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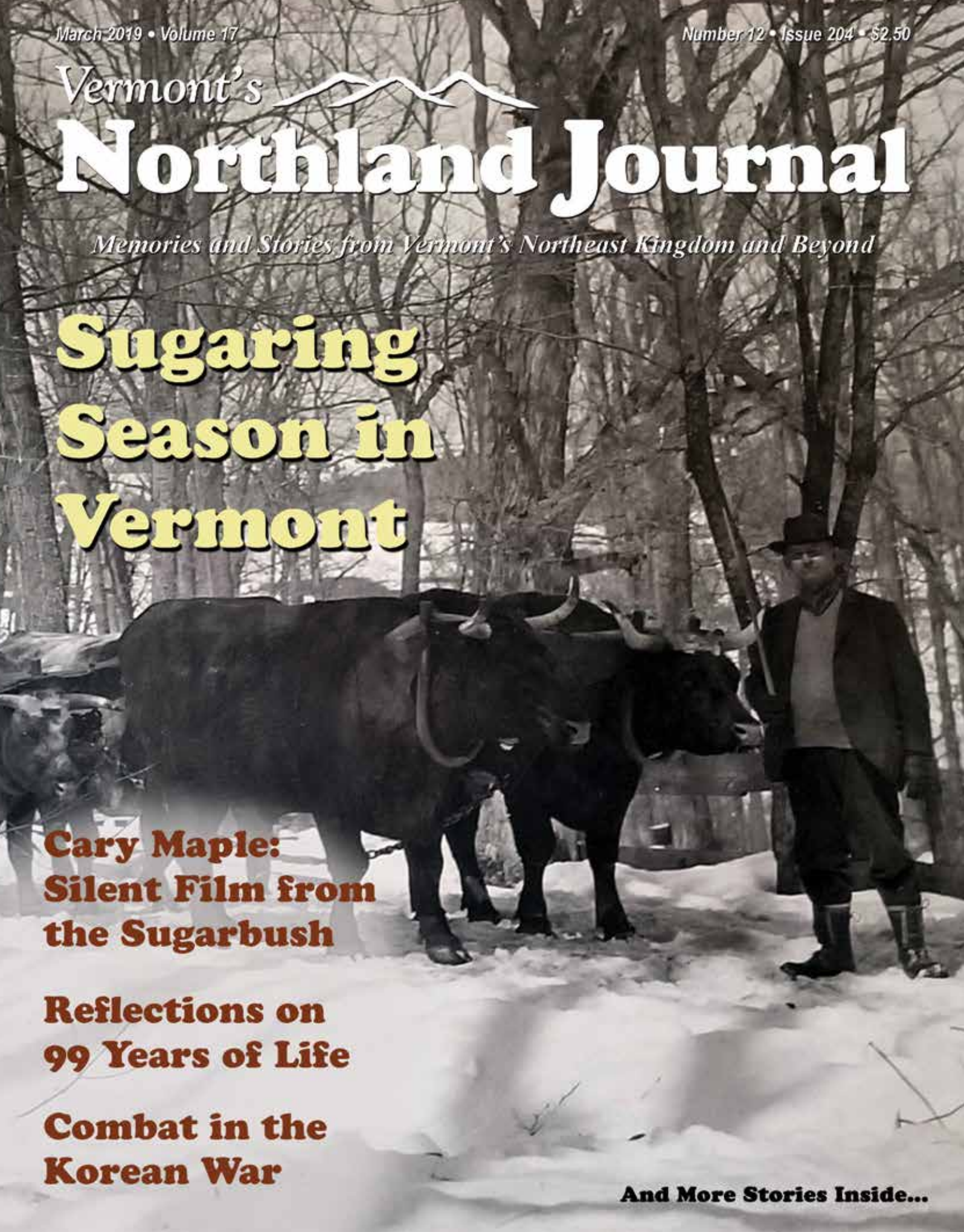
Sugaring Season in Vermont

**Cary Maple:
Silent Film from
the Sugarbush**

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99 Years of Life**

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Korean War**

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Cary Maple: Silent Film from the Sugarbush

by Matthew M. Thomas

The maple sugar business was very good for George C. Cary. So good, in fact, it allowed him to establish one of the finest farms and sugarbushes in the North Danville area of Caledonia County. Cary chose the maple woods of his 4,000-acre Highland Farm in the spring of 1927 as the backdrop for the filming of a silent motion picture promoting maple syrup and maple sugar to audiences across America.

