

Common Questions asked about Maple Sugaring in North America; Answered using Documentation from the Colonial Era.

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The purpose of this paper is to present an extensive survey of primary source documents that relate to the making of maple sugar in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I have included some authors from the nineteenth century who provided observations of common practices and terms that sharpen the details of our understanding of sugaring during this era.

The structure of this paper allows for people interested in public education, historical reenactment or further research to look at the subject through the eyes of those who witnessed these events rather than my own interpretation and prose. I hope that by providing answers to common questions about sugaring the educator can anticipate what the public might be interested in, and then fashion a narrative explanation that focuses attention to historical knowledge of a specific time and place. What was said by those who were sugaring in the colonial era is always more interesting than broad statements and wide-sweeping generalizations of modern writers.

My own bias and interest in Native and French cultures of the Great Lakes during this period is evident from the sources I draw upon. But it should be noted that these sources tended to be more extensive and illustrative than documents from this era in the British colonies. There is quite a bit of information on sugaring during the first decades of the United States, some of these documents reference in passing sugaring at an early time in the colonies. Many of these references can be found in H.A Schuette and I. J. Ihde, *Maple sugar: a bibliography of early records. II*, Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, volume XXXVIII (1948).

When I was not able to find copies of primary source material or had trouble translating documents, I opted to draw from Helen and Scott Nearing's, *The Maple Sugar Book*. This book is essential to anyone wanting to know more about the history and practice of maple sugaring. Another helpful resource was H. A. Schuette and Sybil C. Schuette, *Maple sugar: a bibliography of early records*, 216, Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, volume XXIX (1935).

The dates given after the authorship of a quote are the dates of the event being described. This is a deviation from the normal parenthetical reference system, but I think it makes the quote more useful to understanding the historical context than if I had referenced the books' publication dates. I have kept the quotes in chronological order to give a framework to understanding how the skills and knowledge of maple sugaring developed in colonial North America.

Did the Native Americans teach the Europeans how to make sugar?

“The Savages have practiced this Art, longer then any now living among them, can remember.” (An Account 1685, 988)

“Though this discovery has not been made by the English above twelve or fourteen years; yet it has been known among the Indians, longer then any now living can remember.” (Beverley 1705, 21)

“The French make it better then the Indian women, from who they have learned how to do it.” (Lafitau 1724, 155)

“The savages from prehistoric times, long before the Europeans discovered America, made maple sugar.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

What trees were being tapped?

“The red maple, or *Acer Rubrum*... a sweet juice runs out of it.” (Kalm 1748, 1:132)

“They boil a good deal of sugar in Canada of the juice running out of the incisions in the sugar-maple, the red maple, and the sugar-birch, but that of the first tree is the most commonly made use of.” (Kalm 1749, 2:411)

“Maple with red flowers (red maple)... A good deal of sugar is made from this tree, but the sap is more watery then (sugar maple); longer cooking is necessary in order to obtain a smaller amount then (sugar maple). The sugar produced is darker, sweeter, and more healthful to use and is especially good for the chest. (Kalm 1751, 150)

“Sugar birch... sugar is also made of from the sap of this tree. It is not as sweet as that of the (maple), but tastes a little bitter. The French call the tree *merisier*; the English, sugar birch, wild birch, and black birch.” (Kalm 1751, 151)

“Hickory... a sugar is made from this tree which is sweeter than that from other types, but the tree produces such small quantities of sap that it is not worth the trouble. It is called *noyer amer* by the French, hickory by the English.” (Kalm 175, 151)

“covered with the rock or sugar maple, or sugar-wood.” (Henry 1760's, 69)

When are maple trees tapped?

