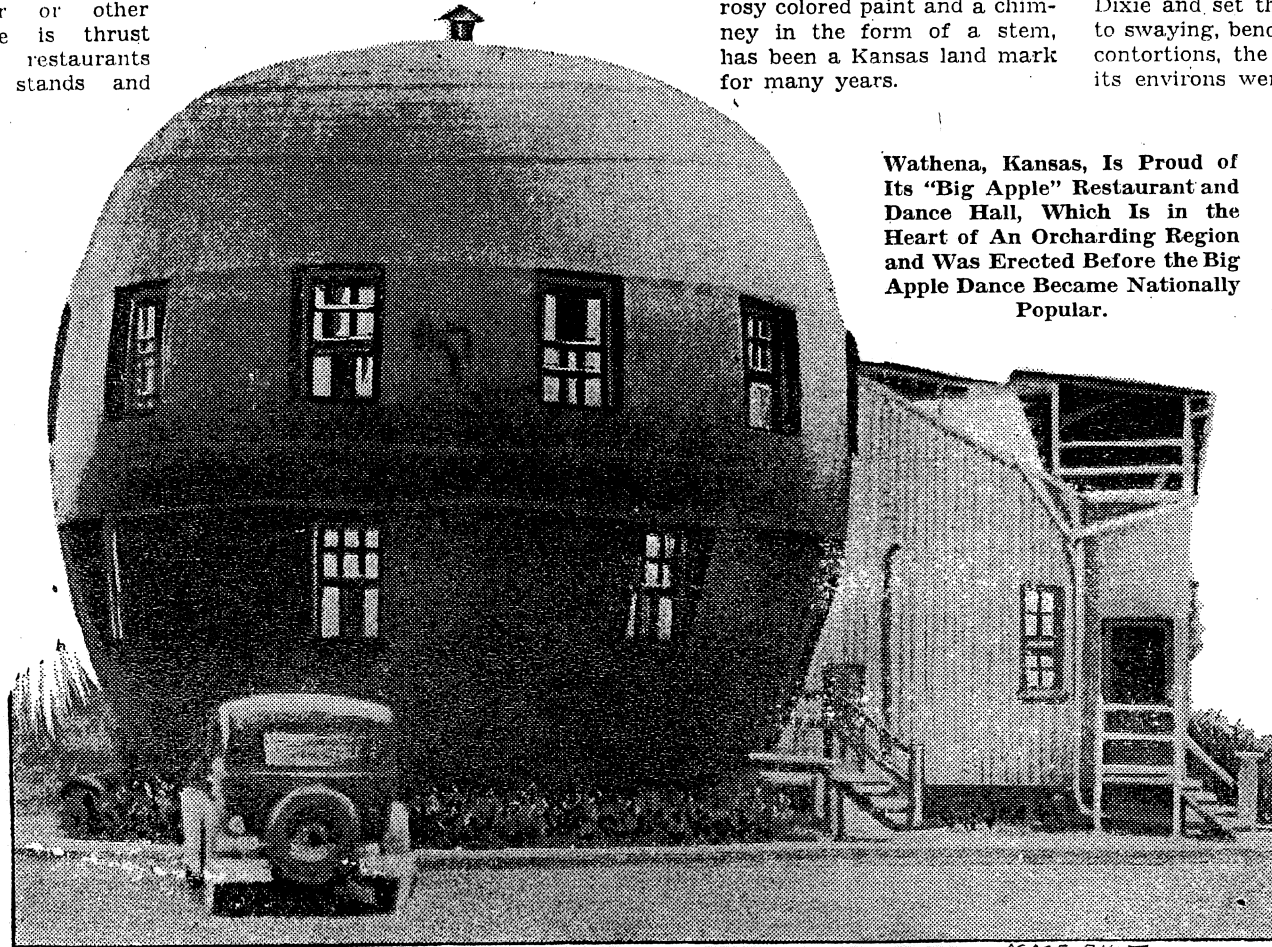
Long before the Big Apple dance craze swept over the country from Dixie and set thousands of youngsters to swaying, bending and going through contortions, the folks of Wathena and its environs were pointing to the Big Apple dance hall with pardonable pride.

**Wathena, Kansas, Is Proud of Its "Big Apple" Restaurant and Dance Hall, Which Is in the Heart of An Orcharding Region and Was Erected Before the Big Apple Dance Became Nationally Popular.**

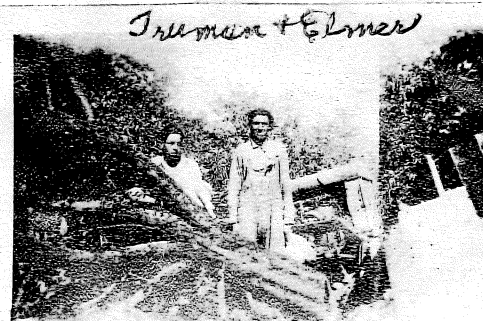
Living in a section of the state where big, luscious apples are grown, they felt the dance hall proprietor was doing his bit to publicize this fruit and the farmers who own the orchards.

The Wathenans showed their appreciation by patronizing the Big Apple and on Saturday nights, young blades with their hair slicked down and girls in their very best frocks, drive into town from miles around to meet at the novel dance hall to step to the latest dance tunes.

When the Big Apple craze hit Kansas recently, it found a dance hall already built to match it.



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*Truman Nold and Elmer Frey - taken at scene of George Nold's Tractor accident. He was in the hospital for sometime. HUNT'S ORCHARD 1929*

## Apple roadside oddity

It was called The Big Red Apple — and with good reason. It was 30 feet high and 100 feet in circumference. It was painted a beautiful apple-cheek red and was a structure designed in the familiar shape of the pome of Eden. Built in Doniphan County at the edge of the largest apple orchard in Kansas, it was located on U.S. Highway 36, eight miles west of St. Joseph near Wathena.

