

FIFTY YEARS OF PAPER LABELS FROM THE VERMONT MAPLE SUGAR MAKERS' ASSOCIATION

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For the first part of the last century, one of the perks of membership in the Vermont Maple Syrup Makers' Association (VMSMA) was exclusive access to members only paper labels identifying the contents of a can, bottle or tub as a pure maple product and made by a member of the association. The VMSMA was formed in January 1893 and one of its first orders of business was to "issue a copyrighted label to be used by its members, guaranteeing the purity and weight of all packages." Introduced in April of that year, a goal of the labels was to protect consumers from fraud when purchasing maple products, with the belief that the presence of the label was a guarantee of the purity of the product.

To use the label, members were required to sign and submit to the Association Secretary a prepared statement confirming that the maple products displaying the label were manufactured by the member and that they were pure maple syrup or sugar of standard weight and quality. In the beginning, members were provided 100 free labels with payment of the Association's \$1.00 annual dues. Additional labels were available at 50¢ per 100 labels, which was reduced to 35¢ per 100 a few years later. Unfortunately, the label was not copyrighted as originally planned, and non-Association members and unscrupulous syrup sellers were reportedly copying the label and selling adulterated blends of maple and corn syrup as pure Vermont maple syrup.

The original 1893 label was printed in black on white paper and featured a pair of maple related photos, one a sugarbush scene and one the interior of a sugarhouse, along with the association name and the words "Pure Maple Sugar and Syrup" across the top. The original two-photo label was redesigned around 1908, updating the photos and rearranging the layout and wording of the text. A completely new color version featuring the "Freedom and Unity" seal of Vermont was introduced in 1914 in two variations, one for maple sugar and one for maple syrup. The state seal label was updated a few years later, maintaining the basic design but shifting to a more colorful and cleaner version of the seal.

In 1918, the VMSMA labels afoul of the United States Food and Drug inspectors for failing to display the quantity of the contents of the package, as required by the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Soon after, a new, monochrome green on white label with the Vermont State Seal was made available with the addition of the required text of net weight in pounds.

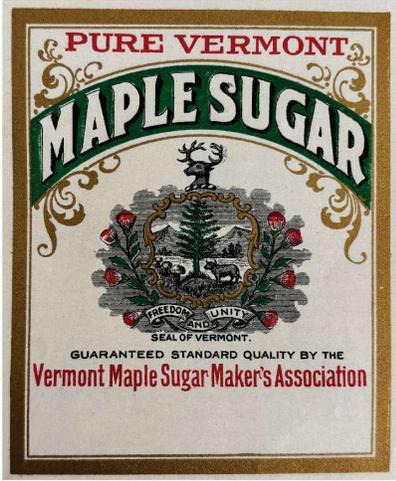
For the 1929 season, it was recommended by the Secretary of the VMSMA that members use the new "Made in New England" labels for that season since their supply of the usual VMSMA labels was destroyed in the devastating 1927 flood in Montpelier. Better known as the "New England Farm Products Label" or the "New England Quality Label," the label was part of a multi-state program of the New England Marketing Officials Association to promote farm products from the New England region. In the case of Vermont, the label was endorsed by the state of Vermont's Commissioner of Agriculture and signified that the contents of the container were labeled in accordance with the state of Vermont's grading standards. However, any registered syrup maker was free to use the New England Quality label and it was not specific to members of the VMSMA.

Use of the VMSMA State Seal label ended in 1933 when a state law went into effect prohibiting the use of the state seal, flag, or coat of arms for advertising or commercial purposes. As a result, the VMSMA was forced to develop a new paper