Cary was a traveling salesman for a Maine grocery business who, almost by accident, stumbled into the maple sugar business in 1886. After finding himself the owner of 1,500 pounds of maple sugar that he didn't know what to do with, Cary hit upon the novel and very successful idea of using maple sugar in the curing and flavoring of tobacco instead of the traditionally used Barbados sugar. Practically overnight Cary went from struggling to secure orders for groceries in the villages and back roads of Vermont to becoming the owner and president of St. Johnsbury's Cary Maple Sugar Company, the single largest dealer in bulk maple sugar in the world. Such success and dominance of the maple industry earned him the title of Maple Sugar King and St. Johnsbury the title of Maple Capital of the World.

The buying and selling of bulk maple sugar for use in tobacco processing and in blending with cane sugars was the early backbone to the success of the Cary Maple Sugar Company. However, by the 1920s the company had diversified and expanded its production and partnerships and was also involved in selling individually packaged maple products, like maple syrup and maple candies, for home or personal consumption.

As an industry leader, Cary was a strong supporter of the maple industry, but he also wanted



"BOILING-DOWN" IN THE INDIAN WAY.

Penobscot Indian John Lewey and his son demonstrating Native American maple sugar making in the Cary sugarbush.

Photo from *The Vermonter*, 1929, Vol. 34, No. 1.

to promote his products and his own brand of maple syrup called Highland Pure Maple Sap Syrup, named after his Highland Farm in North Danville. Highland syrup was mostly marketed and sold to consumers in stores in the western United States. To reach a wider audience of potential syrup buyers in the western U.S., who more than likely had no idea what real maple syrup tasted like or how it was made, Cary came up with the idea of producing a short educational film to be shown to theatergoers before the start of the feature film. It just so happened that in addition to telling a story of the history and making of maple syrup, the footage also included images of the filling and packing of cans of Highland brand syrup in the Cary company factory in St. Johnsbury.

The footage for the silent moving picture, along with an extensive collection of still photographs of the same sugarbush and sugarhouse scenes, were shot over several days in the spring of 1927 by well-known photographers Harry and Alice



John Lewey and his son demonstrating Native American methods of gathering sap in Cary sugarbush.
Photo from the Tom Olson Collection

Richardson of Newport. Many of the accompanying still photographs were used in other more general contexts to illustrate maple sugaring. In fact, many of the still photos have been preserved in museums and archives and continue to appear in print from time to time.

While the Richardsons were widely regarded photographers in the Northeast Kingdom, they were not known for their motion pictures. Rather, their bread and butter business was studio work and still photographs of scenes from Newport, Orleans County, and throughout Vermont, including a variety of colorful novelty postcards. The Richardsons did make at least one other motion picture. In 1929 the Richardsons served as the official news photographers for the Vermont Special train. For that assignment they captured 4,000 feet of footage highlighting the many scenes and experiences of the participants on this unique train that traveled from Vermont to 18 cities around the U.S. and Canada

promoting the products, people, and beauty of Vermont.

A significant portion of the filming for the Cary film was done outdoors in the sugarbush at Cary's Highland Farm in North Danville, located a little north of the old Stanton School. Cary and the directors of the film set up scenes in the sugarbush that focused on three romanticized periods in the history of maple sugaring: Native American sugaring, 19th century Euro-American/Euro-Canadian sugaring, and early 20th century Euro-American/Euro-Canadian sugaring.

For the telling of the Native American story, Cary hired a full-blooded Penobscot Indian named John Lewey from Old Town, Maine. Mr. Lewey was accompanied by his son Roy Lewey. Posing in the snow in a full-feathered Plains Indian-style feathered headdress, buckskins, and polished leather dress shoes—a look that was a little out of place for a New England sugarbush—Lewey is shown tapping a few

maple trees with an axe, gathering sap with wood pails from rough-hewn wood troughs, and boiling sap in a large iron kettle suspended from a tripod in front of a newly constructed log cabin. For the film, sap was gathered from about 100 split log wood troughs fed by hand carved flat wood taps.

