

# Minnesota Maple News

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## The St. Paul Syrup Refining Company and its Brand of Absolutely Pure Canada Sap Maple Syrup – Matthew M. Thomas

At the turn of the last century, Minnesota was home to the nationally famous Towle's Log Cabin Syrup Company. Less well known is St. Paul's other maple syrup blending company, the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company and their brand of "Absolutely Pure Canada Sap Maple Syrup."

The origins of the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company can be traced back to the arrival of the Samuel Bliss Company on Sibley Street in downtown St. Paul in 1886. The Bliss Company was a large Chicago-based sugar refiner and syrup dealer with branches in Rockford, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri; and St. Paul, with the St. Paul facility managed

by Oliver S. Musser. In the mid-1880s, Bliss introduced the "Canada Sap Maple Syrup" as his signature brand. Unfortunately for Bliss, the company ran into financial troubles and went bankrupt in 1888. Out of the failure of the Bliss Company, the National Syrup Company formed the following year, locating on 3rd Street in St. Paul, with O. S. Musser continuing as the new manager.

The National Syrup Company's sales range extended to the west coast and the company managed to win bronze and silver medals for its Canada Sap Maple Syrup at the San Francisco Mechanics Institute Industrial Exposition in 1889 and 1890, even though the syrup was a blend of predominantly corn syrup and a small

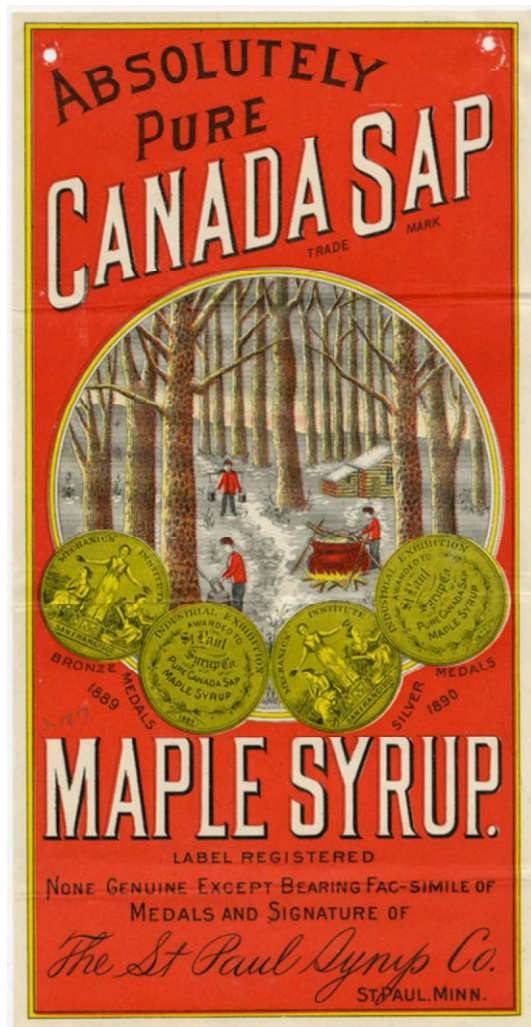


Figure 2. St. Paul Syrup Refining Company label for Absolutely Pure Canada Sap Maple Syrup. Collections of the California State Archives.

amount of maple syrup. The National Syrup Company wasted no time in using these questionable awards for their marketing benefit and proudly displayed them on their labels over a bright red background alongside a sugarbush scene, not unlike the appearance and color scheme of the labels of their St. Paul neighbor and rival, the Towle's Log Cabin Syrup Company. (continued p. 2)



Figure 1. Original Canada Sap Maple Syrup newspaper advertisement from Gunnison Valley News (Gunnison, Utah) August 11, 1905.

Musser left the company in 1891 and under the new management of George P. Williams, the National Syrup Company changed its name in 1895 to the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company, possibly to distinguish and distance itself from the similarly named National Glucose Company, also operating at that time. Williams continued as president and manager for the next eighteen years before moving to Kansas City to lead a reborn version of the Bliss Syrup Refining Company.

In addition to their most prominent, “Canada Sap Syrup,” the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company also used other syrup brand names like “Paragon,” “Blood of the Maple,” and “Red Crow.” In addition to blended maple and corn syrups, the company packaged strained honey, a sorghum syrup blend, and molasses. Although they were located in Minnesota, it is unclear where exactly the company obtained its maple syrup. Contrary to the label name, it remains to be discovered if any of the syrup was actually made in Canada or if it was made closer to home in Minnesota?

There is even a question of whether or not their cans and bottles contained ANY real maple syrup. One analysis by the State of Kansas in 1906 concluded



*Figure 3. National Syrup Company Absolutely Pure Canada Sap Maple Syrup sample size bottle, see adjacent quarter for scale. Collections of the author.*

there was no maple syrup in their blend; however, the accuracy and sensitivity of testing methods at that time were better at detecting the presence of corn syrup added to a container of maple syrup, as opposed to detecting low percentages of maple added to a can of mostly corn syrup. Following the introduction of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and the requirements for accuracy in the language of packaging labels, words like blend and maple flavored were added to the labels of the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company’s “Canada Sap Syrup”.

During Williams’ period of leadership, the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company expanded its advertising program, formally incorporated in the state of Minnesota in 1907, trademarked its company name and the “Absolutely Pure Canada Sap Maple Syrup” brand. Prior to that time, Scudders, another Chicago based syrup company, was also using the “Canada Sap Maple Syrup” name for their blended syrups. When Williams moved on from the company in 1913 he was replaced by Timothy Edward Natrass, formerly a clerk for Musser. Natrass continued as manager until the St. Paul Syrup Refining Company closed its doors in 1926.

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## MMSPA Fall Meeting Summary – Shelly Carlson

The annual fall meeting of MMSPA was held at Tamarack Nature Center, Stillwater. Many thanks to Shannon Stewart for organizing a wonderful set of events for us. Thanks especially to Roth Sugarbush for providing the morning refreshments.

After introductions, Shannon, an environmental educator at the center, provided an overview of what is offered at this outdoor nature center. It

is a busy place year-round with students from pre-school to 5<sup>th</sup> grade in attendance. Tamarack is 320 acres and a part of the Ramsey County Park system. Other available activities include birding, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing. The center also makes apple cider, maple syrup, and produces honey that is harvested from hives located in the park.

Ben Carlson, Nature Conservancy, then gave a presentation on invasive species and how they affect your sugarbush. The main pests are woody plants (*i.e.*, Eurasian buckthorn, honeysuckle), herbaceous plants (*i.e.*, garlic mustard), and fauna (*i.e.*, worms, white-tail deer). Worms cause soil erosion and compaction, resulting in poor regeneration of plants ultimately resulting in a loss of biodiversity in your woodlot. (*continued p. 3*)