

## The early History of the Plastic Maple Syrup Jug: Part Two – The 1970s

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The unique and instantly recognizable shape of the modern plastic maple syrup container got its start in the early 1970s when a pair of New England inventors and their companies introduced a new container made from a stiff, unbreakable plastic that could handle the requirements of hot-packed syrup and hold up to the rigors of shipping and transport.

### Kress Creations – Elmer Kress

Elmer Kress got his start as a potter when he opened Kress Ceramics in Seymour, Connecticut in the 1950s. According to his daughter Sarah Jean Davies, Elmer developed health problems related to exposure to ceramic

dust and needed to make a change in his business. He sold the pottery business in 1967 and decided to give the manufacturing of plastic maple syrup containers a try under the name Kress Creations. Kress had previously dabbled with producing small, novelty size stoneware jugs for maple syrup sales, so he had a familiarity and design idea in mind that resembled an antique loop-handled stoneware jug.

Kress invested in his own blow molding equipment and made his containers from a new plastic called XT Polymer developed by the American Cyanamid Corporation in Wallingford, Connecticut. XT Polymer was chosen by Kress because it could handle the hot packing

of syrup. Kress jugs also featured a metal tamper-proof cap made by the ALCOA Company. Kress' daughter tells that her father did not want his jug to look like cheap plastic, so he specifically used a heavier, glossier plastic that looked more like ceramic. XT polymer was more expensive, but Elmer felt it looked nicer. As an artist, Elmer Kress drew his own designs for the exterior sugarbush scene and did the one-color screen printing on-site at the Kress Creations



Examples of Kress Creations plastic jugs in one pint and a half gallon sizes.

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factory. Kress jugs were originally released in early 1970 in pint and quart sizes, with half-gallon and a unique three-quart sizes added later. The company outgrew the plant in Seymour and moved to a new facility in Oxford, Connecticut in 1975.

The Kress operation was a true mom-and-pop business with the Kress family often taking weekend road trips around New England to peddle their containers out of the back of their car. Kress sold the plastic jug company in 1990 to a Southbury, New Hampshire firm, which in turn sold the molds to Pioneer Plastics in Greenville, New Hampshire which continued to manufacture and sell the Kress jug until around 2005. Elmer Kress passed away in 2005.

## **Bacon's Sugar House – Charlie Bacon**

As a syrup maker from Jaffney Center, New Hampshire, Charles "Charlie" Bacon was dissatisfied with metal syrup cans bursting when he shipped syrup across the country. Deciding plastics would be a better option, around 1967 he began researching food grade plastics that could handle hot packing of syrup. According to Bacon's son, Jim Bacon, Charlie settled on high density polyethylene as the best option and, working from a simple sketch, had a wood form made in the shape of an old-fashioned crockery jug which was then made into a durable metal form for blow-molding by Hillside Plastics in Sunderland, Massachusetts. Early examples of Bacon jugs featured a metal cap with an interior heat activated seal.

The first Bacon jug was available for sale in early 1971 in a quart size followed by a half-gallon and a pint a few months later, and lastly, a one-gallon jug in 1973. Jugs were screen printed and distributed from the Bacon farm. Eventually, they were available in five sizes with either a standard one-color screen-printed design or option to do custom designs. Adoption of Bacon jugs spread quickly with the assistance of a network of dealers located around the maple region to more directly connect with nearby syrup producers. By 1980, Bacon was manufacturing a million jugs a year. Jim Bacon shared that his father never obtained a design patent on his jugs. Although he considered it, Bacon realized that it was not worth the expense of filing the patent paper-



Example Bacon's Sugar House plastic jug  
ONE GALLON SIZE.

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work since another maker could come along with a slightly different design that was virtually identical, and there was nothing Bacon could do about it.