“This tree furnishes a great quantity of sugar, which commences to rise from the first days of April and continues until about the 15th May.” (Sarrazin-Vaillant 1708, 213)

“In the month of March, when the sun has gathered a little strength and as trees begin to be in sap” (Lafitau 1724, 154)

“On (March) 19th and 20th, they began to make incisions into the sugar-maple, and to prepare sugar from its juice. April- During this month they continued to extract the juice of the sugar-maple, for making sugar.” (Kalm 1745, 2: 373-74)

“In February and March, there exudes from this tree an abundant flow of a delicious, sweet and clear liquid which is fragrant and wholesome.” (Bonin 1750's, 144)

“Some time in February... In this month we began to make sugar.” (Smith 1750's, 36)

“If the spring snow begins to melt, the trees fill up... the sap runs for about three weeks, but this period

varies according to weather conditions.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“About the middle of February is the time... The season for this business lasts till the end of March and sometimes to the middle of April.” (Hopkins 1753, 38)

“The Indians extract it in January, making a hole at the bottom of it, and apply a little tube to that. At the first thaw.” (Bossu 1756, 188)

“The earlier part of the spring is that best adapted to making maple-sugar. The sap runs only in the day; and it will not run, unless there has been a frost the night before. When, in the morning, there is a clear sun, and the night has left ice of the thickness of a dollar, the greatest quantity is produced... On the twenty-fifth of April, our labour ended, and we returned to the fort.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

“In the month of March, the manufacture of maple-sugar engaged as usual their attention.” (Henry 1760’s, 192)

“In the beginning of April, I prepared to make maple-sugar, building for this purpose a house, in a hollow dug out of the snow. The house was seven feet high, but yet was lower than the snow. On the twenty-fourth, I began my manufacture..... Sugar-making continued till the twelfth of May. (Henry 1760’s, 211)

How do you ensure a good maple run from a tree?

“All this reasoning proves that if the maple is to provide a juice suitable to make sugar, it must have snow spread on the ground which covers the roots..” (Sarrazin-Vaillant 1708, 213)

“For the trees to give their water in abundance there should be at the base of the trunk a certain amount of snow, which keeps the water fresh. It should freeze during the night and the day should be clear, without wind and without clouds; because then the sun has more strength, which dilates the pores of the trees, and which the wind closes so much that it stops the running.” (Lafitau 1724, 155)

“The observation is worthy of note that there must be snow at foot of the tree in order that it shall let its sweet water run; and’ it refuses to yield this liquid when the snow appears no more upon the ground.” (LeClerq 1671, 123)

“Maple sap can be drawn from the same tree for five or six consecutive days, if care is taken to make new grooves every day always on the same side towards the noonday sun. This must be, too, when it has been cold the night before, and when there is bright sunshine without a cold, fierce wind.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

“The greater the amount of snow during the winter, the more severe the cold, the greater the quality of sap produced by the sugar maple during the following spring.

The first sap which runs from the sugar maple in the spring is sweeter than that which runs later. The more intense the cold, the greater the quantity of sugar in the sap. The warmer the air, the smaller the quantity of sugar in the sap which runs from the tree.

The slower the spring comes and the longer the snow lasts before it melts, the more sap, consequently, the more sugar produced. If the spring comes quickly and the snow melts quickly there is not nearly the quantity of sap as it soon quits running immediately.

If a east wind blows, the trees appear to give very little sap, for the wind is either warm or moist.

The heavier the frosts are at night in the spring when the sap is running, the greater is the quantity of sap produced the following day.

During clear weather more sap is produced than during cloudy weather.

The most sap is obtained if there are heavy frosts during the nights and the following days are clear and not too cold. During the night the trees give practically no sap, provided the night is not too mild.

Medium-sized trees give the most and best sap. Those which are very old and large are seldom tapped.

Trees which have been tapped for many years give less sap in proportion, but the sap is sweeter.

Trees of the same age do not always give the same quantity of sap or sugar. Often one tree produces the same amount of sap as another, but not necessarily the same quantity of sugar.

The sugar maple growing on stony mountains or high lands give much sweeter sap than the sugar maple growing on low, moist soil. The sap of the latter is not as sweet as that of the former, nor does it produce as much sugar.” (Kalm 1751, 154)

How do you know when the trees are done giving good sap?

