MAPLE SUGAR LANGUAGE IN VERMONT

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During the summer of 1947 Dr. Bryant collected the terms listed below. She consulted a number of persons in Vermont who were thoroughly familiar with the maple sugar industry and the terms connected with it. Most important among these were Judge Norbet J. Towne, Northfield, Vermont; and Mr. C. H. Jones, of the Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Vermont.

The Editor

One of the chief industries of Vermont is the making of maple syrup and sugar from the beautiful, stately maple trees. In various parts of the world there are nearly seventy varieties of maple trees, six of which grow in the Green Mountain State. They are the sugar maple (commonly known as the rock or hard maple), the black maple, the red maple, the mountain maple, the silver maple, and the ash-leaved maple. The sugar maple and the ash-leaved maple, however, are the two best sugar-producing maples.

The secret of making maple sugar was known long before the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth in 1620. The American Indian knew the secret perhaps hundreds of years before the white man arrived. His method of making the sugar was far more primitive than that of the twentieth century, where one finds up-to-date sugar houses with evaporators, ventilators, filters, hydrometers, thermometers, bucket washers, etc. He collected the sap in bark troughs from incisions in the maple trunks undoubtedly cut with his tomahawk. Into these incisions he probably inserted a reed or a concave piece of bark. The sap thus collected was then boiled by repeatedly dropping hot stones into the vessel containing it.

The early white settlers followed the Indian method except that they substituted the ax for the tomahawk, wooden spiles or spouts for the reed or bark spouts, and used for boiling purposes a large iron or copper kettle, generally the former. Then came the auger for boring holes and smaller kettles swung from a pole which was held by two crotched posts. Later sheet-iron pans were used

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on stone fireplaces built in the open and without flue or chimney. But as time has gone on, the twentieth century with its mechanical genius has made so many improvements and inventions that today the sugar-making equipment is very elaborate and efficient.

The sugar season starts in the spring, usually about the middle of March—whenever the sap rises. The date depends upon whether the spring is early or late. It has begun as early as February 22, and as late as the first week in April. Its length also varies with the season. It has been known to last six weeks, and to be as short as two weeks. It begins with the breaking of winter and the melting of the snow, with the first warm days of spring. Also the seasons of various sugar orchards vary, depending upon the lay of the land. Where the land lies to the south the season is earlier than for an orchard on land lying toward the north, for the snow melts faster and the sap goes up as the snow melts. At that time the roots absorb water in considerable quantities; and since the leaves are not out, the trees cannot throw off the moisture. It is, therefore, at this time that the sap flow is largest. The season ends when continuous warm weather arrives and when the buds begin to swell.

The sap drips steadily into the buckets when there are crisp, cold nights and warm, sunshiny days; when there is alternate freezing and thawing. On days in which there are "good runs," the buckets are brimming full and the farmer sits up late into the night to keep the fire going and the sap boiling so as to catch up with the day's yield. His persistent effort and his constant watch produce the delicious maple syrup and sugar that so many gourmets treasure. But as he works he uses special terms in connection with his sugar making. Among them are the following:

arch: *n.* A long and narrow iron (sometimes brick) furnace. In the earlier days it was made of brick.

ash pit: *n.* A part of the furnace where the ashes accumulate.

Baumé scale [bo'me]: *n.* The scale on the hydrometer for testing the density of the syrup. By taking the temperature of the syrup, one can calculate the density by allowing a quarter point on the Baumé scale for each ten degrees the syrup is above or below 60°. At 60° the syrup should test 36, but at 160° it should test 33½ on the Baumé scale.

big run: *n.* A large supply of sap produced on a favorable day.

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bobsled: *n.* A vehicle on runners used for conveying the gathering tank. It is often drawn by horses, but in more modern times by a tractor. In the earlier days oxen were used. The sled has wooden runners, for during the season it is often drawn over dirt and this type is more easily pulled than one with iron runners.

boring machine: *n.* A machine consisting of a bit and operated by a small gasoline engine carried on the farmer's back. This is the most modern method of boring holes in maple trees.

break out: *vb.* To break a road through deep snow by means of a team and an empty sled so that the sap will not be overturned when hauling it to the sugar house.

bucket cover: *n.* A curved piece of galvanized iron placed over the sap bucket and spout on the tree so as to keep out snow, rain, sticks, and bark and at the same time ventilate the bucket. Sometimes the cover is attached to the spout and sometimes to the bucket.

bucket washer: *n.* A machine for cleansing the buckets. Formerly all buckets were washed by hand.

crude sap: *n.* The sap as it comes from the maple tree before the leaves put out.

drawing syrup: *n.* Sap in the last compartment after reaching the boiling point. It is then ready to be drawn off.

draw(ing) tub: *n.* Same as *gathering tank*, *q. v.* See *gathering tub*.

drawoff: *n.* The outlet by which the syrup leaves the pan of the evaporator to be filtered.

drip of sap: *phr.* The dropping of the sap from the trees into the sap buckets.

