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MAPLE SUGAR-MAKING, *A Vanishing Industry*

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By S. S. LAPPIN.

THERE was a day, far distant, but remembered by oldest residents, when thousands of pounds of maple sugar and "tree molasses" were shipped from southern Indiana. Now the output is not of commercial importance, the total product of the season being absorbed locally. The sugar maple (acer saccharum), one of the most useful and most beautiful of Indiana's native trees, is fast following the yellow poplar toward obscurity if not extinction. The tree is of value for timber, being used in the manufacture of furniture as well as for building purposes. Its limbs, slabs, knots and leftover parts rank among the five best as firewood.

The graceful form of the growing tree, with its truly marvelous colorings at autumn time make it "tops" as an ornamental growth in town and country.

But, from the days when Indians evaporated the sweet sap by crudest means to our own time, maple sugar and maple sirup have been the most highly appreciated product of farm wood lots.

Other Trees Yield Sirup.

Many of our native trees yield sweet sap. It is not generally known, I think, that the black walnut, the ash, and the soft maples produce a good flow in early spring and that when this is mixed with that of the hard maple no difference can be discerned. The sap of these trees and perhaps others that have not been tried produce a good quality of "maple sirup" when properly treated. But its more abundant flow marks the harder maples, the black sugar, the Norway maple, our common sugar tree and their near kin as high-ranking dispensers of sylvan sweetness.

The farmer's job of sugar making is an off-season activity. When he has no other pressing task and when there is no income from his tillable acres he turns to the farm woodlot and his sugar orchard. The preparation for it may fall in bleak weather when snow flurries and light freezes are frequent. Wood, not of value for any other purpose, is reduced to furnace size and length. The evaporating pan is scouted out and soldered where rust may have damaged. Cobwebs are swept down and buckets scalded. The trees are tapped, the larger ones in two or three places, and buckets hung on iron spikes driven into augur holes.

Obstacles Alter Flow.

Formerly the wood of the common alder bush was used for this. The sap runs slowly, drips really, each bucket catching a gallon or more a day, depending on weather conditions. A sharp freeze at night with a warm forenoon to follow is best. Wind affects the flow. Settled warm days stop it. Hard freezes with a continued cold spell hold up proceedings. It takes the warmth of late winter sunshine to get results.

The sap is gathered, usually in barrels on a horse-drawn sled and conveyed to the evaporating box. There it is collected in a large metal container and fed into the boiling pan by means of an automatic float as needed. The raw sap goes in at one end and boils violently as it flows through narrow canals toward the other end. In the last compartment of the long pan will be found the finished sirup from which it is drawn off through a spigot. Some 50 gallons of the sap is required to produce a gallon of sirup and some skill is required in the testing and drawing off.

Pioneer Sugar Chests.

Sugar such as can still be had in Somerset county, Pennsylvania and other districts further east is not produced in Indiana now. It is a soft yellow sugar, quite moist and likely to "ferment" if kept in a closed container too long. Pioneers had their "sugar chests" in which this condensed sweetness might be preserved for family use. These chests are souvenir antiques now. The finished sirup can be further reduced into a delicious "taffy" and still further into caked candy-like shapes.

An orchard of note was that finally worked and at the last sold for timber on the farm of W. H. Medaris, aged farmer near Bedford. This hardy and most worthy citizen delighted in the occupations that had been his from youth onward, one of these was sugar making. His was quality sirup and his prices always reasonable. Hardy is the right adjective when describing that type of citizen now nearly extinct. When the neighborhood church was building for a new generation he, though 74 years old, hauled over 700 loads of stone from nearby quarries furnishing trees and sap for the job. His name is preserved on a plaque on the walls of Mount Pleasant meeting house as it well should be.

Remains of an Industry.

When we're passing [illegible] representative of [illegible] sugar-making [illegible] photographer we stopped [illegible] the wood lot where [illegible] 200 trees were tapped [illegible] the old iron kettle, discarded long ago and half covered with moss and dirt. He led us to the part of his grove last worked. There only a few old trees were to be seen and where were the remains of a log dwelling built at least three generations ago. There he stood, with folded arms, his [illegible] spare body silhouetted against the barren background as though no longer willing or able to resist an ongoing impulse that might suggest that he and his [illegible] and let other carry on "[illegible] old shed, old man," he said [illegible] and with the blur of a good-humored twinkle in that grey eye.

He is gone now. I wrote his [illegible] from Pittsburgh, asking that I save me sirup from his sugar making. His answer came to be a slight tone of sadness. He had sold his trees for timber. His sugar making days were over. And [illegible] added [illegible] ready for the next [illegible]

Roundabout Rescue Frees Caught Cat

Fort Collins, Colo. — (AP) — [illegible] sounded like some [illegible] cat high [illegible] into [illegible] tree [illegible]

I found THE WAY
to an amazing NEW

Indiana native foods