



## Interview with Carroll Barclay

Under the Auspices of the  
Monmouth County Library Headquarters  
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.  
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

**Date of Interview:** October 9, 1999  
**Name of Interviewer:** Lydia Wikoff  
**Premises of Interview:** Ms. Wikoff's home, Manalapan, NJ  
**Birthdate of subject:** May 3, 1926



**Carroll Barclay**

**Mr. Barclay:** I'm pleased to be included in what seems to be a very interesting oral history, and I think it's worth while. I hope that I can contribute something. As Lydia said, my name is Carroll Barclay, and my roots are in my grandparents' families back to the Barclays that were in Cranberry. There was a John Barclay there at the turn of the century; he must have been about twenty or twenty-five years old at the turn of the century. He was an apple grower, and they actually called him The Apple King of New Jersey during his heyday from the early 1900s until end of the 1920s. He was interesting, as an apple grower, and I'll talk a little more about apple growing later. I'll just go through the family background first. John Barclay Sr. had three sons. My father was Carroll; John had another son, Charles and a youngest son, John, and a daughter, Marian. They all grew up on a farm on Dye Rd. in Cranberry. The maternal side of my family was Applegate. There was Charles Richard Applegate, who was also an apple grower. He was married to Carrie Hutchinson. Her middle name was Woodward, so that gives you some indication of the families that were involved on that side of the family. The Woodwards were from here in Monmouth County, I believe, and the Hutchinsons may have been from Mercer. The Applegates were farmers here in Monmouth County. My grandfather's father was a farmer. I often ask my father what they did when they first came over from Scotland, and he said, "I think they were bricklayers in Princeton." In any case, my grandfather Applegate had a more interesting or different background in getting into apple growing. He didn't start out like I think Grandfather Barclay did. Grandfather Applegate, when he was married to Carrie Hutchinson, was in to New York and

was working for a cousin in hardware, and Carrie was making hats. My mother was the first one to be born in 1900. She was born in New York while they were working there, and they made a decision to come out of New York. The way I was told, it was not a good place to bring up children, so they came back out to Monmouth County where they had their roots and lived in Colts Neck Township, which was Atlantic Township at that time in 1901. They moved in with my grandmother's parents and they were sharecropping on a farm that's only about a mile from where I live in Colts Neck Township. Subsequent to that they moved and became sharecroppers on Wemrock Road in Freehold on what is now the Oakley place, as we call it. They had another child, Richard. The children were I guess eleven months apart, my mother being born in New York and Richard being born in Monmouth County. They had another son, Leslie, who was born eleven years after my mother. He was what we would call "second crop."



**Carroll Barclay's  
mother, Ruth  
Applegate Barclay**

They got their start there on the Oakley place, and there were many stories that my grandmother used to tell. But it was owned by a lawyer in Freehold by the name of Hartshorne, and he would drive out in a very expensive big automobile and pull up in the yard. And he would point to a chicken and say, "Carrie, that's a nice looking chicken there," and before he went back to town he would have a chicken and some eggs and some things out of the garden. And that just didn't set very well as my grandmother used to tell the story. It just seems though they were working for someone else and they weren't real happy about that. It's interesting how my grandfather Applegate got into fruit growing. The story goes that a hay rake broke down at the time they were on the Oakley farm. It was just a general farm, a dairy, and crops as most Monmouth County farms were; there might have

been a few apple trees out there. Yes, the story goes that the hay rake broke down one summer afternoon and my grandfather Charles Applegate went over to the Carr farm to get a repair part for it, maybe. He was gone all afternoon. He had spent the afternoon talking with the Carrs. That farm was where the Monmouth Battlefield is, and they were close neighbors about a mile away from where my grandfather was farming. And apparently they talked all afternoon about how good it would be for Charlie Applegate to get into apple growing. I guess that was the spark that set him out to become an apple grower, and it wasn't very long after that that they stopped share cropping and bought a farm on Wemrock Road which is now part of the Battleground Park, and he planted his first apple trees. As I recall it was about 1906 or 1907; my mother would've been about seven years old. And he planted that farm, which was a very sandy farm, but it would grow apple trees, and he started his fruit growing there. Within fifteen to twenty years, Charles Applegate, my grandfather, had planted the rest of that orchard that was on the battleground and he had close to 300 acres by 1928.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Carroll, wasn't this called the Parsonage Farm? It was called this because at one time our minister, William Tennent, lived there. The house was located in the heat of the battle. In fact, a cannonball went right through the house.