“The trees, stop giving when the sap begins to have more consistency and to thicken. One notices that very soon, because not only do the trees give less but the water that comes is more viscous, and though it has more body than the first run it will not crystallize as easily, nor make as easily into cakes of sugar, and it only makes a sticky and imperfect syrup.” (Lafitau 1724, 154)

“It can be determined that the tree contains no more sap when the sap appears whitish and runs slowly.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

What are the uses for trees that give poor sap?

“When it is at that stage, vinegar or a drink like cider can be made from it, if you go on extracting, but it still must be boiled down into sugar.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

How are maple trees tapped and what do you use to drain the sap?

“A gash is made about half a foot deep, a little hollowed in the middle to receive the water. This gash has a height of about a foot, and almost the same breadth. Below the gash, 5 or 6 inches, there is made a hole with a drill or gimlet which penetrates to the middle of the gash where the water collects. There is inserted a quill, or two end to end if one is not long enough, of which the lower extremity leads to some vessel to receive the water.” (Denys 1672, 2:380)

“You box the tree, or we call it, i.e. make a hole with an axe, or chisel, into the side of the tree, within a foot of the ground; the box you make may hold about a pint, and therefore it must shelve inwards, or towards the bottom of the tree; you must also bark the tree above the box, to steer or direct the juice to the box. ” (Dudley 1720, 27)

“When you have pierced or tapp’d your tree, or box, you put in a reed, or pipe, or a bit of cedar forced with a channel” (Dudley 1720, 27)

“The Indians make with their hatchets transverse incisions in the trunks of trees, from which trickles in abundance a water which they receive in large receptacles of bark.” (Lafitau 1724, 154)

“They extract the sap by cutting the tree on one side, in such a form as that the sap will naturally gather into a small channel at the bottom of the hole cut, where they fix into the tree a small chip, six or eight inches long, which carries the sap off from the tree into a vessel set to receive it.” (Hopkins 1736, 38)

“a slanting groove is cut about three feet from the ground, and a knife blade, is inserted. The juice runs down this spout so abundantly that twenty-five pails of it may be drawn from a healthy tree between sunrise and sunset.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

“In the sugar tree they cut a notch, sloping down, and at the end of the notch stuck in a tomahawk; in the place where they stuck the tomahawk they drove a long chip, in order to carry the water out from the tree, and under this they set their vessel to receive it.” (Smith 1750’s, 36)

“A small spout is put into the hole, and a pail is put under the spout. The sap then flows into the pail abundantly.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“The trees were now cut or tapped, and spouts or ducts introduced into the wound.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

“Tubes of Elder or Sumac, 8 or 10 inches long, corresponding in size to the auger, and laid open for a part of their length.” (Michaux 1810, 2:227)

How do you collect maple sap?

“You must also tap the tree with a small gimblet below your box, so as to draw the liquor off. When you have pierced or tapp’d your tree, or box, you put in a reed, or pipe, or a bit of cedar forced with a channel, and put a bowl, tray, or small cask at the foot of the tree, to receive your liquor, and so tend the vessels as they are full.” (Dudley 1720, 27)

“As some of the elm bark will strip at this season, the squaws, after finding a tree that would do, cut it down, and with a crooked stick, broad and sharp at the end, took the bark off the tree, and of this bark made vessels in a curious manner, that would hold about two gallons each: they made above one hundred of these kind of vessels.” (Smith 1750’s, 36)

“They also made bark vessels for carrying the water, that would hold about four gallons each. They had two brass kettles, that held about fifteen gallons each, and other smaller kettles in which they boiled the water. But as they could not at times boil away the water as fast as it was collected, they made vessels of bark, that would hold about one hundred gallons each, for retaining the water; and though the sugar trees did not run every day, they had always a sufficient quantity of water to keep them boiling during the whole sugar season.” (Smith 1750’s, 37)

“The liquid flows into a large vessel to be emptied into a large kettle as it fills.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

“As soon as the snow begins to melt, a hole is cut or bored into the tree... a small spout is put into the hole, and a pail is put under the spout. The sap then flows into the pail abundantly.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“The next day was employed in gathering the bark of white birch-trees, with which to make vessels to catch the wine or sap.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

“the liquor was taken out in buckets, and conveyed into reservoirs or vats of moose-skin, each vat containing a hundred gallons.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

“store troughs or large cisterns in the shape of a canoe or larger manger made of white ash, linden, basswood, or white pine.” (Rush 1792, 7)

Does tapping the tree kill or injure it?

