

# Minnesota Maple News

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## Stretching the Meaning of Pure Maple Syrup – Towle's Log Cabin Syrup

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Log Cabin Syrup, the most famous maple syrup in the history of Minnesota, was not really maple syrup at all. Or rather, it was not entirely 100% pure maple syrup, but rather a blend of mostly cane sugars and a lesser amount of maple syrup. Log Cabin Syrup began when Patrick J. Towle relocated from Chicago to St. Paul in 1888 following the bankruptcy of his wholesale tea, coffee, and spice business. Towle partnered with William J. McCormick in his first year as Towle & McCormick, selling Log Cabin Pure Maple Syrup across the western United States. After one year the partnership with McCormick ended and control of the company was consolidated in the hands of the Towle family. In the 1890s, the company boldly called itself the Towle Maple Syrup Company and in the 19-teens, the Towle Maple Products Com-pany, before changing to the Log Cabin Products Company in the 1920s.

In its early years, Log Cabin Syrup creatively danced around the question of whether or not it was a true maple syrup or a blend. It was common in the 1880s and 1890s for syrup that was a blend of mostly corn syrup or cane syrup and a small amount of real maple syrup to be labeled and sold as simply maple syrup. Makers of real maple syrup considered these blends to be adulterated and lobbied to make it illegal for blenders to use the words "maple syrup" on anything but 100% real maple syrup.

Corn syrup was produced by a chemical treatment where sulfuric acid was applied to inexpensive corn starch to

force a chemical conversion of the starch to sugar. As a result, corn syrup was considered by many to be an unsafe, unnatural, or impure sugar. In contrast, more expensive cane sugar and maple sugar were naturally occurring sugars that were formed through simple concentration and evaporation of plant juices or sap. It has never been revealed to be the case that Log Cabin Syrup was once made with corn syrup, but in 1897, P. J. Towle curiously attended a secret meeting, and even served as committee president and negotiating representative, of a group of syrup blenders who were trying to secure access and lower prices to supplies of corn syrup. That P.J. Towle would

serve in this role strongly suggests that the Towle Syrup Company was using corn syrup in their blend in the 1890s.

There were no reliable chemical analyses to differentiate between sugars in the 1890s, making it easy to get away with blending corn and cane syrup with maple syrup. That changed in the early 1900s when a test was developed to identify the amount of corn syrup that was present in a syrup blend. It was at this time that Log Cabin Syrup most likely shifted to using cane syrup in its blend since it was not yet possible to differentiate between cane sugar and maple syrup. Government regulators attempted to address concerns with blended syrups by enacting labeling laws. Early state level labeling laws were all over the board, with most only requiring that the label disclose the true ingredients in a package but not state

**THE SYRUP CAMP**      *Try This Delight*      **THE SYRUP CAN**

# TOWLE'S LOG CABIN SYRUP

The use of this delicious syrup will give you and the family a new joy.

**FROM CAMP TO TABLE**

**The quality or the flavor of Log Cabin never changes.**

It is the same today as it was when Mr. P. J. Towle (The Pioneer of Absolutely Pure and Full Measure Maple Syrup) discovered, that in addition to the Towle Process, a small amount of Cane Sugar Syrup blended with the Maple Syrup, greatly improved and balanced the color as well as the flavor, making it soft, mellow, deliciously sweet, still retaining that delicate Maple Character.

It matters not where you purchase Towle's Log Cabin Syrup, from the dealer you have always traded with or at a store where you are a stranger. The Log Cabin Can insures you uniform quality, uniform purity and uniform full measure.

We are so positive that Towle's Log Cabin Syrup will suit you and your family that if your grocer does not sell Towle's it will pay you to go to one who does.

## Towle's Log Cabin

*The Pioneer Maple Syrup*

### Full Measure—Full Quality—Full Flavor

We have an attractive book "From Camp to Table" which tells of the many ways Towle's Log Cabin can be used and gives thirty-three prize recipes.

Every housewife should have a copy of this interesting book. By its aid you can delight the family with many new delicacies.

**Send for It. It's Free**

To every reader of this advertisement who sends us 10 cents in coin or in 2 cent U. S. stamps, we will mail, postpaid, an always useful article—a beautiful, full size, long wearing, silver-plated teaspoon, as illustrated—no advertising on it.