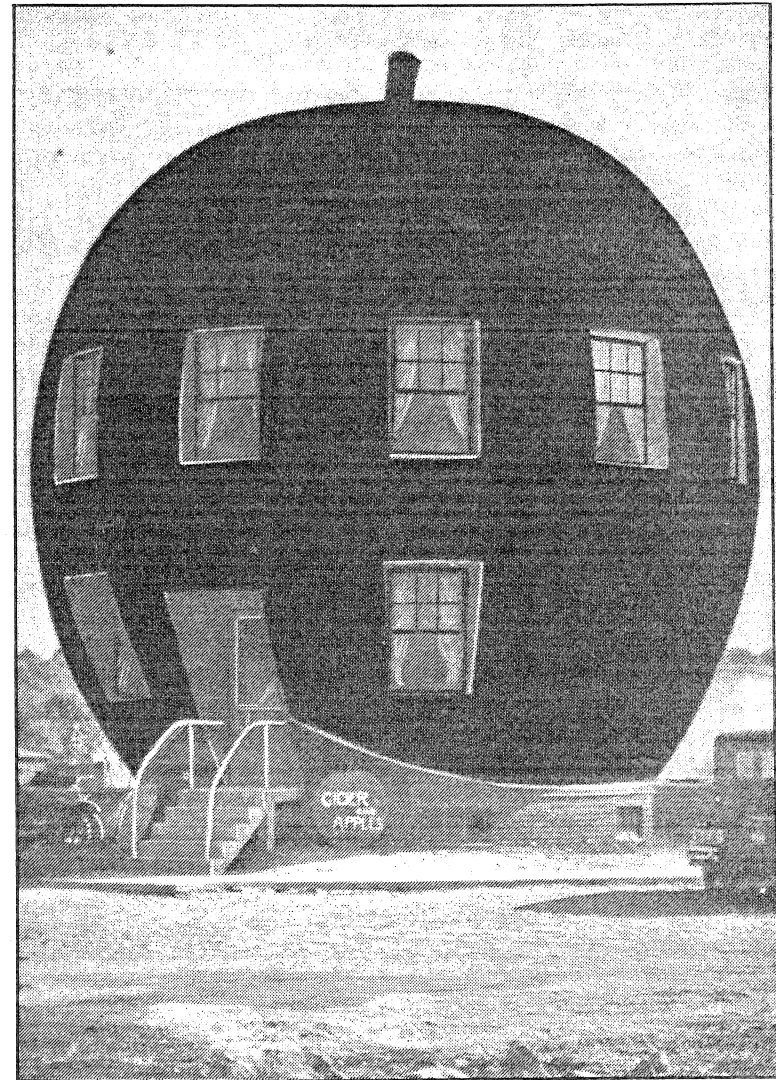
The Big Red Apple was originally conceived and constructed in the mid-1920s by Hunt Brothers Fruit Co. The firm billed the gigantic fruit-like edifice as the “largest apple ever grown.” Tourists were known to drive miles out of their way just to see the roadside oddity. St Joseph fathers, my own included, would drive the old autos across the new, free Missouri River bridge that had just opened in 1929 to treat the family to a Sunday visit to the Big

Red Apple by the side of the road.

As will be recalled, there was in the interior of the Apple an open staircase leading to the second floor, where space for dancing and a juke-box was provided and banquets were held. In addition at that location, one could buy snacks and fruits and vegetables. There was also at that site what was in those days called a tourist camp.

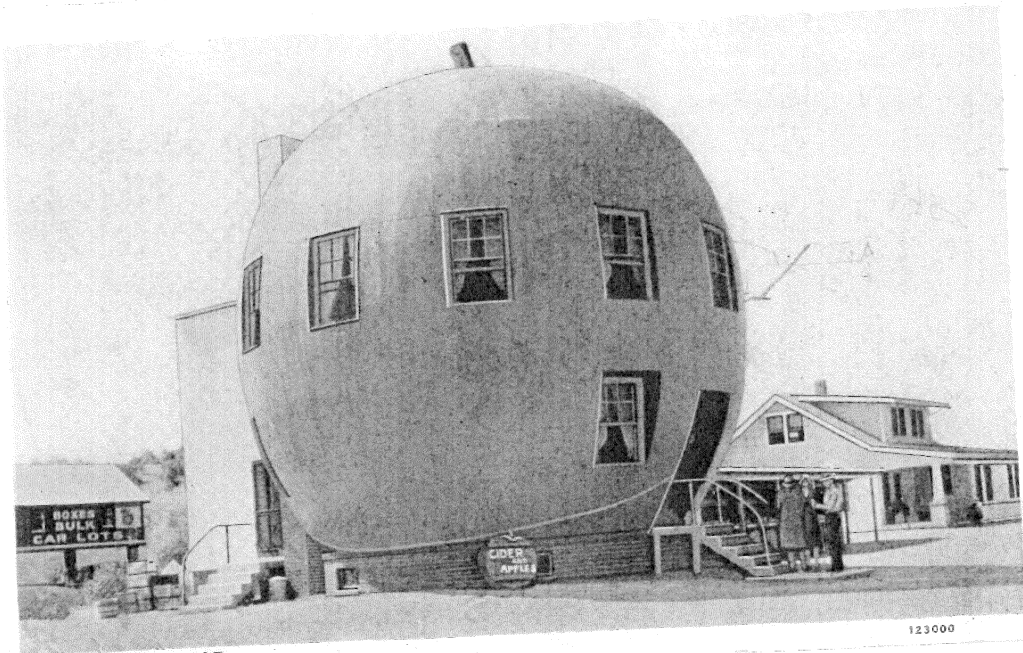
There were actually two editions of The Big Red Apple. The first burned to the ground in the early 1930s and was promptly rebuilt. The second apple was also destroyed by fire, never to rise again. According to Frederick C. Hunt of the Hunt Co., the second structure burned in the mid-1930s. At that time, there was talk of the possibility of arson, but nothing developed to prove this rumor as fact.

