

Two weeks ago the beloved apple tree in Tarr's Field fell over. A single wilted branch pointed to the sky. Jud Brown captured its demise in the following message.

THE ANCIENT APPLE TREE

The ancient apple tree at the center of Tarr's Field had become a wonder to us all, and more so each year when we returned to find a more capacious dark hollow where there had been heartwood, a thinner partial ring of enclosing crusty bark, and a few crooked branches still eking out leaves and blossoms with a chance of evolving into a few knurled apples in the fall.

Almost every family on the island has pictures of loved ones happily huddled inside the tiny hermitage the trunk had become— giving a different meaning to heartwood, I suppose.

This apple tree and a companion specimen at the edge of the field riddled with holes from the work of sapsuckers are the last remnants of what had been a small orchard and a modest farmstead in the original version of human settlement on the island. Under nearby pines lie ancient gravestones with clues to the hard and hearty livings scraped out year-round here a century or so ago.

There was a photograph posted this May 25 entitled "Hanging in There" showing the tree holding up a bouquet of blossoms on a bright spring noon. It looked like the tree — and you could say truthfully at this point the whole community along with it — had been granted another year of grace.

But it wasn't to be.

The revered eminence suffered a sudden, massive, solitary collapse at an unknown hour.

Upon its discovery, word of the catastrophe spread quickly through the grapevine. I went to take a look. At the base of the wreckage there was just a dark well of humus enriched with decades of decay. No sign of even a shred of a root. At the prow of the shipwreck, however, a branch like a raised bowsprit was bravely waving green leaves like semaphores in the golden evening light.

There was talk someone was taking cuttings.

But I wasn't entirely convinced the Great One was finished yet.

There is, indeed, the possibility of "taking cuttings" and the possibility of other remembrances of respect. While these options are being researched and explored, please forbear from sawing or chopping pieces of this much venerated tree.

Here are some of Jud's pictures.