**A Souvenir of Towle's Log Cabin**

There is a coupon on every can of Log Cabin Syrup, which enables you to secure more of these spoons. Address:

**The Towle Maple Products Co.**  
St. Paul, Minn., U. S. A.

*Refineries and Offices:*  
St. Johnsbury, Vt.      St. Paul, Minn.  
In the Virgin Maple Sugar Forest      In the center of North America.  
San Francisco, Cal.      Pacific Coast Headquarters.

*Geo. Mother! but this is good Syrup!*

Figure 1. 1910 advertisement claiming that the addition of small amount of cane sugar blended with maple syrup improved the flavor, color, and balance of Log Cabin Syrup - Saturday Evening Post, October 15, 1910.

exactly how much or how little maple syrup it contained. Log Cabin got ahead of this in 1904 by diversifying its product line to offer a range of Log Cabin Syrups, some blends, some true maple syrup. For example, Log Cabin Penoche Syrup was entirely cane syrup, Log Cabin Camp Syrup was a blend of cane and maple syrup, and Log Cabin Maple Syrup and Log Cabin Selected Maple Syrup were supposedly 100% real maple syrup.

Those that felt blending syrups was a form of adulteration hoped that the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 would bring an end to syrup blends being sold as maple syrup. To their disappointment, the 1906 act was aimed at the elimination of dangerous and unnecessary ingredients.



**Pledges Of Purity**

Look for the “Log Cabin” can, and the Red Label when you want a pure, delicious maple syrup that is full measure. The Cabin can is your assurance that you are getting the sweetest, purest, richest and most delicious maple syrup on the market. Be sure to ask your grocer for

**Towle’s Log Cabin Maple Syrup,  
Towle’s Log Cabin Camp Syrup**

—AND—

**Towle’s Log Cabin Penoche Syrup.**

Towle’s Log Cabin Penoche Syrup is an original sweet. It is an absolutely pure sugar syrup especially adopted for making fine candies. In the process of refining Penoche syrup we bring out all the delicacy, all of the delicious flavor to be found only in the sun-kissed West India cane sugars. All good grocers sell **Log Cabin Syrups**.

A gold plated souvenir spoon, and a valuable recipe book sent for ten cents in stamps.

**THE TOWLE MAPLE SYRUP COMPANY, St. Paul, Minn.**

Figure 2. Newspaper advertisement from 1906 for three variations of Log Cabin Syrup – Bismarck Tribune, December 22, 1906.

Adulteration in the eyes of the federal government came to mean the addition of unsafe, unhealthy, inferior elements or chemicals. In response, syrup makers like the Towle company simply adjusted their labels, as required, to accurately state that the syrup was made from cane and maple syrup and expanded their use of the word “pure” to emphasize that there were no dangerous, unhealthy, or added chemical ingredients. Of course, this was genius in that it implied that other brands of syrup might be impure, or, for the less careful reader of the label, that the Log Cabin Syrup package contained pure maple syrup. Log Cabin complied completely and even added specific language to their label that their syrup was “Guaranteed Under the Food and Drugs Act of June 30, 1906”.

Over the years, both before and after the enactment of the Food and Drug Act of 1906, many states, including Minnesota, attempted to prosecute the Towle Syrup Company for claims of adulteration, misbranding, or a violation of labeling laws, and in every single example the states failed to win their case. Judges and Attorneys General repeatedly found Log Cabin’s labels accurate and consistent with their ingredients and the language of the state or federal food and drug acts.

We do know that during the time the company was owned by P.J. Towle, and later his sons, the syrup was a blend of 75% cane sugar syrup and 25% maple syrup. After the company was sold by the Towle family to the General Foods Corporation in 1927, the blend was reduced to 85% cane and 15% maple syrup, where it remained until the 1960s when it was reduced to 10.5% maple. In the early 1970s the formula was further reduced to 3% maple syrup, and then to 2%, and then to a trace amount in the 2000s, before maple syrup was completely eliminated from the ingredients sometime after 2013.

For most of the 20th century, Log Cabin Syrup was the best-selling pancake syrup on the market. Even with only 25% real maple syrup, the production of Log Cabin syrup required enormous volumes of maple syrup and the company was arguably the single largest purchaser of pure maple syrup in the world.

Portions of this article are taken from a longer article on the early history of the Log Cabin Syrup Company written by the author which will appear in the spring 2022 issue of Ramsey County History, the journal of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

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