Bacon became concerned with the quality of manufacturing at Hillside Plastics in the early 1980s. In response, in 1983 he took his molds to the Hussey Molding Corporation of Manchester, New Hampshire for production. Bacon sold the jug manufacturing, printing, and sales to Hussey around 1986. A few years later, a sales agent for Hussey that knew Hussey was interested in getting out of the screen printing and sales portion of the syrup jug business, recognized that both Dave McClure's Honey and Maple Products and Roger Ames' American Maple Products of Newport, Vermont were each buying a lot of jugs. The agent put McClure and Ames in touch and in 1988 McClure and Ames partnered to purchase the

painting and sales portion of the Bacon Jug Company, opening a shop in part of the old Cary Maple Sugar Company warehouse in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Hussey continued to serve as their jug manufacturer.

A few years later McClure bought out Ames and moved the printing and distribution to a new facility in Littleton, New Hampshire. McClure himself sold the Bacon Jug Company in 1997 to Dutch Gold Honey, Incorporated and its subsidiary, Gamber Container, out of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who continue to own and operate the Bacon Jug Company from the Littleton location. Under the ownership of Dutch Gold and Gamber, manufacturing of the Bacon jug was moved from Hussey and returned to Hillside Plastics which had moved to Turners Falls, Massachusetts. Charlie Bacon passed away in 2006.

### **R.M. Lamb – Bob Lamb**

Robert "Bob" Lamb, inventor and manufacturer of Lamb Naturalflow plastic tubing, also offered a blow-molded plastic jug for maple syrup in the 1970s and 1980s. The R.M. Lamb jug was shaped and colored to look like a stoneware loop handle jug with very rounded shoulders and a tapered base. These were made from XT Polymer plastic, similar to the Kress jugs, and silkscreened with a one color, old-time sugarbush scene. When first released, the Lamb jug featured a metal ALCOA tamper-proof cap, like the Kress jugs, and later replaced by a plastic cap. Not a lot is known about the Lamb jugs. They were released in 1973 in two metric sizes of 125 and 500 milliliters and appear to have been targeted for sale to

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Canadian maple syrup producers. In 1975 Lamb expanded his line to include 1-liter and 2-liter jugs.

The fact that the Lamb jugs were made of XT Polymer plastic suggests that they may have been manufactured by Elmer Kress for Bob Lamb. Interestingly, in the years that Lamb advertised sale of these jugs in the *Maple Syrup Digest*, Kress Creations stopped advertising in the *Digest*, suggesting that Lamb and Kress may have had an agreement. The Lamb jug appears in advertisements in the *Digest* from 1973 through 1977 and in Canadian equipment sales catalogs in the early 1980s before being discontinued by 1985.

#### **Fairfield Plastics – S. Allen Soule**

S. Allen Soule, the Vermont inventor of the first lithographed metal can for maple syrup producers in the late 1940s, got into the plastic jug making

business in 1975 when he purchased a blow molding machine for the manufacturing of small sized polypropylene plastic containers. Soule's containers were designed for sales in gift shops and the tourist trade. Most of Soule's jugs were made for use in bottling syrup from his Fairfield Farms brand pure maple and blended syrups. In addition to making containers for his own maple products, Soule sold containers to syrup makers under the name Fairfield Plastics. Soule's containers resembled small ceramic jugs with short necks and loop handles and in some cases were made from a bright yellow plastic. According to John Soule, son of S. Allen Soule, Fairfield Plastics ended production in 1987 when the molding machine and molds were destroyed in a fire at their Fairfield, Vermont bottling plant.

*This article is the second of three articles on the history of plastic syrup containers. Part one appeared in the June 2021 edition of the Maple Syrup Digest. Part*

*Three of this article will focus on plastic jugs introduced in the 1980s by Dick Haas and Sugarhill Containers, Gerard Fillion and Les Cru-chons J.U.G.S, and Peter Stransky and Stransky Jugs.*



Examples of R.M. Lamb plastic jugs in half liter (16.9 ounces) and 1 liter (33.8 ounces) sizes.