**Mr. Barclay:** That's right, it was called the Parsonage Farm, and when I was a young boy, I hunted on that farm and that was planted to apple trees sometime in the 1920s.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Did you ever find any cannonballs?

**Mr. Barclay:** Yes, there were always cannonballs sitting on the hearth in my uncles' homes, and they were turning them up right regularly. My grandfather also bought the farm on the corner of Wemrock Road; it was the Perrine farm on the corner of what is now old Route 33. So, actually he owned several farms on Wemrock Road and in that battleground area. I'm going to talk a little bit now about apple growing at that time. I see my two grandfathers as being quite different in their attitude toward the fruit business. Grandfather Barclay, known as the Apple King in New Jersey, was very, very particular. He believed that you could only grow apples if you concentrated on a small acreage, managed it very closely, and he probably did much of the work himself to get it done right. His orchard was probably never more than thirty or forty acres. He won all the prizes at the Trenton fairs. He won many prizes at other fairs and he was very proud of that, but you know, it didn't make a lot of money, as my father said. And actually Grandfather Barclay never, never became a very wealthy or large apple grower. At that time, apples were grown on many of the farms. There were a lot of orchards, but most of them were twenty or twenty-five acres maybe even ten acres, and they were part of the other farming operations. It's interesting at this point, that you would still use horse power probably, because most of it the tractors were just beginning to come in. Equipment was very limited and there were diseases to be controlled and insects and it was rather difficult. Grandfather Applegate began to expand and see the opportunities if you could handle 100 or 200 acres. He realized that selling to New York and Philadelphia in the 1920s was very lucrative. If you could get the volume, the apples would sell, and there was money to be made. Well, at the same time, equipment was being improved, and sprayers were larger, and tractors became more reliable. So he saw the opportunity for more acreage and made opportunities for himself. An interesting side here is that Delicious Orchards in 1911 was named by a man the name of Fred Lerch, who came in to Monmouth County after making quite a lot of money in mining in the west. He thought that apple growing would be a great enterprise, and he hired Grandfather Barclay, who was an expert, to help him lay out the orchard that was set in 1911 in Colts Neck. Lerch got the expertise from my grandfather, but unfortunately, he didn't hire a good manager for the orchard.



**Charlie Leonard tending to the original trees, 1911**

So from 1911 when the orchard was planted until 1923, he got almost no fruit whatsoever. He put money into a storage and packinghouse, and of course growing the trees, and at its time, it was one of the largest orchards in the area. There may have been some in South Jersey that were as large as that, but a 100-acre apple orchard was a large orchard. Well, he put his nephew on it to manage it and it never produced any apples. And in 1923, or late 1922, he put it on the market for \$50,000.

Grandfather Applegate mortgaged every farm that he had and scraped up all the money he could find and put a down payment on it. That was a lot of money in those days, but he eventually bought it when it was eleven years old in the early 1920s. The farm, 100 acres of fruit, needed good management to make money, so he put my father on that farm to manage it along with his daughter, Ruth, my mother. She had married Mr. Barclay from Cranberry, son of John. And he was about twenty-six years old at that time and my father knew the apple business. My father and my mother had been married in I think 1919, so you had the marriage here of two apple growers or their daughter and son. And you had my grandfather Applegate saying here's an opportunity to take over a 100 acre orchard that's in its prime years.

The trees were thirteen years old then. And he was able, as I said, to buy it, and then to manage it by using the skills of his son-in-law and his daughter. And they moved into the house down on Route 537, east of Colts Neck where I live now, where I was born. My mother moved in there in 1923. She had a very young daughter, my sister, who was only about I think sixteen months old. This old farmhouse on Delicious Orchards was rather beautiful, but not very well equipped. It had no water inside, it had no plumbing, and it had no heat except fireplaces, and no electricity yet, down on that road in Colts Neck. The interesting part was that when she got married in 1919, her father Charles Applegate had built her a beautiful home with steam heat, electric, all the amenities, including bathrooms. She had lived there for three or four years prior to moving down to Delicious Orchards. She also thought she was moving into the sticks because she had been living just outside of Freehold which was the county seat. Freehold Township and that area that they were living in was certainly a more progressive area. I don't know how to describe it, but it had good potato farms, it had good soil out west of Freehold, and wealthy farmers had moved into town in the 1800s and early 1900s. It was a prosperous community. It had five or six churches in it, it had The Women's Club, and I think a Cecilian Music Club, and all these things that were my mother's interests. And here she moved down seven miles out of town, and she



**The Barclay Family (Carroll Barclay bottom left)**

seemed to feel that she had left all her friends and all her interest in Freehold. Well, she was told by the Mayor of Little Silver not to worry, that she had moved into the heart of the world. And sure enough, of course Colts Neck and Scobeyville, where this farm was located, was fairly close to Red Bank where the railroad was going through or had gone through. You had people commuting into New York already in the early 1920s from Red Bank and Rumson.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Carroll, could I also mention that your farm was adjacent to Laird's Distillery, which was an operation at that time. I believe also apples could be sold there. I thought that might be of interest.

