

# A 'VERMONT MAID' LANDMARK IN ESSEX JUNCTION

BY LAURIE JORDAN

Maple sugar and syrup companies in the early 1900s often relocated and changed their names and owners as well as their brands. In 1916, Fletcher N. Johnson started the Essex Junction Vermont Maple Syrup Company in the building that still stands on the end of Jackson Street next to the railroad tracks. He was a maple sugar



and syrup wholesaler from Ohio and sold a Sugar Bird brand of cane and maple syrup. Often coming to Vermont for syrup, he joined with his brother-in-law and three Vermonters. Arthur Beeman and A.B. Rugg were two of them from Essex Junction.

Johnson started a new F.N. Johnson Maple Company in Burlington to can and sell syrup after he sold his 50% controlling share of the Essex Junction company and building to George Cary of St. Johnsbury in 1919.

Following a dispute with F.N. Johnson over the use of the Sugar Bird brand, Cary created a new brand of blended syrup called Vermont Maid which was initially packaged in the Essex Junction plant.

The Cary Company was connected with the Towle Maple Products Company from St. Paul, Minnesota when Cary sold his St. Johnsbury maple sugar plant to Towle in 1910. Following the death of P.J. Towle in 1912, the Towle company sold the St. Johnsbury plant back to Cary and moved their operations back to St. Paul.

George Cary may have gotten the Vermont Maid label idea from Towle's St. Johnsbury sales of a Vermont Maid brand of "pure maple sap syrup" between 1910 and 1915. Cary adopted that brand name and registered the trademark in 1919 with his Vermont Maple Syrup Company in Essex Junction. The Vermont Maid Blended Cane and Maple Syrup tins were sold at least as early as the summer of 1920. He reorganized his Essex Junction company in June 1922 and moved it to St. Johnsbury in February 1923. Vermont Maid's 1923 label location became St. Johnsbury.

Matt Thomas sent me a photo of his purchased original 1922 Vermont Maid can. I have a tin gallon can with a label for "Golden State Cane and Maple Syrup" produced by the Vermont Maple Syrup Company in Essex Junction. In 1923, Vermont Maple Products Co-operative Exchange leased the vacant building. That company's workers are shown in a c 1927 photo. Farmers Warehouse, Inc., an organization created for the Maple Co-Op Exchange, purchased the building in 1925. Around 1930 Vermont Maple Orchard, Inc. produced a blend of maple and cane syrup in Essex Junction in its first year. John Rickaby, a former manager for Cary in St. Johnsbury, started his new company there before moving to Burlington. Other maple businesses produced in that building until 1991. The structure at One Jackson Street is a landmark for where Vermont Maid began between 1920 and 1923.

The Vermont Maid logo was used for advertisements and labels in 1922 and its location read Essex Junction. There was a field in the background of a maiden with pigtails and wearing a white bonnet. The logo has changed over the years, but it has kept the maiden in the middle of a green panel. Once the syrup was produced in Burlington around 1927, the white bonnet disappeared and the background became a solid color. The white panel on the label's bottom read Burlington. It was packed in sample size and two other sized bottles and three sizes of tins. During World War II, the bottles became simpler. It has had several owners and manufacturing locations as well.



George Cary sold his St. Johnsbury Vermont Maple Syrup Company and the Vermont Maid brand to Johnson's new company in November 1926. Johnson had merged his Burlington F.N. Johnson Maple Company with a New York company to form the American Maple Corporation in early 1926 and he acquired Burlington's Welch Brothers Maple Products Company. In the spring of 1927, Johnson changed his company's name to Vermont Maple Syrup Company and he was voted as president.

Johnson's Burlington operations and their associated brands and labels (including Vermont Maid) were sold to the Louisiana company Penick and Ford in 1928. They were the largest corn and cane syrup packers in the country at that time. F.N. Johnson returned to Ohio and added wholesale grocery sales to his now smaller maple syrup business. R. J. Reynolds purchased Penick and Ford and the Vermont Maid brand in 1965. The Burlington plants had few changes. R.J. Reynold's Vermont Maid Syrup bottling plant on Pine Street and Marble Avenue in Burlington closed in 1975. Vermont Maid consolidated and moved their operations to New Brunswick, New Jersey. Later in 1985 Reynolds acquired the Nabisco brand and Nabisco sold the Vermont Maid brand to B & G Foods in 1997. That company owned Maple Grove Farms of Vermont and other brands such as Spring Tree Maple Syrup and Cary's Maple Syrup.

I have Matthew Thomas who researched Vermont Maple Industries to thank for my information. I met him at a maple conference with antique displays and both of us welcome any more information someone may have on the Vermont Maid and Essex Junction maple landmark.

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#### Resources are from:

Matthew M. Thomas, "The Beginnings of The Vermont Maid Brand of Blended Syrup" and One thought on "The Beginnings of The Vermont Maid Brand" originally published May 5, 2019, revised February 7, 2020

A Matt Thomas Presentation for Chittenden County Historical Society on "The Essex Junction Syrup Plant: Weaving Together Seventy-Five Years of Vermont Maple Syrup" May 17, 2022



Some of the workers in this photo are Anna Houghton, Mae Wheeler, Nelson Valyou and Lock Wheeler.

