Lebanon to Apple Valley in just six years

and about Apple trees and Apple streets

By David Schreier and Bill Wolston

Thanks to Carla Costes and the Dakota County Survey Department for map support.

On January 1, 1969, Dakota County's Lebanon Township became the Village of Apple Valley. Why Apple Valley? Why not the Village of Lebanon?

Historically as villages were carved out of townships some took the township name as did Hampton and Castle Rock. Others like New Trier in 1856 and Sunfish Lake in 1958 picked new names. Apple Valley was different. It absorbed the township and also gave it a new name.

Actually changing a township's name was not unusual. Burnsville was originally Union, Eureka was Berlin, Randolph was Richmond. However, Apple Valley was different. While the others changed their names during the township's formation, Apple Valley waited 111 years before replacing the Lebanon name.

What preceded the change

By 1960 suburban housing had expanded from Minneapolis south through Bloomington and across the Minnesota River to Burnsville and the borders of Lebanon. Burnsville's population had increased five-fold between 1950 and 1960. In 1964 Burnsville organized as a village and annexed the northwest corner of Lebanon.

Lebanon differed from neighboring townships. It was all farm country. It didn't have a business center or even a rail stop within its borders. Most people shopped in the village of Rosemount, kids attended high school in Rosemount, and many worked in Rosemount.

In 1960 the population of Lebanon Township was 585 including residents of 153 new homes in the northern section. The township growth rate was only five per year since formation in 1858.

In 1961 another 72 homes were added in the north and then housing boom started. Four Bob's Garden View subdivisions were platted and built in 1962, totaling 112 homes. During the 1960s Lebanon's population grew by 800 per year.

Why Apple Valley?

In a 1976 Dakota County Tribune article Gary Thompson, son of Apple Valley builder Orrin Thompson, said his father chose Lebanon for a housing subdivision because, "it was a nice looking piece of land and available. It was close to the freeways but not on top of them." His father had decided the expected construction of highways 35E and 35W would make the development area more accessible.
Dakota County Tribune clipping announcing the first Apple Valley addition. Orrin Thompson's goal for the first year was 200 to 300 homes.

Orrin Thompson was a nationally recognized housing developer. He built over 4,000 homes from 1957 to 1962 in Bloomington, Cottage Grove, and Coon Rapids. He built what he called a complete community with a selection of homes, water and sewage systems, recreation and commercial facilities, and schools. His "complete community" approach would make its mark later when the vote was taken for a village name.

Apple Valley the subdivision, the subdivision, the subdivision, the......

The entry of Orrin Thompson into Lebanon resulted from his offer to buy out Henry and Arthur Broback who purchased the Bob Strese farm on County Road 42 west of Cedar. In 1962 the Brobacks had built 112 of a projected 507 homes when they sold out to Thompson. The completed homes were called Bob's Garden View.

Orrin started his first unit of 115 homes in 1963. He called it Apple Valley First Addition. Son Gary believes the name Apple Valley was suggested by a cousin, Dennis, because the area reminded him of the community Apple Valley, California. During 1963 two more Apple Valley subdivisions were completed on the north side of County Road 42.

From 1964 through 1968 Orrin Thompson built eight more Apple Valley subdivisions on the south side of the County 42. Orrin Thompson homes built from 1963 through 1968 totaled 1,556. During the same period other subdivisions accounted for less than 200 homes.

As the homes were built a row of stores was built near Garden View Drive on Highway 42. This was Lebanon's first business district in 113 years. A larger shopping center at the northwest corner of 42 and Cedar Ave. was soon underway.

The election of December 17, 1968

By the late 1960s Lebanon had a population large enough to qualify for incorporation as a village. The Lebanon planning commission discussed the possibility of including the Village of Rosemount and calling the new village West Rosemount. The township petitioned the State Municipal Commission for village status.

The commission approved presenting the question to voters at the November 1968 general election. The voters were given a two-question ballot. They were asked, should the town of Lebanon be incorporated as a village, and if yes, should the name be Lebanon or Apple Valley.
Map of the City of Apple Valley total area. Locations of Apple Valley and Greenleaf additions are noted.

The voters chose to incorporate as a village and they also chose Apple Valley as the new village’s name. As could be expected longtime residents of Lebanon picked Lebanon. Lebanon was also selected by new residents in the northern section. It didn’t matter. They were simply outnumbered by voters in the Apple Valley additions.

Orrin Thompson’s “Complete Community” approach had just expanded to include the entire township. In truth the residents of the Apple Valley subdivision considered themselves a community. They had the only community water service, the only sewer service, the only nearby stores. And they were forming civic and social organizations. They were the modern day pioneers of the out lands.

**Thompson builds without Apples . . . except**

With the incorporation of the township as the Village of Apple Valley Orrin Thompson dropped Apple Valley as a subdivision name. The firm built ten more subdivisions from 1969 through 1975 with the name Greeneleaf. The subdivisions totaling 1,154 homes were located primarily in the northeast of the village.

The one "Apple" exception was a 1973 "Apple Valley East" subdivision in the southeast. It included 49 homes.

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This article on Apple Valley actually had roots in a conversation with former DCHS President Carlyle Mitchell. At the time Carl lived in Apple Valley. In fact he had lived there for several years and was active in the community.

Carl mentioned that the streets of his Apple Valley subdivision were named after types of Apple trees. He went on further to say that apple trees were planted at each home by Orrin Thompson. At the time I took him to mean the tree planted at a house matched the street name. I thought it would be interesting to have an article giving a historical account of the trees. Possibly including recipes homeowners had for their streets’ apple pie or if their apples were good for dunking.

Carlyle was going to gather up information on the subject. Unfortunately he was transferred to Arizona by his employer The St. Paul Companies.

Since Carlyle’s departure two other Apple Valley residents have accepted the challenge and failed. Finally David Schreier, from Eagan, made some checks and found some houses with apple trees but really no one who could verify that the trees were routinely planted by the Thompson organization.

**To the best source**

I was surprised and pleased when I learned the Thompson Company is still in the housing business and that Gary Thompson is chairman of the board. I called him asking about Apple Valley and the apple trees and streets.
The Apple Street area of Apple Valley centered in the northern half of Section 33. The major apple street is Whitney Drive. Photo left is the intersection of Fireside and McIntosh.

I learned the first three Apple Valley housing additions had streets named after trees but not apple trees. Their names were:

- Redwood
- Pinewood
- Elm

One notable naming exception was Strese Lane and Strese Circle. The naming was certainly a recognition of Bob Strese the original landowner.

**Now the Apple trees**

The street names for the next housing additions built south of County Road 42 were "Apple" trees. Gary Thompson believes the plan was to plant an apple tree on every lot. While it's possible that a tree planted at a house matched the street name Gary doubts it. It's also possible that apple trees were limited to people purchasing homes in the Fourth Addition, the first with "Apple Streets."

**The Apple Streets**

Additions with Apple streets were the Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth. The street names are:

- Baldwin
- Duchess
- Haralson
- Jonathan
- Oriole
- Ramsdell

- Beacon
- Fireside
- Hoover
- McIntosh
- Pennock
- Regent

- Cooper
- Golding
- Kent
- Minjon
- Porter
- Whitney

- Cortland
- Greening
- Lowell
- Newell
- Redwell

It still seems there should be Fireside trees on Fireside Drive and Beacons on Beacon Lane.

Maybe early Apple Valley residents were fortunate. By the time Orrin Thompson's Greenleaf additions were built the new metro street naming system went into effect. Under the new system early Apple fourth addition residents would be limited to Haralson or Hoover.