

Minnesota Maple News

Newsletter of the Minnesota Maple Syrup Producers Association

Fourth / Winter Quarter

<http://www.mnmaple.org>

December 2023



Life After Log Cabin: Bucket Brand Syrup and Pioneer Maple Products Company

by Matthew M. Thomas

As maple history goes in Minnesota, the Towles Log Cabin Syrup Company, which began in St. Paul in 1888, gets the honor of most famous maple-related syrup company. What is less well known is that there is a second chapter for the Towle family in Minnesota maple history. In 1927, the Towle family sold the Log Cabin company for \$4.8 million to the Postum Company, a company that changed its name to General Foods later that year. As part of the sale, the Towle family promised to never use the Log Cabin name or the log cabin container in the sale of syrup, and the Towle family members could not engage in the syrup selling business for a period five years.

With their purchase of the Log Cabin Syrup, General Foods was primarily interested in the Log Cabin brand, the Log Cabin logo and packaging, and its customers sales list and grocery store shelf space. General Foods was not interested in the Log Cabin Company's syrup plant in St. Paul and instead shifted the bottling of Log Cabin to General Foods' sprawling factory in New Jersey. In the wake of this move and abandonment of Log Cabin's syrup bottling plant, described as the largest syrup bottling plant in the United States at that time, a group of former Log Cabin Company employees bought the Log Cabin plant and in April 1929 incorporated a new syrup company called the Pioneer Maple Products Company. Along with the new company name they trademarked their new product name, Bucket Brand blended syrup.

Early the next year Bucket Brand Syrup could be found on grocery store shelves around the United States. Learning from the success of Log Cabin Syrup's special cabin shaped

metal can, Bucket Brand Syrup was packaged and advertised in a unique metal can shaped and painted like a wooded bucket (Figure 1). The can was sealed with a flat cover and had a small pour spout on top that "never spills". It came in four sizes: table or small size (12 oz.), medium size (1 pint, 10 oz.), large size (1 quart, 1 pint, 10 oz.), and a one-gallon size. In later years, Bucket Brand was also available in three sizes of glass bottles; 12 ounces, 26 ounces, and 32 ounces. Like the metal cans, the bottles, which came with a paper label, were uniquely shaped and embossed to look like wooden bucket. The company also

few decades. Bouthilet's experience as the past vice-president and general manager of Log Cabin was touted as a source of critical expertise in developing the secret syrup blend of the Pioneer Company.

Along with Bouthilet, the treasurer was Eugene Towle Eldredge, a grandson of Log Cabin Company Founder Patrick J. Towle, but conveniently without the Towle last name. Eugene Towle Eldredge began working as an assistant treasurer for Log Cabin Products in 1926 and 1927. He was the first Pioneer Company treasurer with its formation in 1929, and then advanced



Figure 1. Examples of the front and back of the brightly painted pail shaped metal container used for Bucket Brand Syrup.

grabbed customer's attention with the use of a series of catchy slogans like, "It's Mighty Good," "Maple at its Best" and "Tip up the Bucket."

The President of the new Pioneer Company was John A. Bouthilet, a former Log Cabin accountant, auditor, general manager, and Vice-President, who had been with the company for a

to vice president from 1930 to 1939. Eugene's father, Frank A. Eldredge, was married to Honora "Nonie" Towle, and as P.J. Towle's son-in-law, was a key member of the family business, working as the Log Cabin company secretary from 1896 to 1927. In reality, it is likely that the Towle family was part the formation and financing of Pioneer Maple Products from the very

MN Maple News

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Minnesota Maple News is the official publication of the Minnesota Maple Syrup Producers Association. The officers and Board of Directors are listed on the last page.

The MN Maple News is published quarterly (March, June, September and December). A full-color version of the newsletter is sent to all members via email, and a black/white version is also sent to those who request a paper copy. The deadline for contributions is the first day of the publication month. Send articles, photos, ads, etc., to: Stephen Saupe, editor, MN Maple News, 14493 325th St., St. Joseph, MN. 56374 or email to ssaup@csbsju.edu.

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Thanks to Stu Peterson for editorial assistance.

beginning and simply operated in the background until their five-year waiting period had expired.

In July 1933, following the end of the five-year non-compete period, it was announced that William J. Towle, Jr. was the new Vice President of the Pioneer Maple Products Company and his brother Patrick J. Towle, II was the new treasurer. Soon after, all Bucket Brand Syrup containers and advertisements featured the Towle family name and advertisements emphasized their history of three generations and nearly fifty years of blending syrup (Figure 2).

It is interesting to study the wording in the company's advertisements over time. In the first three to four years the company did not hide the fact that they were selling a blended syrup. Rather, in the spirit of creative marketing, they embraced that fact and promoted the idea that their blended syrup was a smoother and a more mellow flavor that was preferable to pure maple syrup. In addition, the early advertising

Come and get it - THE RICH MAPLE GOODNESS OF BUCKET SYRUP

BUCKET SYRUP HAS A FLAVOR THAT CAN'T BE COPIED
It's the result of **48 Years' Blending Experience**

THE TOWLE family started blending syrup nearly fifty years ago... and the third generation is blending Bucket Syrup today with the superb skill that is developed only through long experience.