**Walt Drannan**



The Big Red Apple advertized nearby orchards.



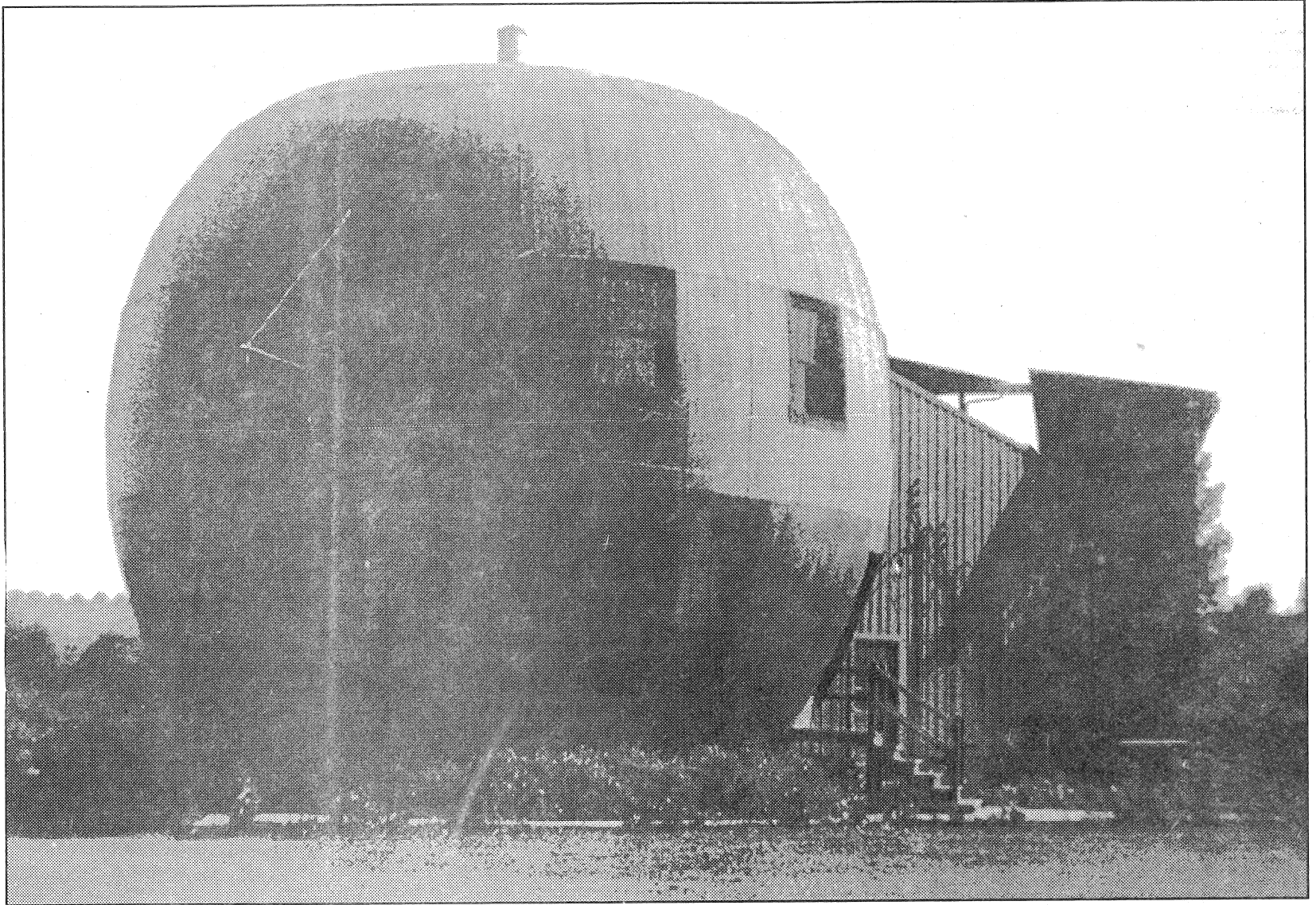


THE BIG RED APPLE

123000

# 'The Big Red Apple Restaurant' long gone, but not forgotten!

The Highland Vidette received a photo from one of our readers several months ago of the "Big Red Apple Restaurant" located just west of Wathena in the