The 19th century methods of sugaring featured a Yankee farmer played by Albert Leland, himself a sugarmaker from Barton. Leland dressed for the part, complete with wide-brimmed straw hat, a thick full-length beard, and high boots. Equipped with a shoulder yoke and two wooden gathering pails, Leland is shown hustling from tree to tree

collecting sap from wood troughs set on the ground and transporting it to a gathering tank pulled by oxen through the snow. Cary was well known for, and quite proud of, his prize-winning oxen and made sure to feature them prominently in the filming. A young boy named Richard Franklin, the son of George Cary's friend and employee Earl Franklin, is shown leading a pair of steers with a goad stick. In another scene, Mr. Cary himself appears driving a different pair of oxen along a snow-covered road in the sugarbush.

Twentieth century sugaring was depicted with the collection of sap in covered galvanized metal



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Advertisement for Cary Maple Sugar Company's Highland Pure Maple Sap Syrup.

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The Story of the Cary Maple Sugar Company

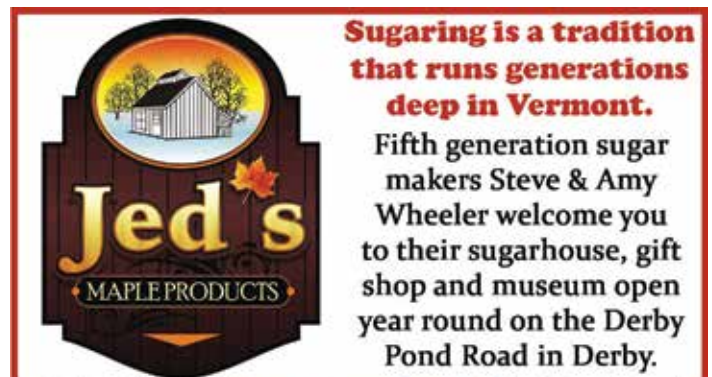
Maple King: The Making of a Maple Syrup Empire
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pails hung from metal spiles on trees, as well as with what was then the cutting-edge Brower Sap Piping System. The Brower pipeline, also called the “gooseneck system” due to the shape of a long connecting pipe dropping off the spout, was an all metal [gravity-fed] system of interconnecting galvanized pipes and spouts that carried sap directly from the taphole through a pipeline to a central gathering tank [or often, directly to the sugarhouse]. In one scene in the film a man is shown installing the gooseneck section of the Brower pipeline in a taphole in the tree. Later he is shown connecting sections of the pipeline along their wire supports, while in another he is walking along and checking the metal pipeline for leaks.

In addition to the sap gathering scenes, footage also depicts two of Cary’s Highland Farm sugarhouses in action with steam billowing from the cupola and men feeding the boiling arches and drawing off syrup. Elsewhere, men are seen moving metal barrels of syrup, along with gathering and unloading tanks of fresh sap pulled



John Lewey demonstrating the Native American method of tapping trees and gathering sap.
Photo from the Tom Olson Collection



Yankee farmer Albert Leland gathering sap with a yoke.

Photo from the Tom Olson Collection

on sleds by teams of Cary's prized oxen. Both sugarhouses that appear in the film are still standing today and continue to be used for making maple syrup into the 21st century, although their owners are no longer using them for syrup production. Similarly, the log cabin in the background of the imaginative Native American sugaring scenes with John Lewey

still stands and has been preserved on the Sugar Ridge Farm of Stephen and Diane Jones.

The filmmakers also spent time filming inside the Cary Maple Sugar Company's St. Johnsbury plant. In contrast to the dirt and soot of the scenes from the sugarbush and sugarhouses, shots from the plant interior feature employees clad in all white pants,

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smocks, and hats, working with the most modern, efficient, and automated packaging and processing equipment. From its earliest days, the interior of the Cary Maple Sugar Company plant was portrayed as a sterile, food-safe environment with white painted walls and polished floors.

