



March 2005

President's Message:

The Spring meeting of the Springfield Historical Society will be held on Thursday, April 14th, 7:00 pm at the Libbie A Cass Library Conference Room. Sponsored by the Humanities Council, Rebecca Rule will give her presentation on Yankee Humor. The program was very popular in Croydon and Grantham.

Thankyous go to the following:

Bill Sullivan for the interesting presentation on the India/Pakistan situation.

Alice Nulsen for the great mulled cider and cookies at the January meeting.

Brandt Denniston for setting up our microfilm reader that we've had for several years. It is in the NH Room at the library. The Later Day Saints gave us a copy of the early Springfield records on microfilm. Now we can read it!

Don Garlock for arranging interesting programs.
Patsy Heath Caswell, President

SPRINGFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOOKS FOR SALE!

If you wish to order the following, send money to Trudy Heath, Box 6, Springfield Historical Society, Springfield, NH 03284,
NEW-COLLECTION OF SPRINGFIELD
STORIES @ 20.00 plus \$2.00 postage _____

AND/OR

PICTORIAL HISTORY OF SPRINGFIELD
@\$20.00 plus \$2.00 postage _____

Sugaring in Springfield, NH

The Native Americans taught the Europeans the art of maple sugaring.

The maple crop is one of our oldest agricultural commodities and it is one of the few crops to be solely American and produced only in the Northeastern US and Southeastern Canada. Of the 13 species of maple trees native to the US, and important to the production of syrup, because of the sugar content of the sap is the ACER SACCHARUM, Marsh, known as the sugar or rock maple that furnishes the sap in New England. The average maple tree cannot be tapped until it is forty years old. The average sugar maple of this age will yield about 10 gallons of sap each year or just enough to make one quart of pure maple syrup.

The sap flows up the tree when the temperature rises above 32degrees F. When the temperature drops below 32 degrees, the sap descends back to the tree roots. The sap can only be harvested while moving through the tree trunk. Freezing nights, and warm, sunny spring days are needed for a good maple harvest. In NH, the season starts about Feb 28th and lasts about 40 days.

The best way to determine when sap has boiled to the standard density of syrup is by its boiling point which when at the proper density is 7 degrees F. above the boiling point of water which is 212 degrees F. Atmospheric pressure comes into play also.

The drawn-off syrup is strained through a "felt" to remove impurities and then the syrup is ready to package in cans, etc.

The maple sugaring industry goes back generations in Springfield. Farm families carried on the process in their own maple woods providing syrup and by products for their families and selling any surplus to town's people who might not have had sugar orchards. Some of these families had a simple arch in the woods; others built sugar houses. If one knows where to look in the area woods, you can still see the remains of the simple arches that go back many years. In the late 1990s, cousins, Harold Tillson, Robbie Heath, and Patsy Heath Caswell, found the arch that was in the woods in back of the old chapel (no longer existing) to the right of the intersection of 4A and Shad Hill Road going north. There was still an old sap boiling pan in the leaves. Also remembered in the 1940s, probably during the war years, my father Paul Heath and Ernest Broe had a simple arch in the woods to the west of the fields of the Heath Homestead (destroyed by fire 2003).

CLOVER RIDGE FARM SUGARING

One of the finest sugaring operations in Springfield of the mid twentieth century, and going back to at least the turn of the century, was that of the Frank Colby family at Clover Ridge Farm on Philbrick Hill. The sugar house and orchard were quite a way from the farm buildings. You walked down the pasture lane on the west side of the hill to the maple forest at the foot of the hill. There was the sugarhouse nestled in the maple trees. The main room was where sap was boiled, and on the west side was a small room with a cot where Aunt Maybelle Colby could take catnaps when she was boiling late into the night. There was also a small toilet room attached. (not a modern flush!) I believe there was a woodshed on the northwest side.

The trees were tapped with spiles and wooden and galvanized buckets hung on the trees. A large tank on runners was pulled through the woods by one or two horses. (Some farmers used oxen.) The people gathering the sap wore a yoke on their shoulders with two large pails hanging from each side. Going from tree to tree, they would collect the sap and pour it into the large tank that was pulled by the horses. When the tank was full it would be taken back to the sugarhouse and put into a holding tank. Oftentimes plain doughnuts would have been made up at the farmhouse and brought down to the sugarhouse. The treat was to dip the doughnuts into the warm new maple syrup.

After the syrup was made and poured into cans (in those days), back at the Colby farmhouse on the hill, some of the syrup would be made into maple cream and maple sugar for sale.

Another memory of this period was the walk, often under the stars, back up the pasture lane to the farmhouse on Philbrick Hill. After the season was over, the sap buckets were all brought up to the house to be washed and stored in the attic for the next season. I am not sure when Maybelle Colby no longer sugared. It may have been in the 1960s. I do not believe that she ever used the plastic tubing method.