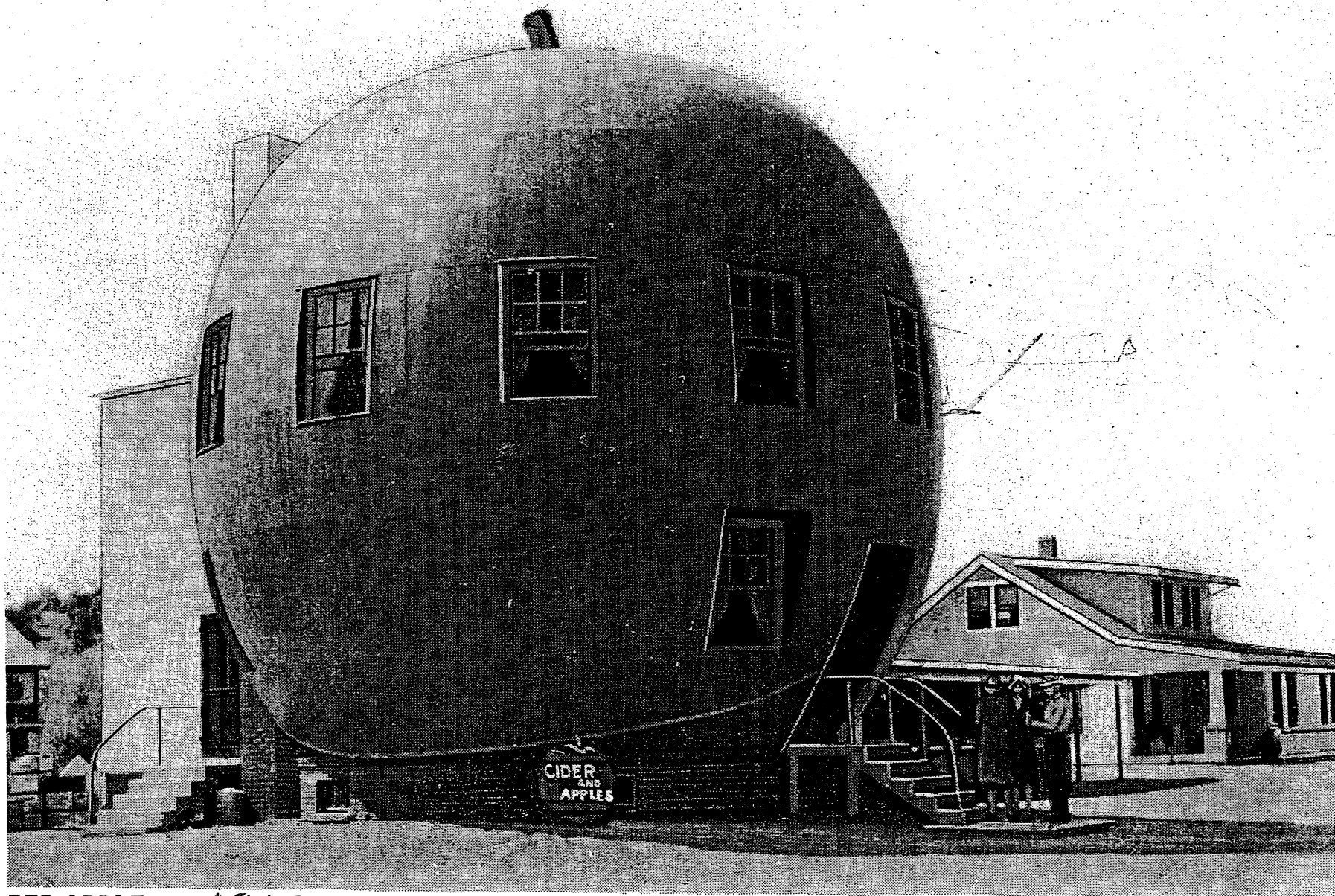


2-8-01

1920s. The younger members of our Northeast Kansas society do not remember that Doniphan County (along with northwest Missouri) was once a major apple growing region with some of the best orchards near Wathena. As late as the early 1970s, there were still a number of orchards in the eastern end of the county. Over the years, most of the apple trees have been chopped down and now there is only a few orchards left.

The above restaurant was one of the more colorful buildings and from reports of people who remember it, it served some pretty good food – especially barbeque ribs. The photo was taken by Alma Launder of Denver, Colorado, formerly of White Cloud, Kansas.





RED APPLE - 1929 -

BARRY POPIK  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
225 EAST 57TH STREET  
SUITE 7P  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022  
(212) 308-2635  
Bapopik@aol.com

28 June 1999

Conrihan County Historical Society

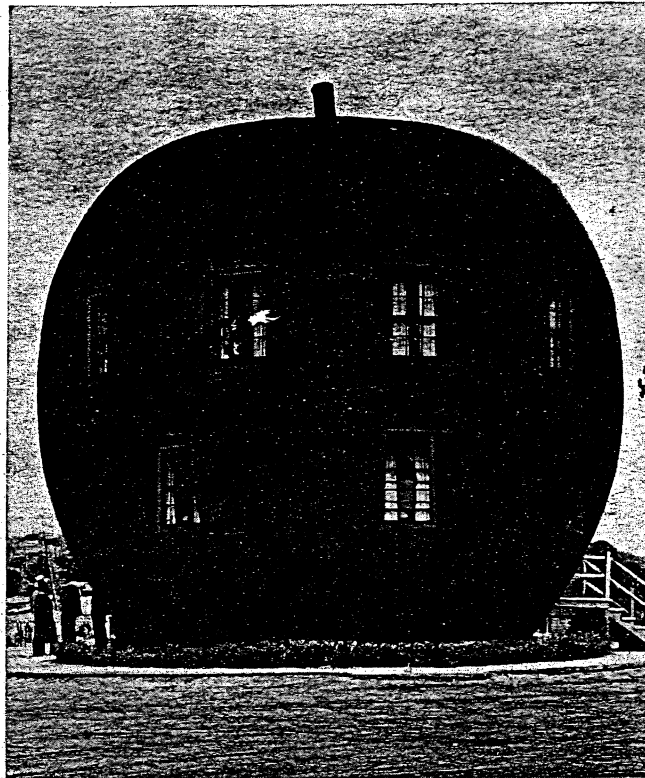
See the enclosed "Big Apple" of Wathing, KS.  
When was it built? Is it still there?

I will pay for copies of any records you have.  
You can also e-mail me, although I have a summer  
vacation July 2-22.

Barry Popik

(See my "Big Apple" work  
on the web page of the  
Museum of the City of New York  
[www.mcnyc.org](http://www.mcnyc.org))





# *The Big Red Apple*

Patented

Hunt Brothers, Owners

Cliff D. Woodbury, Mgr.

**It's A Wonder! Nothing Like It Anywhere!  
Largest Apple Ever Grown**

Thirty Feet High

Over One Hundred Feet Around

Novel Roof Garden with Dancing Floor

Dining Rooms, Both Public and Private

Fresh Fruits and Soft Drinks

Gasoline Service and Other Conveniences

Dinners

Lunches

Tourists Cottages

Rest Rooms

An Ideal Place to Entertain Your Parties and Friends

*Apples and Fresh Cider every day in the year*

We Cater to the Highest Class of Patronage

Eight Miles West of St. Joseph, Mo., on U. S. Highway 36.