“If the trees are treated properly, they do not die and are not injured even though they are tapped yearly. They can last many years and each give a large quantity of sap. In tapping the tree care should be taken to place the bore upward into the tree, not downward. If the bore is down into the tree, rain water will collect and rot the tree. In addition care should be taken to tap the tree on the same side each year, otherwise, if it is tapped all the way around, the tree will die in a few years.” (Kalm 1751, 154)

Can you drink maple sap?

“There is made from it a beverage very pleasing to drink, of the colour of Spanish wine but not so good. It has a sweetness which renders it of very good taste; it does not inconvenience the stomach... This is the drink of the Indians, and even of the French, who are fond of it.” (Denys 1672, 380)

“It yields a Sap, which has a much pleasanter taste than the best Limonade or Cherry-water, and makes the w’holsofomest drink in the World.” (de Lahonton 1703, 2:249)

“I was regaled here with the juice of the maple; this is the season of its flowing. It is extremely delicious,

has a most pleasing coolness, and is exceedingly wholesome; the manner of its extracting it is very simple." (Charlevoix 1721, 176)

"Even the sap of the tree is good to drink, as it is delicious, refreshing, sweet and quite healthful." (Kalm 1751, 156)

"After the first ceremonies were over, they brought me a calabash full of the vegetable juice of the maple tree." (Bossu 1756, 188)

How was sap commonly boiled during the colonial era?

"After you got your Liquor, you boil it in a Pot, Kettle or Copper." (Dudley 1720, 27)

"These (kettles) are place over a hot fire to boil the juice which becomes first a syrup, then moist sugar.... Maple sap must be cooked for a two full hours to make syrup, and two more hours to make sugar, which is always brown." (Bonin 1750's, 144)

"A large iron or copper kettle is filled with sap. It is cooked until it gets so thick that it can no longer be easily stirred with a ladle." (Kalm 1751, 153)

"From these, we supplied the boilers, of which we had twelve, of from twelve to twenty gallons each, with fires constantly under them, day and night." (Henry 1760's, 70)

How did the Native Americans boil sap before having metal kettles?

"Before the arrival of the French in the country of the Canadians and other nomad tribes their entire household material was only of wood, bark or stone...they cooked or rather made tender in the following manner. They heated a quantity of stones and gravel red-hot in a good fire, then they threw them into a kettle filled with water." (Sagard 1620's, 108)

"They used vessels of wood, and they made water boil by throwing in stones made red hot. They found our iron and tin kettles much more convenient, and this is the merchandise which we are sure to find a vent for when we trade with them." (Charlevoix 1744, 6:47)

How can you make sugar without boiling the sap?

"We had no large kettles with us this year, and they made the frost, in some measure, supply the place of fire, in making sugar. Their large bark vessels, for holding the stock water, they made broad and shallow; and as the weather is very cold here, it frequently freezes at night in sugar time; and the ice they break and cast out of the vessels. I asked them if they were not throwing away the sugar. They said no; it was water they were casting away; sugar did not freeze, and there was scarcely any in that ice. They said I might try the experiment, and boil some of it, and see what I would get. I never did try it; but I observed that, after several times freezing, the water that remained in the vessel changed its color, and became brown and very sweet." (Smith 1750's, 69)

How do you know if the sap is ready to become syrup or sugar?

"First, while the (boiling sap) cooks there is usually a heavy scum on it, as long as the scum shoes the sap is not sufficiently cook; the more nearly it is cooked the smaller the amount of scum on the (boiling sap). The second method of testing is to take a spoon of the (boiling sap) and allow it to cool in order to see if it thickens and turns to sugar. If it does not harden, it has not been cooked long enough." (Kalm 1751, 153)

Can you store the sap?