In one shot inside the plant, men are seen assembling wooden crates stamped with the Highland Pure Maple label using an automated nailing machine. Further footage shows workers, dressed head to toe in white, filling the wooden crates lined with waxed paper on a conveyor line with thick hot semi-liquid maple sugar from an overhead vat. Another scene shows a room full of hundreds of such crates of sugar cooling into block sugar for shipment to tobacco companies and syrup blenders.

Other scenes inside the Cary Maple Sugar Company plant demonstrate the filling of small metal cans with maple syrup with a worker being sure to present the label of Highland Pure Maple Sap Syrup for the camera. Female workers packed the cans in wood crates for

shipment. Footage from outside offers a glimpse of the plant in full operation with black smoke billowing from the tall smokestack, rail cars lining up on the multiple tracks alongside the plant and warehouse, and 1920s automobiles passing back and forth in front of the plant along the unpaved Portland Street.

A few years after the shooting of the film, a St. Johnsbury reporter from the *Caledonian-Record*, who had been on hand to document the movie making, told of his delight at seeing the short film while in a movie house in Seattle, Washington. The reporter was even more shocked to see a few seconds of himself on the film where they had captured close-up images of him drinking fresh sap from a metal collection pail behind a large tree. In addition to being shown before feature films, it was also screened at a local theater in St. Johnsbury in 1935 as part of Vermont's very first statewide maple sugar festival.

One part marketing tool and one part educational materials, the film was shown in theaters as a short before feature films began. The many feet of



Albert Leland leading a team of oxen pulling gathering tank on a road through the sugarbush where metal pipeline is being used.
Photo from the Tom Olson Collection



Richard Franklin leading a team of oxen pulling a gathering tank on a road through the sugarbush where Brower metal pipeline is being used.
 Photo from the Tom Olson Collection

footage taken by the Richardsons were subsequently edited and reduced to a short film that was either accompanied with screens of descriptive text or voice-over narration. Unfortunately, since there is no existing copy of the short film, we do not know exactly how the short film was finished in terms of editing and production.

The silent film was originally shot on 35mm nitrate stock, which today is very unstable and highly flammable. Fortunately, a copy of the unedited raw footage from the film making was discovered and has been archived in the Philippe Beaudry Collection at Northeast Historic Film, a repository in Bucksport, Maine, where it has been converted to more

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Man installing Brower metal sap pipeline in the Cary sugarbush.

Photo from the Tom Olson Collection

accessible VHS and digital formats. Although the quality of the film has degraded over time and some portions are severely deteriorated, other portions are clear and fascinating to watch. A digital copy on disk is on file and available for viewing in the archives of the Vermont Historical Society.

Cary was not the only Vermont maple producer to host filmmakers in his sugarbush. Ten years later, in 1937, the maple woods and sugarhouse of George H. Soule of Fairfield played home to a Universal film crew that shot 2,000 feet of film to be reduced



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to a few minutes-long newsreel with voice-over narration. Besides sharing the honor of supporting early filmmaking in his Vermont sugarbush with George Cary, George H. Soule was also given the title of Maple King in honor of his operating the single largest sugarbush in Vermont in the early 1900s with around 15,000 taps.