Near Wathena, Kan.

Phone, Wathena C177

## ROOF GARDEN

### DINNER

Roast Pork	Potatoes	Roast Beef
Brown Gravy	Choice of Pie	Vegetable
Coffee	Tea	Milk
	85¢	

### FRIED CHICKEN DINNER

Cream Gravy	Potatoes	Salad
Hot Bread	Vegetable	
Coffee	Choice of Dessert	Milk
	Tea	
	\$1.50	

Ham & Eggs.....	85¢
Bacon & Eggs.....	85¢
Breaded Pork Chops.....	90¢
Chicken Soup A La Carte.....	20¢
Hot Tamales.....	20¢
Fried Chicken Sandwich.....	75¢

Try A Butter Kistwich Toasted Sandwich

All Sandwiches Toasted Unless Ordered Plain.

Hot Beef Sandwich with Brown Gravy.....	30¢
Hot Pork Sandwich with Brown Gravy.....	30¢
Red Apple Special Sandwich.....	40¢
Chicken Sandwich.....	40¢
Chicken Salad.....	35¢
Tomato & Bacon Sandwich.....	30¢
Roast Pork ".....	25¢
Roast Beef ".....	25¢
Baked Ham ".....	20¢
Ham Salad ".....	20¢
Swiss Cheese ".....	20¢
Cream Cheese ".....	20¢
Brick Cheese ".....	20¢
Lettuce & Tomato ".....	20¢
Peanut Butter & Jelly.....	20¢
Olive Sandwich.....	35¢