**Mr. Barclay:** Yes, it was right next door on the corner of Laird Rd. and Laird's Distillery was one of the major distilleries even at that time in Monmouth County and New Jersey. About Laird's Distillery: For making applejack, Laird purchased the lowest quality apples, paying very low prices, only enough to cover handling. For growers it was a salvage or cleanup operation. I remember prices paid as low as twenty-five cents to fifty cents per CWT, or ten cents to twenty cents per bushel. Top quality apples, packed and shipped to New York would bring two dollars and fifty cents to three dollars per bushel, so growers did not deliver more apples to Laird than necessary. So my father was quite successful in making this orchard pay, and during the 1920s, farming in Monmouth County was a good business. At some time during that time, Monmouth County had the highest farm income of any county in the United States. That was to be short lived, we might say, because the Depression came in the 1930s and apple prices dropped to one third of what they were in the 1920s. And it became very, very discouraging for my father. So discouraging that he wished he were doing something else, and by the mid 1930s, about 1936 or 1937, when I was about eleven years old, he left home. He continued to operate the farm until the early 1940s until about the time the World War II broke out. And then there was a divorce between my mother and father. And my mother, because of the way her father's will had been set up (and he was quite wealthy when he died in 1929), she got the farm. When she took it over, it was appraised at thirty-five thousand dollars. The mortgage, which was in trust as long as her mother lived, was thirty-three thousand dollars, so my mother started all over again in 1943 with an equity of only about five thousand dollars. Meantime, my father had profited from this wealth gotten during the good years in agriculture in Monmouth County, and he moved to Florida with the money that he had made during those years: about one hundred thousand dollars. Somewhere in there I came along. I was born May 3, 1926. I went to the local schools. Atlantic Township wasn't noted as having the best, but we were out of the one room school situation by that time. We had a consolidated school, and in eight grades about one hundred and twenty pupils. When you got to eighth grade, you were bussed on into Red Bank and went to the Red Bank High School. I worked reasonably hard to make good grades in high school. And about the time my mother and father were going through the divorce process, I decided that I didn't want to take the farm with my father. So I went off to college for one year in Syracuse, actually to study to be a doctor. Subsequently, my

mother got the farm and started to operate it by herself. When I came back from college, I joined her in the enterprise of fruit growing. This was 1944. I started in January at the tender age of seventeen. We worked very hard to rebuild the orchard into a strong commercial orchard. It was difficult, because by this time, the original trees that were planted in 1911 were getting old and had been pretty well used up. I got my education from my uncles. Let's see, I had two uncles on my mother's side, Dick Applegate and Leslie Applegate, who were apple growers, and I had two apple growers on my father's side, John and Charles. Both my grandfathers at this point had died in 1929 when I was very young. But I got my apple orchard education from my uncles and from Rutgers Extension Service. One of the things I learned was that every apple grower had his own style and his own way of doing things. If you ask my four uncles a puzzling question, they would respond four different ways, because each one of them had different attitudes about how to run an apple orchard. I soon found out that it had a lot to do with your personality and your attitude toward money and markets and people. And there was a lot more to it than just what was in the science of fruit growing in the book. Well, we had the benefit of some years just before World War II ended when apple prices went back up. And through the early to the late 1940s and even into 1950s, we were able, my mother and I, to plant new trees, build cold storage, buy other farms, and plant more orchards, to replace the ones that were old on Delicious Orchards. For about seventeen years we were what you would call commercial or wholesale apple growers selling to supermarkets and for export. But the bottom fell out of the price of apples in the late 1950s, and it was very, very low prices. We were in debt due to buying farms and putting up cold storage and buying equipment. And the mortgages just became more than we could handle with the price of apples falling back into prices that were back into the 1930s. Of course in the meantime, taxes and labor were going up, in Monmouth County. And there was a decision made in the spring of 1959: we either were going to sell the farm and get out and do something else, or we would go into the retailing of fruit and cider. We made a decision, I say we, my mother, my wife, Janet, and I. I haven't talked much about Janet, but I will. But Janet, and my mother, and I made this decision to go into the retail business. And it was quite a decision because when you're in the wholesale business, you don't have to deal with customers, and you don't have to deal with many other things that you have to do when you get into retail. And you're open Saturday and Sunday because that's where your major sales are, and it becomes a whole different way of life. So we did manage to get enough money together to build a little red building on Route 537. The first year we started to sell cider and the apples from the farm, we were joined by my sister, and her husband, Caroline Barclay Smith and William E. Smith. He had been a potato grower and corn grower in Freehold for quite some years, and my mother felt that he could take care of the orchards, if I took care of the retail which we did. We had a family enterprise and from 1959 to 1966 we operated out of this little red building on Route 537. And, I think Lydia is going to add in here that we started to make pies in the farmhouse.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Oh, I remember that very well. Because Carroll and Janet had been a life long friends of mine. We had played cards, and we would get together, and Carroll and Janet had to give up their beautiful dining room because they were making their pies in their dining room, and Carroll was making donuts in the shed. And it was funny, because when we would go there, it smelled so wonderful! Those two operations just have a wonderful aroma. But they really did sacrifice by starting to bake the pies, and of course they were so good, that it just kind of mushroomed from there, and Carroll will tell you that story.