KIRK HEATH'S SUGAR HOUSE

Kirk, Paul and Hollis Heath all had experience boiling sap on the open arch and in various wooded areas around the Heath Homestead on 4A. After World War II in 1947, Kirk was the only one interested in going into a full scale business. What was once known as grandpa's Sheep Pasture, became Kirk Heath's Sugar Wood.

The Sugar Wood was an ideal location because Kirk could lay a galvanized pipe down the mountain with a dumping station for sap every 100 feet. His first year he used an arch under a canvas roof. By the next year, he decided to build a sugar house approximately 1000 feet from where his final sugarhouse was located. He originally used some wooden and galvanized buckets.

As the business grew, Kirk tapped more trees. The winter of 1958 saw an accumulation of 4 to 6 feet of snow and broke many of the pipe lines. The year 1959 was a perfect time for him to experiment with plastic tubing. He had 600 trees on tubing and 1600 buckets. A network of tubing was created throughout the mountain which then joined larger lines that ran into a tank on the mountain. Here they could hold back the sap if necessary, or let it run downhill to the sugarhouse. The elevation at the sugar house was 1300' and the orchard elevation was approximately 2000'.

When 4A was completed in 1960, Kirk moved the sugarhouse to what became its permanent location. He continued to improve his tubing and other equipment throughout the 1960s. In 1967, he had 2500 trees on tubing and 500 buckets. He added a new evaporator fired by an

oil burner, which was used to finish off the syrup. Eventually he had over 8 miles of small tubing. Each year they had to take it up and clean it. He also began giving "the pill" (flormor tablets) which enabled him to tap ahead of the sap run. The operation also had its hard times when the sugar house burned and it was necessary to rebuild.

Kirk died in his beloved sugar orchard in 1971. His son, Donald, and his family continued the operation until the late 1980s. The sugar house is now the private home of Trudy Heath.

When the sugar house was in business, it was a popular place to stop and watch the sugaring operation. The family was known for their sugar parties. Visitors were always welcomed!

VALLEY VIEW FARM SUGAR HOUSE

The largest maple sugaring operation in Springfield today is that of the Kezar family at the junction of Georges Mills Road and Route 114.

Ben Kezar, the elder, started boiling sap in sugar house #1 in 1937. Along the way sugar house #2 was built and he continued to sugar each Spring until his death in 1986. His son, Ben had learned from his dad, and was encouraged by his son, David to get back into the business. In 1997, the newest sugar house was built and Valley View Farm Sugar House was boiling sap for the first time in 10 years.

The Kezars are one of the few sugar producers still using wood fire. They use propane gas with the finishing evaporator. They have made many improvements since the latest sugar house was built in 1997. They plan a new evaporator, a vac system, and use of reverse osmosis which will speed up evaporation of the sap. They tapped 2000 trees in 2004 and produced 1000 gallons of syrup. They hope to increase the amount this season.

The Kezars buy sap delivered from Darien Patten, who has his own orchard, but not a sugar house, and then sell it back to him as syrup. Darien then bottles and sells the product under his own label.

As in most sugar producers' operations, the public is encouraged to visit the sugar house.

In the 1997 News Leader Archie Mountain told the story of the man from Colorado, who after watching the operation at the Kezar's asked "When do you add the sugar?"

Ben politely told him that God had already added the sugar! These stories continue each year. Recently, Ben told the story of explaining the boiling system of sap to syrup to a flatlander and how it is necessary to get the temperature up to 219 degrees, and boiling point of water is 212 degrees F. The flatlander said "That's hot isn't it? Do you have to pasturize it?"

As in the past, there are still families making syrup for their own use and enjoyment. To some it is a rite of Spring in New Hampshire which is the third largest sugar producer of the New England states. The Wesley Tinkhams on Philbrick Hill have their own little sugar house and have been sugaring off and on for quite a few years. Janet and Wesley Roberts have their own small sugar operation on George Hill. Craig Lampiere on Cemetery Rd. has an arch where he has been teaching his young children what it is all about. There are probably several other families doing the same thing in Springfield who have not been brought to my attention. All of these people are keeping up a wonderful Springfield tradition.

Patsy Heath Caswell

References: Sugar House Campgrounds by Kirk Heath; Sugar House Campground background material about sugaring by Mildred C. Davis; "Maple Weekend" article by Archie Mountain in News Leader, Thursday, March 20 1997; talk with Ben Kezar Jan 12 2005.

DUES: IF THERE IS A RED DOT ON THIS NEWSLETTER, WE HAVE NOT RECEIVED YOUR DUES.

INDIVIDUAL, \$15.00 _____

FAMILY (2 OR MORE) \$25.00 _____

LIFETIME (PER PERSON) \$125.00 _____

NAME _____

ST. or PO _____

CITY/TOWN _____

STATE _____ **ZIP** _____

Please mail to Trudy Heath, Treasurer, PO Box 6, Springfield, NH 03284. **THANKYOU!**

The Grantham Historical Society will have trolley ride tours of historical places in Grantham on June 26th. Reservations are required. Call Alan Walker 863-3484.