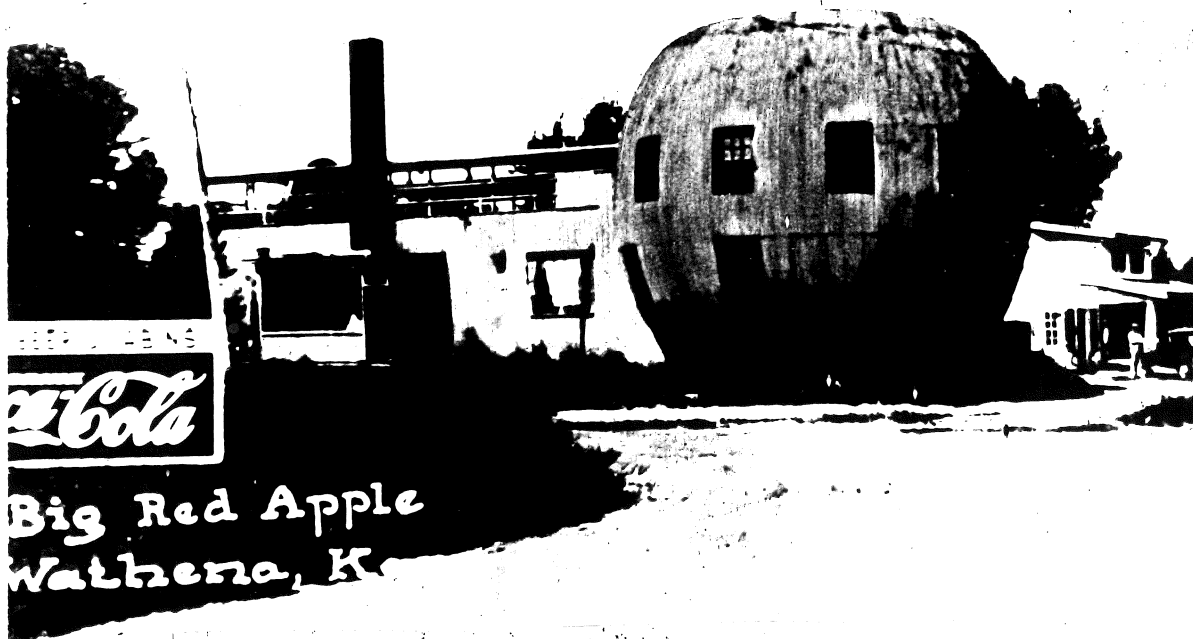
Home Made Pie Per Cut 15¢

Apple Pie Ala Mode -- Our Special 10¢

## ROOF GARDEN

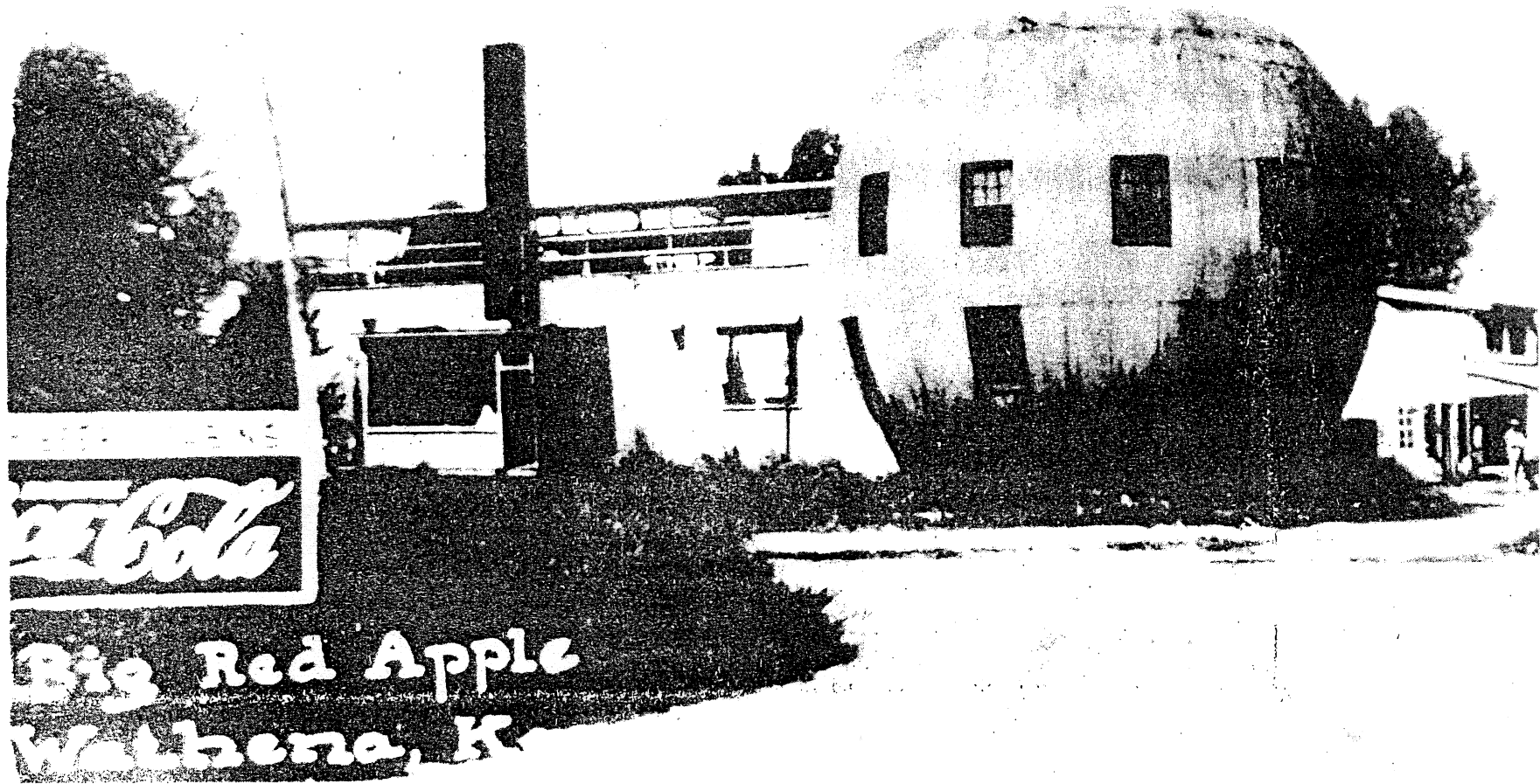
### FOUNTAIN DRINKS

Chocolate Fudge Sundae	20¢
Strawberry " "	20¢
Pineapple " "	20¢
Caramel Nut " "	25¢
Red Apple Special " "	30¢
Chocolate Ice Cream Soda	20¢
Strawberry " " " (Crushed Fruit)	20¢
Pineapple " " " " "	20¢
Vanilla " " "	20¢
Plain Ice Cream (Flavors)	15¢
Malted Milk (Any Flavor)	25¢
Hot Chocolate	15¢
Coca Cola	10¢
Root Beer	10¢
Orangeade lg.	15¢
All Phosphates	10¢
Country Club Beer	20¢
Lemonade	20¢
Limeade	15¢
Grapefruit Juice	15¢
Sweet Cider per mug	10¢



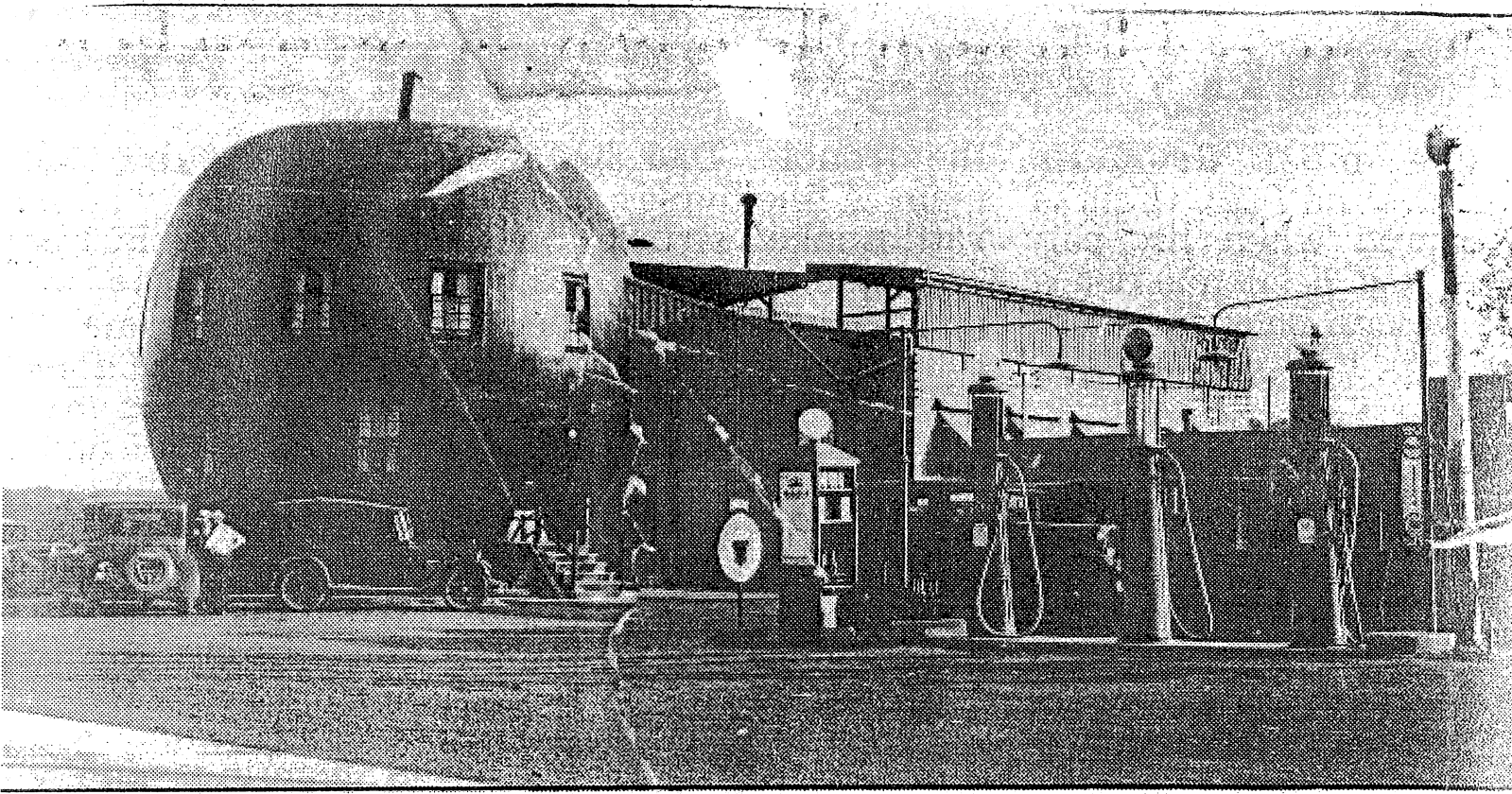
The Big Red Apple, denoting the Apple Industry of Doniphan County, was used as a tavern, motel, and dance hall. Fleek's Fruit Market is now located in the area where it once stood. The Big Red Apple attracted young ladies and gentlemen from communities in Doniphan County as well as Northwest Missouri. It burned.





