



EMBRACING CHANGE & PRESERVING THE PAST: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MAPLE HISTORY CORNER

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This article is the first installment of several articles that will share and explore topics and stories that relate to the past and present within the maple syrup industry in Vermont.

Change is inevitable and mostly a good thing. But in embracing and pushing for change there is often value in looking back to appreciate our past. Technological improvements and industry advancements do not happen in a vacuum; they are a response to current or previous events or conditions and depend on an accurate understanding of the past. Sometimes “the past” refers to the previous week, other times “the past” refers to previous decades or even centuries. Learning from the past means ensuring we document and preserve our history.

As an example, take the sugarhouse, the mainstay of any maple operation. Maple operations will change over time, and we cannot expect one’s sugarhouse to meet the needs of a sugarbush indefinitely. Buildings age, businesses grow, and the needs of a maple operation change. At the same time, it is worth pausing to think about preserving a record of the past before the memories, knowledge, and physical record and remains are gone. There is value in taking the time to gather and document the history and activities of your sugar house and sugarbush and what they represent to your family and community.

Documenting and preserving your history can take a variety of forms from creating a home archive; gathering oral histories and memories of family members, workers, and friends; to photographing the old ruins and relics in your maple opera-

tion as well as the new structures and production infrastructure. Examples of items to consider saving and archiving could include photographs and films, annual production records, awards and competition results, catalogs, advertisements, newspaper accounts, and packaging memorabilia.

An easy way to organize information and get started is to create a timeline of events and memories. With the help of today’s mobile digital devices many of these things are already being done by producers, such as photographing new equipment and construction of new facilities or maintaining seasonal production records. Other ways of documenting your history, like conducting oral histories, take a little more effort and planning but the results are unbelievably rewarding, and their value is often not recognized until years later.

In short, documenting and preserving maple history does not need to be intimidating or academic. We all have a history to tell and record. It does not have to be fancy. It just needs to make sense and be helpful to current and future generations. There is no wrong way to do it.

Dr. Matthew Thomas is a historian who researches and writes about all aspects of the maple syrup industry. You can learn more about his books, articles, and other publications at his Maple Syrup History website at www.maplesyruphistory.com. Matt welcomes your questions and is happy to provide advice and assistance where possible. He can be contacted by email at maplesyruphistory@gmail.com.

VMSMA would love to hear from you! If you have a story or photo to share for future newsletters, please contact our Membership Manager, Heather Winner: heather@vermontmaple.org

One of our favorite historians and VMSMA member Cedric Alexander recently shared this gem with us! We love when members share their memories and historical finds. It’s just one of many easy ways for us to document our shared past and traditions.