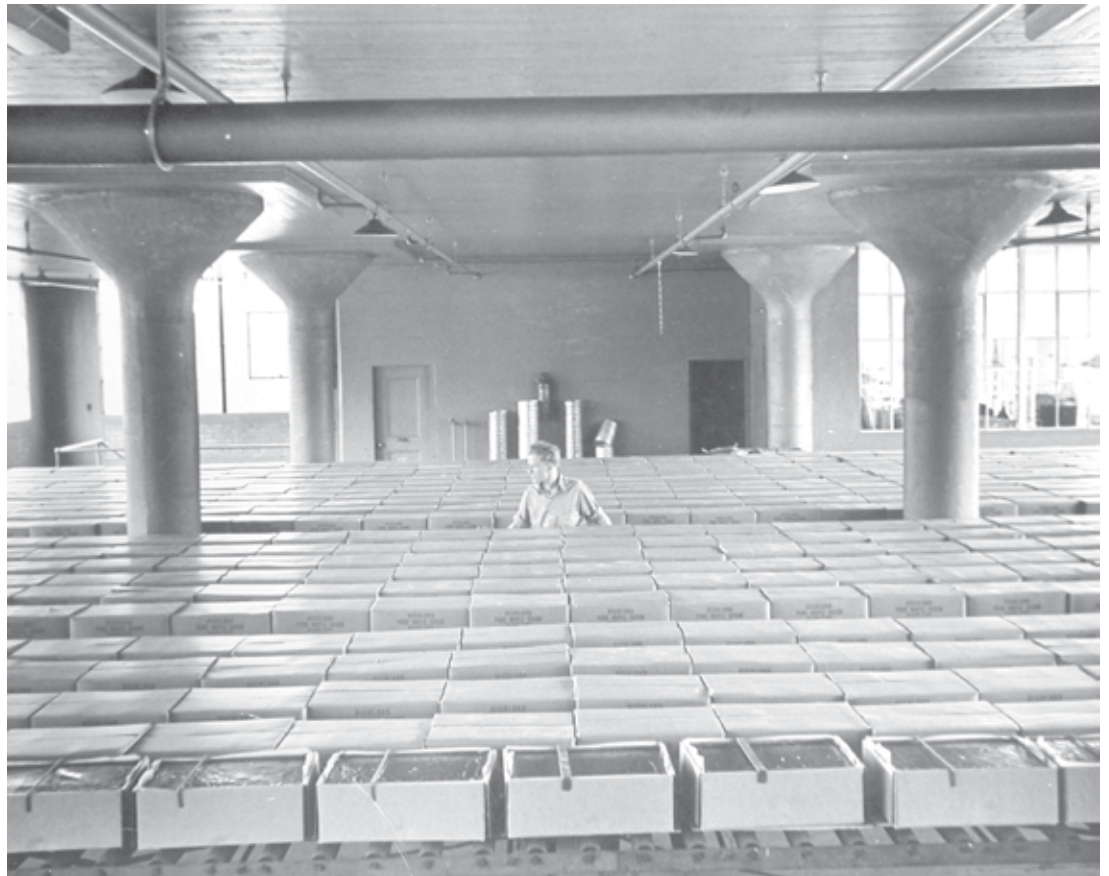
A few years after the film was made George Cary and the Cary Maple Sugar Company experienced serious financial difficulties.

In 1931 George Cary declared bankruptcy and the company was taken into receivership. A few months later, in November of that year, George Cary died at the age of 66. Following the death of George Cary, the Cary Maple Sugar Company and Maple Grove Candies were reorganized with a greater emphasis on packaging and selling maple syrup and other maple products and less on the processing and sale of bulk maple sugar. In time the ownership of Cary Maple Sugar Company and Maple Grove Company split, and the Cary company business moved to New Jersey, while Maple Grove continued on in St. Johnsbury.

The history of George Cary's silent film is just one part of a much larger



One of the Cary Maple Sugar Company sugarhouses on George Cary's Highland Farm.
Photo from the Vermont Historical Society Collection



Hundreds of blocks of maple sugar cooling in crates for shipment at the Cary Maple Sugar Company in St. Johnsbury.
Photo from the Vermont Historical Society Collection

story of the rise and fall of George Cary. There is much more to discover about what became of the Cary Maple Sugar Company and Maple Grove Candies, which is known today as Maple Grove Farms of Vermont. ●

Matthew Thomas is an independent researcher with a wide range of interests in all aspects of the history of the maple syrup industry. His recent book, Maple King: The Making of a Maple Syrup Empire, traces the history of the George Cary and the Cary Maple Sugar Company. The book is available for purchase online at Amazon.com, in St. Johnsbury at the Maple Grove Farms gift shop, and at the St. Johnsbury History and Heritage Center. He also shares research and maple history news on his website, maplesyruphistory.com.



Another of the Cary Maple Sugar Company sugarhouses on George Cary's Highland Farm.

Photo from the New England Maple Museum Collection

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