"Big Red Apple" was located on U. S. 36, west of Wathena, near Fleek's old fruit market. The establishment, which was owned by the

Hunt Brothers, was known for its food and dancing.



# The Big Apple

The Big Apple restaurant was once located on highway 36 close to Elwood, Kan., and was known for its pies. Photo submitted by Carol Bruns, St. Joseph.

## Fred Frey dies at age of 77 years

Bellemont Cemetery 3-18-1881 - 1-29-1959

Fred Frey, 77, died of cancer Jan. 29 evening at 6:45 at his home. Mr. Frey was besought by a number of serious illnesses during his life-time, but always came back to work hard. He was active until about three months ago.

Mr. Frey was born in Bern, Switzerland March 18, 1881 and came to this country when a small boy. He had lived here for 34 years. He formerly managed orchards in the community. He was a member of the Methodist church.

He is survived by his wife of the home; four sons, Leslie of Eldorado, Ralph of Oceanside, Cal., Elmer of St. Jo, and Kenneth of St. Paul, Minn.; one daughter, Mrs. Howard Crane of Wathena; one sister, Mrs. Fannie Ammeter of Burns; nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Services were Sunday at the Methodist church, the Rev. Wm. H. DeLaughder officiating. Mrs. Kenneth Miller, vocalist, was accompanied by Mrs. P. F. Dubach. Burial was in Bellemont with arrangements by Harman's. Pallbearers were Leslie, Elmer, Kenneth and Rex Frey, P. F. Dubach and Howard Crane.

**The Red Apple**  
 located by Blair  
 Last month's  
*"Young at Heart"*  
 had The Red Apple  
 restaurant as located  
 by Elwood, Kan. It  
 was in fact between  
 Wathena and Blair. I  
 remember the Red  
 Apple. My aunt lived  
 a few blocks from it  
 and we could hear  
 the music. This  
 would be the late  
 1930s.  
**Dorothy Redmond Sollars**  
 Savannah, Mo.

Bellemont Cemetery - 1884 - 6-10 - 1963

## Mrs. Hulda M. Frey, 79

Mrs. Hulda Mary Frey, 79, died Monday night at a St. Joseph hospital.

Born in Junction City, Kansas, Mrs. Frey had resided in Wathena the last 37 years. She was a member of the Wathena Methodist Church.

Surviving are a daughter, Mrs. Alice Crane, Wathena; four sons, Leslie Frey, El Dorado, Kansas; Elmer Frey, St. Jo, Kansas; Ralph Frey, Oceanside, Cal., and Kenneth Frey, St. Paul, Minn.; a sister, Mrs. P. F. Dubach, Wathena; two brothers, Ralph Gfeller, Oklahoma City, Okla., and Edward Gfeller, Burns, Kansas; nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Services will be at 2 p.m., Thursday at the Wathena Methodist church, the Rev. Charles Minsch officiating. Paul Burket will be the soloist, accompanied by Mrs. Elsie Barnes Durham of St. Jo at the organ. Pallbearers will be Don Wilson, Robert Boeh, Quincy Grable, H. J. Hagan, Gordon Lieftring and Lee Shifflett. Burial will be in Bellemont cemetery.

The family requests that any donations for flowers be given to the cancer fund.

Arrangements by Harman Funeral Home, June 10, 1963

# Big Red Apple helped put Wathena, Kan., on the map

Fruit-shaped restaurant  
was even featured by Ripley

By ALONZO WESTON  
alonzow@npgco.com  
St. Joseph News-Press

WATHENA, Kan. — Wathena was once known for growing some of the best and largest apples in the country.

In fact, it once even had a two-story-high apple.

The Big Red Apple was a restaurant and dance hall that sat just outside of this Northeast Kansas burgh on U.S. Highway 36.

People came from miles around just to see the huge, red, apple-shaped building. And it wasn't only a unique dining and entertainment spot, but a clever marketing stratagem dreamed up by James Hunt, one of the owners of the Hunt Brothers Fruit Co., to help promote the

## Tales of the MIDLAND EMPIRE



local apple-growing business.

"My dad wanted to publicize apples here so he built it to get people thinking about apples," said Fred Hunt, son of James Hunt. "It was a unique patented design."

The Hunt Brothers Fruit Co. was well-

known in the apple-growing business throughout the nation. It also has a unique history.