drop flue: *n.* A flue attached beneath the evaporator pan into which the sap circulates. The fire touches the complete height and length of this type of flue and ensures greater and more even evaporation.

dumping place: *n.* A place for unloading from the bobsled the gathering tank full of sap.

elaborated sap: *n.* The sap of the maple tree after the leaves have come out. The action of the sunlight upon the leaves gives the sap its carbon and changes it from crude to elaborated sap.

evaporator: *n.* An arch over which rests a partitioned pan usually equipped with flues beneath it into which the sap from the storage tank is introduced. The liquid enters at one end of

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the pan and gradually circulates around the partitions, allowing the water to evaporate and the sap to become thicker and thicker as it flows back and forth lengthwise over the hot fire. By the time it reaches the last compartment, the liquid has evaporated so much that it is almost syrup. At that point it is closed off and boiled until it reaches the necessary boiling point of standard syrup.

feed pipe: *n.* The pipe through which the sap from the storage tank enters the evaporation pan.

filter(ing) tank: *n.* A tank in which a number of felt filters are attached for filtering the syrup coming from the evaporator. Same as *settling tank.*

fire: *vb.* To take care of the fire used in boiling the syrup.

first run: *n.* The first sap of the spring. All farmers are desirous of getting the first run, for this is of the best quality. The grade goes down as the season advances.

float: *n.* A regulator between the pipe coming from the storage tank and the flues where the sap starts to circulate.

flue brush: *n.* A brush used to clean the soot from the flues.

flue drawoff: *n.* An outlet for drawing the sediment out of the flues each morning to prevent its boiling over and coloring the sap.

flue pan: *n.* A pan below the main pan of the evaporator in which there are many circulating partitions so that the sap can flow from flue to flue.

frog run: *n.* The last run of the season. The name is derived from an idea common among farmers that when the frogs are first heard the season is over. Another indication of the end of the season is the appearance of millers around the trees.

gathering pail: *n.* A galvanized iron bucket into which the sap from the sap buckets is emptied.

gathering sled: *n.* The bobsled used for transporting the sap from the trees.

gathering tank: *n.* A tank into which the buckets attached to the trees are emptied. The design of it is such that the sap will not spill out. It is a low galvanized iron vessel usually oblong and having curved ends with a large drum in the center so as to prevent spilling. On the outside is a strainer for keeping dirt and ice out and letting sap in. This tank will hold from twenty to sixty pails. In the earlier days it was made of wood. Same as *draw(ing) tub.* See *gathering tub.*

gathering tub: *n.* A gathering tank made of wood.

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good run: *n.* An abundant flow of sap induced by favorable weather. There are from two to five days in the average season when *good runs* occur.

good runner: *n.* A tree which yields a large flow of sap.

good sap day: *phr.* A day when the sap falls into the bucket with a steady drip. It usually occurs on a crisp, clear morning followed by a day of sunshine. Then the snow melts freely.

grate: *n.* A framework of iron bars for holding the fuel in the furnace.

heater pan: *n.* A small pan placed directly over the flues of some evaporators into which the sap from the feed pipe directly flows and is immediately heated to the scalding point by the steam escaping from the flues.

hole plugger: *n.* Same as *sap spout, q. v.* and *spile.*

hook spout: *n.* A spout having a hook on which the sap bucket is hung. See *sap spout.*

hookless spout: *n.* A spout without a hook. This type of spout may be used along with a hook spout by the farmer who wants two spouts to a bucket. It may also be used alone.

load of sap: *phr.* A gathering tank full of sap from the trees ready to be conveyed to the sugar house, where it will be drawn off into the storage tank.

maple orchard: *n.* A grove of maple trees which produce sap. Same as *sugar grove* and *sugar orchard.*

(maple) sap: *n.* The sap of the maple tree. It is about 95 per cent water but contains from two to six per cent sugar as well as traces of certain minerals—such as iron, potash, lime, magnesia—and vegetable acids, all of which give the syrup its distinctive flavor.

nitre: *n.* Mineral matter, largely malate of lime floating as gritty particles in the syrup or forming a crust on the bottom of the evaporator, caused by the heat of boiling. Same as *sugar sand.*

ream out: *vb.* To enlarge the holes in the trees where the spouts are inserted.

regulator: *n.* An automatic device which controls the movement of sap from the heater pan as it enters the main pan to which are attached the flues.

run: *n.* A period of sap flow.

sap: *n.* See *crude sap, elaborated sap,* and *(maple) sap.*

sap bucket: *n.* A galvanized iron or tin bucket, holding from twelve to sixteen quarts. It is attached to the spout to catch the

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sap as it comes from the tree. In earlier days the buckets were made of wood.

sap hydrometer: *n.* An instrument for determining the sugar content of the sap. It is also useful in determining which trees yield the sweetest sap.

sap spout: *n.* A metal tube inserted into a maple tree for conducting sap into the buckets. Most spouts are made of galvanized iron. At the bottom of most spouts is attached a hook on which the bucket is hung. In the earlier days a wooden spout was used, and under this was driven a nail from which to hang a bucket. Same as *hole plugger* and *spile.*

scoop: *n.* A large ladle for removing the scum from the sap. See *skimmer.*

scum: *n.* Impure and extraneous foamy matter which rises to the top of the boiling sap.