SELECTED MAPLE USED
The mellow richness of pure New England maple and the exquisite flavor of maple from Quebec province are captured and treasured in Bucket Syrup. Blended with pure cane sugar by the Towle's inimitable skill, Bucket Syrup offers a taste treat you will want to repeat often—for you can depend on it to bring cheers from every member of your family.

A HEALTHFUL, NOURISHING SWEET
Bucket Syrup adds interest to children's menus. They love milk slightly sweetened with this tangy maple syrup... and it's simply grand on puddings or ice cream. But, best of all, it's good for them because it is so easily digestible, because it satisfies their natural craving for energy-giving sweets, and because it is rich in bone-building calcium.

Mixed fruit drinks are marvelously improved by the white maple flavor when Bucket Syrup is used for sweetening. For variety, make cake icings, puddings, frozen mousses with Bucket Syrup.

Like every other woman who discovers the delightful flavor of Bucket Syrup, you'll be inventing excuses to use it. Try it once and it becomes as "staple" an item in your kitchen as sugar or vanilla. It's food, sweetening, and flavoring all in one.

THREE GENERATIONS OF SYRUP BLENDEERS

P. J. Towle, pioneer in the art of blending pure maple and cane sugars to preserve the true flavor of maple in a commercially practical syrup.

W. J. Towle, trained by his father in the skill of blending syrups for 41 years carried on the Towle tradition, passing them on to his son.

W. J. Towle, II, now vice president of Pioneer Maple Products Co. Only such experience can produce the uniformly rich maple goodness of Bucket Syrup.

Old-Fashioned Wheat Cakes
2 cups flour 1 egg, well beaten
1 tsp. baking powder 2 cups thick buttermilk
1 tsp. salt 4 tsp. melted butter
2 tsp. sugar 1st

*Omit sugar if you wish. Beat the eggs in the mixing bowl and add the milk. Place all dry ingredients in sifter, then sift into milk mixture until smooth. Add the shortening and bake on a hot griddle.

Send Coupon for FREE Set of EIGHT BRIDGE TALLIES

Pioneer Maple Products Co.
Saint Paul, Minnesota
Gentlemen: Please send me FREE Set of EIGHT BRIDGE TALLIES.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
My grocer is _____
He does not carry a stock of Bucket Syrup

Figure 2. Bucket Brand Syrup advertisement from 1935 featuring the company's connection to three generations of the Towle family as a marker of their expertise in the blended syrup business.

is honest in saying that the maple syrup they were blending with cane sugar was from Quebec and Vermont.

Furthermore, the company capitalized on the idea that buyers should be assured of its quality because the

makers had over forty years of experience in the blended syrup business. According to their advertisements, they used an exclusive formula and a mysterious process they called “timed blending to preserve in nature’s own way the original tang, flavor and richness of pure maple syrup.”

However, despite being truthful in the company’s earlier print ads, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) took exception to some of their print and radio advertisements. In a complaint filed in 1935, the FTC argued that the wording and claims in their advertisements such as, “mellow richness of pure New England maple,” implied Bucket Brand Syrup was a

pure maple syrup product. Ultimately, the FTC ruled that Pioneer Maple Products was guilty of “unfair methods of competition in commerce,” and as a result the FTC ordered the company to “cease and desist” from stating or implying in its advertising that Bucket Brand Syrup was made entirely, or substantially from maple syrup. This did not prevent Pioneer Maple Products from selling or advertising Bucket Brand Syrup, only that they had to change the wording used in their advertising and be more truthful in the wording it used to promote its syrup.

By the late 1930s, the fortunes of the Pioneer Maple Products Company appeared to enter a decline. Advertisements for their products ceased in

1940 and the company was no longer listed in local business directories. Company President John Bouthilet passed away in 1944; by 1941 Eugene Towle Eldredge had gone to work for the Hilex Bleach company which was started by his father; William J. Towle, Jr. enlisted in the Army Air Corps for the war; and Patrick J. Towle, II shifted interests to real estate in 1936 before becoming the Assistant State Director of the Federal Housing Administration. By the mid-1940s the building the syrup company once occupied was listed as home to the Minnesota Rag and Paper Stock Company. Eventually the building was demolished sometime between 1966 and 1970 as part of the urban renewal efforts in the West Side Flats of St. Paul.

Originally from St. Cloud, Dr. Matthew M. Thomas is a historian of the maple industry who shares his research and writing at the website www.maplesyruphistory.com. He is the author of the recent book “A Sugarbush Like None Other: Adirondack Maple Syrup and the Horse Shoe Forestry Company”, available for sale on eBay and the book “Maple King: The Making of a Maple Syrup Empire,” available on Amazon.com. He can be reached at maplesyruphistory@gmail.com



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