"It is observed, that in the early part of the season, the sap will keep two or three days without injury; but as

the spring advances, and the frost becomes less intense, it will be necessary to boil the sap the day after it is collected, or it may ferment and sour.” (Society of Gentleman 1790, 15)

How do you make the sap into sugar?

“There being no sugar-canes in that country, those trees supplied that liquor, which being boiled up and evaporated, turned into a kind of sugar somewhat brownish, but very good.” (Joutel 1688, 352)

“They afterwards cause this water to boil over the fire, which consumes all the watery matter, and which thickens the rest into the consistency of syrup, or even into cakes of sugar, according to the degree of heat to which they subject it. There is no further mystery to this.” (Lafitau 1724, 154)

“When the vessels are full they gather the sap and boil it to such a degree of consistence as to make sugar. After it is boiled they take off the first, and stir it till it is cold, which is their way of graining it.” (Hopkins 1736, 38)

(After being boiled to thick syrup) “It is then lifted from the fire and stirred rapidly until it is entirely cool and the sugary syrup has hardened into sugar.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“When the proper thickness has been reached, the kettle is taken from the fire, set on the coals, and stirred rapidly to prevent the (syrup) from burning, and the sugar from sticking to the kettle. The stirring is continued until the (syrup) gets so thick that it begins to be like flour. The kettle is then put in a cold place. The sugar obtained by this method is like the brown flour-like sugar or muscovado.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“If cakes or solid pieces are desired, the stirring in the kettle is not continued until the sugar becomes flour-like. Instead, while the substance is quite liquid, it is poured into shells or other vessels, depending on the shape desired, and allowed to cool.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“they get a little barrel full of this juice, which they boil to a syrup: and being boiled over again, it changes into a reddish sugar, looking like Calabrian mana; the apothecaries justly prefer it to the sugar which is made of sugar canes.” (Bossu 1756, 189)

“The Canadians also make a great quantity, which, when the sap is boiled to a proper consistence, they run into moulds where it hardens. But the Indians prefer making it like Muscovado sugar, this is done simply by stirring it quickly about with a small paddle. (Thompson 1800’s, 275-6)

How do you stop the sap from boiling over?

“The women therefore stand by with a brand of hemlock in hand; as soon the liquid threatens to boil over, they dip the branches in quickly, and, it being cool, the syrup settled for a while.” (Baird 1820’s, 30)

How much sugar do you get from the sap?

“after they have evaporated 8 pounds of the liquor, there remains one pounds Sweet, and as much Sugar, as which is got out of the Canes.” (An Account 1685, 988)

“Ten gallons (of sap) will make somewhat better then a pound of sugar. It becomes sugar by the thin part evaporating in the boiling, for you must boil till it is as thick as treacle (molasses/syrup). Ten gallons must boil till it comes to a pint and half. A kettle of twenty gallons will be near 16 hours in boiling, before you can reduce it to three Pints; a good fire may do it sooner.” (Dudley 1720, 27)

“twenty-five pails between sunrise and sunset....This amounts to twelve or fifteen pounds per day”. (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

“Sixteen cans of sap will produce a good skalpund (pound) of sugar and if the sap is unusually sweet even

less sap is required... Two people can easily cook two hundred skalpund (pounds) of sugar during the spring and still attend to various other tasks.” (Kalm 1751, 154)

“carrying with us, as we found liy the scales, sixteen hundred weight of sugar. We had besides, thirty-six gallons of syrup; and, during our stay in the woods, we certainly consumed three hundred weight.” (Henry 1760’s, 71)

How is the sugar stored?

“and while moist is put into wooden bowls to harden into a round loaf.” (Bonin 1750’s, 144)

“Maple sugar is made into small cakes like chocolate so that it can more easily be carried on trips. It keeps for a long time if dry, otherwise becomes moldy, spoiling because of dampness.” (Bonin 1750’s, 145)