**Pie production in the  
Barclay house, October 1967**

**Mr. Barclay:** There are other sources for that story, but the business did grow very, very fast. And we kind of outgrew our dining room for production of the bakery, and we were really outgrowing the red building that we had built on Route 537. The town fathers also felt that what with the traffic that we were creating in what was really a farm zone, or I guess an agricultural zone, we should really go to the commercial zone in Colts Neck, which we did in 1966. We built the first building there. We had an orchard that we had bought way back in the 1940s and a piece of land in that zone. We put up the first building and had to go into debt again in order to do it. It seemed like a very, very big move, and in essence it really was, but the business continued to grow, and we had to add on to that facility many times in the next ten or fifteen years. In the 1980s, the family transferred ownership to three very strong and capable employees, and they have continued to run it and operate it very much in the same way and spirit and the quality that it always had. I'm very proud of them; they're like my own kids, so to speak. The three men who bought it were there for quite a number of years while I was operating it.

**Ms. Wikoff:** What were their names?

**Mr. Barclay:** The head, let me say, the senior partner, the older man, was Tom Gesualdo. The young fellow who had come in with Janet to the bakery was Frank McMahon. He came out of trade school in his teens, and was probably thirty-five years old when he became partner. Then a young fellow by the name of Bill McDonald in the produce department came to work for me when he was seventeen years old, and he took over the produce department when he was only about twenty or twenty-one years old. So at this time I'm speaking here, he's been there twenty-five years. He found his wife, Linda Garrett, at Delicious Orchards and they have four beautiful children, so he's as near to being my son and his children, my grandchildren as can be. The other part of this is, when we transferred Delicious Orchards, it was necessary to keep the orchards separate, and my son David, fourth generation fruit grower, took on that enterprise and still

continues to run it. It was originally selling all its fruit to Delicious Orchards, but he transformed it into a "pick your own" operation, where he is selling directly to the customers at retail.



**Three generations of Barclays (from left to right) Carroll, Ruth, and David**

**Ms. Wikoff:** He named that Eastmont Orchards, didn't he?

**Mr. Barclay:** That's named Eastmont Orchards to make a clear separation from Delicious Orchards. Yes, that has his home on it, and it also has my house that I was born in and still live in, that my mother moved to, in 1923. David is a fourth generation Barclay or Applegate, whichever way you want, it's both sides of the family.

**Ms. Wikoff:** Please tell us about the Land Preservation Program.

**Mr. Barclay:** I think that's important, and that was David's decision to sell the development rights and keep the land in agriculture far into the future.

Janet and I had transferred the farmland to David quite some years ago. And in fact, the final closing with the state is still pending, but he has received a citation from the Colts Neck Township, congratulating him on transferring the development rights to the to the state program. So that 100 acres of orchard, which is Eastmont and was originally Delicious Orchards, will be preserved in agriculture for a long, long while.

**Ms. Wikoff:** I would like to add that this home that Carroll told about that had no electricity, no running water, or anything to make it livable then, is now a treasure. It's a gem--very old and beautifully restored and we should be very proud of that home.

**Mr. Barclay:** Thank you. I am very pleased to be living in it.