The institution began sometime shortly after 1876 when retired St. Joseph physician G.W. Chase and his son, Ernest, opened G.W. Chase and Son produce company.

In 1904, Mr. Chase retired from the produce business, and the company was split between Ernest and James Hunt, who had married Mr. Chase's daughter, Clara.

Ernest Chase took his share from the company and formed the now-famous Chase Candy Co., while James Hunt took sole ownership of the fruit business. It became Hunt Brothers Fruit Co. after Mr. Hunt brought his brothers, George and Luther, into the business. It, too, was a lucrative business.

"At one time Missouri had more apple trees than any other state in the union,"

Fred Hunt said. "Doniphan County, Kan., was a tremendous fruit producer, too."

It was in the mid-1920s when James Hunt constructed the Big Red Apple. The structure stood 30 feet high and was 100 feet in circumference. It had a huge rectangular dance floor on the back.

Mr. Hunt remembered that the building could hold a number of people, which it often did on Friday and Saturday nights.

"It was mainly for parties," Mr. Hunt said. "It was going good around the same time the Frog Hop was going in Missouri."

Although Doris Widemer never went into the Red Apple she vividly remembered seeing it as a youngster growing up in Wathena.

"I was just a little kid when it was swinging out there," she said.

Please see Big/Page B4

THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2001

## Big Red Apple puts Wathena on the map

Continued from Page B1

"It just looked like a very good replica of a huge red apple."

"It was a beautiful place," remembered George Jones, Jr. "The Hunts had the biggest orchard this side of the Mississippi then."

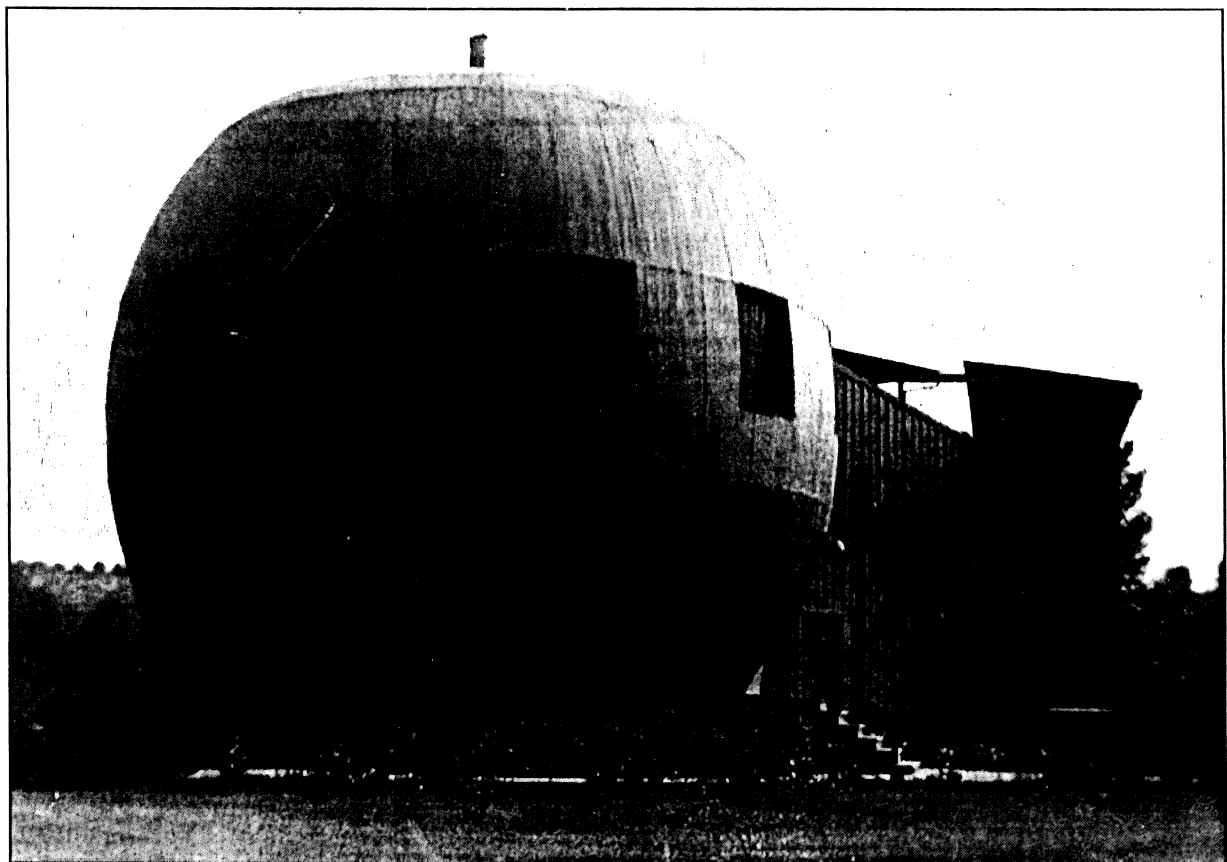
The Red Apple was even once listed in "Ripley's Believe It Or Not." It was listed in what is considered the canon of weird and unusual people and places as "The largest apple ever grown."

"It was just outstanding to see a large apple two stories high on the side of the road," Mr. Hunt said.

The Red Apple burned to the ground in the early 1930s. Another structure was built and it, too, burned in the mid-1930s. It was never rebuilt.

Fred Hunt still owns the family business, which is now called Hunt Supply Co. on Highway 36 in St. Joseph near Riverside Road.

*Tales of the Midland Empire is published weekly. If you know an unusual story, unusual bits of history or an unusual person in the area, call Alonzo Weston at 271-8574, (800) 779-6397 or e-mail him at alonzow@npgco.com.*



Submitted photo

The Big Red Apple was a restaurant and dance hall in the 1920s near Wathena, Kan. At the time, Doniphan County was a large producer of apples.