settling tank: *n.* Same as *filter(ing) tank, q. v.*

skimmer: *n.* A utensil for removing the impurities (scum) which rise to the surface of the sap as it boils. A damp cloth may be used. See *scoop.*

spile: *n.* Same as *hole plugger* and *sap spout, q. v.*

standard sugar: *n.* Maple sap condensed to sugar by subjecting it to a high temperature. A temperature of 235° Fahrenheit will generally produce a soft sugar; 245°, a hard sugar. These figures vary according to the elevation.

standard syrup: *n.* Maple sap condensed to syrup by subjecting it to a high temperature. Ordinarily 219° Fahrenheit will produce syrup that weighs eleven pounds per gallon of 231 cubic inches. This syrup will contain not over thirty-five per cent water and not under sixty-five per cent solid matter.

storage tank: *n.* A large galvanized iron vessel into which the sap of the gathering tank is emptied. Same as *storage tub.*

storage tub: *n.* Same as *storage tank, q. v.*

strainer: *n.* A filter made of canton flannel for use in the storage tank. It is necessary for making white syrup. A coarser strainer is used in the gathering tank.

sugar: *vb.* To make maple syrup or sugar.

sugar-bush owner: *n.* One who owns a group of maple trees.

sugar can: *n.* A can into which the boiling sugar is poured. It varies in size from one to five pounds.

sugar grove: *n.* Same as *maple orchard, q. v.,* and *sugar orchard.*

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sugar house: *n.* The house where all the equipment is kept and where the sap is made into syrup and sugar.

sugaring-off rig: *n.* A smaller arch and pan than are used for syrup. Further boiling is necessary.

sugar(ing) season: *n.* The time when the sap is being collected and boiled. Same as *sugar(ing) time.*

sugar(ing) time: *n.* Same as *sugar(ing) season, q. v.*

sugarmaker: *n.* One who collects the sap and boils it.

sugar mold: *n.* A matrix of varying size and shape into which the boiling sugar is poured and left to harden.

sugar off: *vb.* To make sugar from maple syrup. ((A New Englander tells the Editor that she is familiar with the term *sugaring off* as meaning a kind of party held at the sugar house when the syrup which is at the point of becoming sugar is served on pans of snow, with plain doughnuts and pickles.)) See *sugar on snow.*

sugar on snow: *phr.* "Waxed" maple sugar served on snow. The syrup is boiled until it "waxes" or "hairs," at a temperature generally of a little more than 230°, corresponding to the "soft-ball" stage in candy-making. In the earlier days the syrup was then poured out upon a snowbank. In modern times it is served with pans of snow, and with sour pickles and doughnuts. See *sugaring off* under *sugar off.*

sugar orchard: *n.* Same as *maple orchard, q. v.*, and *sugar grove.*

sugar pail: *n.* A bucket into which the boiling sugar is poured. It usually holds ten pounds.

sugar place: *n.* The part of the farm where sugar maples grow.

sugar sand: *n.* Same as *nitre, q. v.*

sugar weather: *n.* Alternate freezing and thawing: crisp, cold nights and warm, sunshiny days.

syrup can: *n.* A can into which the syrup is filtered. Some cans hold fifty gallons; these are usually termed *syrup drums.*

syrup container: *n.* A small can which is filled from the large can into which the syrup has been filtered. These cans are one, two, or five quarts in size.

syrup down: *vb.* To boil off the water so that the remaining sap or fluid is syrup; that is, will show a certain density on the hydrometer.

syrup drum: *n.* A fifty-gallon syrup can.

syrup filter: *n.* A strainer made of white felt through which the

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syrup is run as it is drawn from the evaporator. This felt filter removes all sediment and nitre.

syrup hydrometer: *n.* An instrument for testing the density of syrup, either hot or cold. Since thermometers vary according to altitude, the hydrometer is preferable for determining with absolute accuracy the density of the syrup.

syrup thermometer: *n.* An instrument for testing the boiling point of syrup. The thermometer must be checked several times a day, for any change in atmospheric pressure will make a slight change in the boiling point.

tapping: *n.* Boring a hole in a maple tree, about four feet from the ground and driving a spout or spile into this hole.

tub sugar: *n.* Standard sugar which is put into tubs (wooden or tin).

ventilator: *n.* An opening in the top of the sugar house directly over the evaporator for the purpose of letting the steam out and the fresh air in. A ventilator is usually a door which swings down on hinges and is operated from the inside of the sugar house.

wood shed: *n.* A separate part of the sugar house, outside the boiling room, away from the steam, so that the wood will keep dry. The shed is covered with a good roof so that the rain and snow cannot get in. In fact, there are two roofs with an opening between them for the escape of any steam that might get in.

yoke: *n.* A wooden frame borne on a person's shoulders for carrying two gathering pails.

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