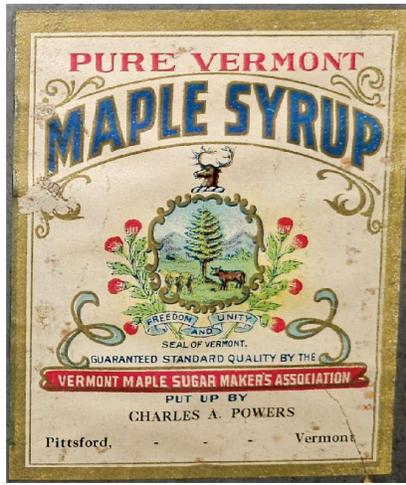


1890s Label

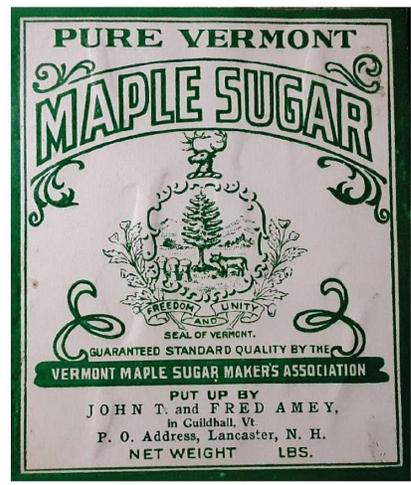
1900s Label



Early 19-teens Label



Later 19-teens Label



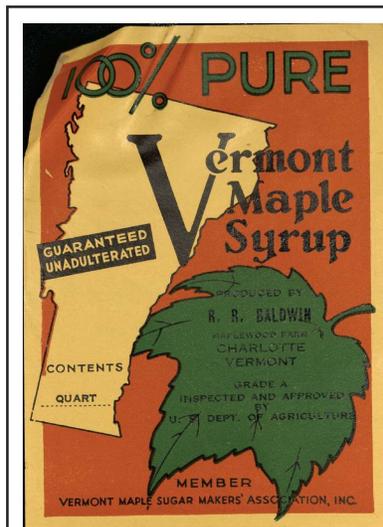
1920s Label

label for the following season. At the February 1934 meeting, VMSMA board members chose a rectangular three-color label with a bold green maple leaf next to the state of Vermont in white, all on a red background.

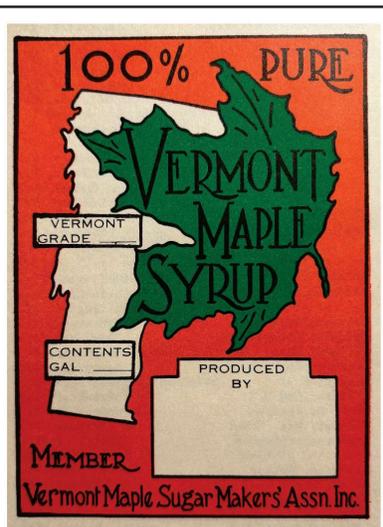
The VMSMA label ran into problems with the federal government a second time when text added by the printers on the green, white, and red label led to a disagreement with the United States Department of Agriculture. Initially, the 1934 label had a blank green maple leaf within which the producer could have their name, location, and grade printed. The 1934 label included the wording "Subject to Inspection by the Vermont Department of Agriculture," as agreed to by the VMSMA and the State of Vermont. However, in 1941 without direction from the VMSMA or the State of Vermont, the printer changed the wording on the VMSMA label to read "Inspected and Approved by U.S. Department of Agriculture." Naturally, this change in wording caught the attention of the USDA who pointed out that no syrup was subject to federal inspections or approval and accused one Vermont syrup

maker of misbranding. To resolve the situation, George Turner, the acting VMSMA secretary and state extension forester, promptly alerted the printer and had the incorrect text removed from printing on all future labels. The three-color red, white, and green label was redesigned for the last time for the 1950 season to accommodate new labeling rules enacted in May 1949 which added requirements that containers include weight or volume and year of manufacture, as well as the standard name and address of producer or packer, name of product, and grade.

As syrup packaging modernized, colorful painted lithographed cans became the newest option for the syrup maker, replacing paper labels on plain metal cans. The VMSMA got on board with this trend and began offering generic lithographed cans for exclusive use by VMSMA members. The first VMSMA lithographed can was introduced in 1951 for use in the 1952 season, bringing an end to the paper label era for most VMSMA members.



1930s Label



1940s Label

