

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Newsletter



March 2018

Maple Season

**For those who think of spring as rain, mud and blackflies –
Remember warm sun, blossoms and Maple Syrup**

While people tend to think of maple syrup dating to colonial times, Native Americans were enjoying this liquid treat long before the first settlers landed. Their methods were crude by today's standards but syrup making has continuously evolved. The **Francetown Heritage Museum** has tried to capture some of this evolution in our exhibits.

Before the Pilgrims the Native Americans would simply cut a V-shaped gash in the side of a sugar maple tree and then place a flat wedge at the bottom of the V. The sap would flow off the wedge and into a basket (which was often just a piece of wood hollowed out with a hatchet).



Native American collecting sap

The sap was collected and then slowly boiled into syrup at which point it was put back in the basket and stored there.

When the Pilgrims landed the Indians showed them how to tap trees. However, the Pilgrims had the advantage of some iron tools that the Native Americans did not have. Instead of using a wedge, the Pilgrims use an auger to drill a hole in the tree and pounded in a wooden spiel. Wooden buckets were then hung on the spiel to collect the sap. The museum has a number of these wooden spiels as they were called and the wooden buckets.



Wooden spiels



Wooden sap bucket

Wooden spiels and buckets made possible the collection of far larger amounts of maple sap. Central boiling points were built and became known as "The Sap House" or "Sugar House". To collect the sap from all these tapped trees

humans wore a yoke that two larger sap pails could be carried from. The sap was taken to a larger “gathering tank” for transport to the Sap House. The **Francestown Heritage Museum** collection also includes a yoke used to carry pails of sap and a wooden gathering tank.



Yoke for carrying sap pails



Wooden gathering tank

This wooden gathering tank was probably set on a sled that was used when gathering maple sap from the trees. The pails of sap were dumped into this tank and taken back to the sugarhouse to be made into maple syrup.

In the 1890's the next iteration saw the replacement of the wooden spiel and wooden bucket with a metal spiel and metal bucket and cover. Examples from the **Francestown Heritage Museum** collection include:



Metal spels



Metal bucket and cover

These materials were stronger, easier to work with, easier to clean and had a longer life than their wooden predecessors. There was a short period beginning about 1960 when syrup makers toyed with using plastic bags rather than buckets. Subject to weather, tears and spills, these soon fell out of favor. Below is such a bag from the **Francestown Heritage Museum** collection.



Plastic sap bag



All of the above various spiels, buckets, yokes and gathering tanks still required intensive labor to go out and collect the sap. At the turn of the twenty first century, in order to forego this labor-intensive work, the plastic spiel and tubing were developed. Once the hole was drilled in the tree a small plastic spout was inserted (this replaced the spiels). The spouts were connected webs of plastic tubing that routed the sap directly into tanks and to the sap house for boiling. Many of these systems were even equipped with vacuum pumps that suck the sap out of the trees to increase yield.

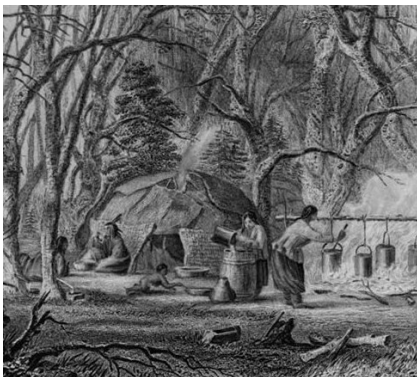


Plastic spout



Plastic tubing

From the 1800's on there were many innovations in boiling the sap into syrup. Oil-fired evaporators eliminated the drudgery of cutting and splitting all the many cords of wood need to boil the sap each year. Reverse osmosis filters that remove some water from the sap leaving the sweet portion which meant shorter boiling time.



Boiling sap in a Native American Sugar Camp



Boiling sap, ~1800's



Boiling Sap in an Evaporator, ~1900's



Modern RO (Reverse Osmosis) equipment

THE FUTURE: Research is now taking place on collecting sap from saplings. This new method could make maple syrup production possible in small acreage without naturally occurring maple forests.

Please Vote YES on Warrant Article #14

We are always working to improve your **Francestown Heritage Museum** and Article #14 allows us to continue to do this. Our goal is pour a concrete floor on the lower level of the **Francestown Heritage Museum** in order to use this space for more exhibits. We are constantly receiving new and exciting donations for display in the museum and additional space will allow us to rotate exhibit items while also being able to display and exhibit more donations. **Please vote YES on Warrant Article #14!**

Help us turn this. . . .



. . . . Into something like this



Did you know . . . In the warmer months (April - October) we are happy to open the museum for school tours, private tours or special events? With enough notice to ensure a curator is available, we are happy to help with your special request. We even have a fun Museum Quiz to help you learn more about our town and the exhibits.

Remember the museum belongs to you – visit it!