“If sugar in a special form is desired the thick syrup can be poured into a mold, cup, or vessel, and it is shaped accordingly.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“It is occasionally as fine as flour, resembling muscovado sugar, but usually sticks together forming larger of smaller lumps, although it is manufactured into various sizes and shapes depending on the form and size of the vessel in which it is molded when poured from the kettle.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“Sugar moulds: These should be made of seasonable boards, or of such wood as will not impart a taste to the sugar... Making them of wood, somewhat resembling a mill hopper, about twenty seven inches long, and ten or twelve inches wide, at the top, and tapered to the width of one inch, at the lower end.” (Society of Gentlemen 1790, 13)

“For the sugar cakes, a board of basswood is prepared, about five or six inches wide, with moulds gouged in, in form of bears, diamonds, crosses, rabbits, turtles, spheres, etc. When the sugar is cooked to a certain degree, it is poured into these moulds.” (Baird 1820’s, 31)

“For granulated sugar, the stirring is continued for a longer time, this being done with a long paddle which looks like a mush stick. This sugar has to be put into the mocock while warm, as it will not pack well if cold.” (Baird 1820’s, 31)

“The sugar-gum, or wax, is also made separately. Large wooden bowls, or birch-bark *casseaus*, are filled with snow, and when the syrup is of the right consistence it is poured upon the snow in thin sheets. When cooled it is put into thin birch-bark, made into a neat package, and tied with bast.” (Baird, 1820’s, 32)

Was all the sap made into sugar or did they make syrup also?

“I noticed that Europeans nearly always excelled the savages in the art of sugar making. In that made by the savages there nearly always remains a large quantity of syrup which makes it difficult to carry.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“If syrup is made, the sap is not allowed to cook until it is too thick. The thickness of the syrup depends on the taste of the individual. Whenever sugar is made, some syrup usually remains. The last sap collected is usually quite thin and is used in the making of syrup.” (Kalm 1751, 156)

“The syrup is sweet, cooling, and refreshing, good for the chest and has the best flavor one could desire. I have seen it so thick and sweet that it had to be diluted with water before it was used as a drink.” (Kalm 1751, 156)

“We had besides, thirty-six gallons of syrup.” (Henry 1760’s, 71)

“The syrup made for table use is boiled very thick, which prevents its souring. For summer use, it is put into jugs and buried in the ground two or three feet deep, where it will keep a year, more or less.” (Baird 1820’s, 31)

How much sugar was eaten during the sugar season?

“Though, as I have said, we hunted and fished, yet sugar was our principal food, during the whole month of April. I have known Indians to live wholly upon the same, and become fat.” (Henry 1760’s, 71)

“On the mountain, we eat nothing but our sugar, during the whole period. Each man consumed a pound a day, desired no other food, and was visibly nourished by it.” (Henry 1760’s, 211)

What is a “sugar bush”?

“The Indians of Housantunnuk leave their habitation and go with their families into the woods to make their year’s stock of sugar” (Hopkins 1753, 38.)

“The season, for making maple-sugar, was now at hand; and, shortly after my arrival at the Sault, I removed, with the other inhabitants, to the place at which we were to perform the manufacture.” (Henry 1760’s, 69)

“In the midst of this, we were joined by several lodges of Indians, most of whom were of the family to which I belonged, and had wintered near us. The lands belonged to this family, and it had therefore the exclusive right to hunt on them. This is according to the custom of the people; for each family has its own lands. I was treated very civilly by all the lodges.” (Henry 1760’s, 141)

“For some years have begun to give something like a right of property to each family on the sugar maple groves, and which right continues in the family to the exclusion of others. But as this appropriated space is small in comparison of the whole extent; and, and every person is free to make sugar on the vacant grounds. The appropriation was made by them in a council, in order to give each family a full extent of ground for making sugar, and to prevent the disputes that would arise where all claim an equal right to the soil and it’s productions.” (Thompson 1800’s, 276)

What did a Native American maple camp look like?

“a house, twenty feet long, and fourteen broad, was begun in the morning, and before night made fit for the comfortable reception of eight persons, and their baggage. It was open at top, had a door at each end, and a fire-place in the middle, running the whole length.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

What were the jobs of the men and the women in Native American cultures?

“The women busy themselves in receiving it into vessels of bark, when it trickles from these trees; they boil it, and obtain from it a fairly good sugar.” (Rasles 1722, 93)

“While the squaws were employed in making sugar, the boys and men were engaged in hunting and trapping.” (Smith 1750’s, 37)

“Shortly after we came to this place, the squaws began to make sugar.” (Smith 1750’s, 69)

“While the woman collected the sap, boiled it, and completed the sugar, the men were not less busy in cutting wood, making fires, and in hunting and fishing, in part of our supply of food.” (Henry 1760’s, 70)

“Arrived here, we turned our attention to sugar-making, the management of which, as I have before related, belongs to the women, the men cutting wood for the fires, and hunting and fishing.” (Henry 1760’s, 141)

How was maple sugar important as a gift?

“I suppose you gave him also sugar and bears oil, to eat with his venison. I told him I did not; as the sugar and bears oil was down in the canoe I did not go for it. He replied you behaved just like a Dutchman. Do you not know that when strangers come to our camp, we ought always to give them the best that we have?” (Smith 1750’s, 44-5)

“When we reached the villages of the savages we received more than anything else gifts of large pieces of sugar which stood us well in hand on our trips into the wilderness.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“The officers of French forts in Canada supply themselves each spring with a large quantity of the syrup which they give to their friends when they come visiting.” (Kalm 1751, 156)

“After this had continued for some time, he came, on a certain day, bringing with him his whole family, and, at the same time, a large present, consisting of skins, sugar and dried meat. Having laid these in a heap, he commenced a speech...” (Henry 1760’s, 73)

How did the Native Americans use sugar in their food?

“Yet we discovered a kind of manna, which was a great help to us. It was a sort of trees, resembling our maple, in which we made incisions, whence flowed a sweet liquor, and in it boiled our Indian wheat (corn) which made it delicious, sweet and of a very agreeable relish.” (Joutel 1688, 352)

“The Indians cooked their Indian wheat (corn) in their maple syrup like pralines, and they mixed their crushed sugar with ground flour (of corn) which they took as provisions on all their trips. This flour keeps well and is very good.” (Lafitau 1724, 2:154)

“The way we commonly used our sugar while encamped was by putting it in bear's fat until the fat was almost as sweet as the sugar itself, and in this we dipped our roasted venison.” (Smith 1750’s, 37)

“At this time homony, plentifully mixed with bear's oil and sugar, or dried venison, bear's oil, and sugar, is what they offer to everyone who comes in any time of the day; and so they go on until their sugar, bear's oil, and venison are all gone, and then they have to eat homony by itself.” (Smith 1750’s, 45)

“About the sides of this pond there grew great abundance of cranberries, which the Indians gathered up on the ice when the pond was frozen over. These berries were about as large as rifle bullets, of a bright red color, an agreeable sour, though rather too sour of themselves, but when mixed with sugar had a very agreeable taste.” (Smith 1750’s, 45)

“This with us was called good living, though not equal to our fat, roasted, and boiled venison, when we went to the woods in the fall; or bear's meat and beaver in the winter; or sugar, bear's oil, and dry venison in the spring.” (Smith 1750’s, 51)

“When savages cooked gruel or mush for us from corn meal they added large lumps of sugar to make up for the lack of milk- for savages have no livestock, if you except dogs and fleas.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“I have in my travels through the lands of the savages had many good meals of just sugar and bread when no other food was available.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“The morass so deep in many parts of the wilderness that horses cannot be used. Water cannot be carried as all supplies must be packed on the back. I always put some sugar in my mouth when drinking the available water. The water which was usually bad was improved, and it agreed with me fairly well. In contrast, my companions and even the savages, who, in the English fashion mixed a quantity of rum or corn liquor with the water which they drank, got deathly ill on the journey.” (Kalm 1751, 155-156)

“Quitserza, or the nourishing food which is used by the savages and even the French on their long journeys through the wilderness when they cannot carry much food, is made of maize flour, and this sugar prepared

and mixed by a special process. I heard the French in Canada say that if our great King Carl XII had this food he could have conquered the entire world. A small sack of this food, which can be carried under a man's arm, can serve as his food for one or two months." (Kalm 1751, 156)

"Often in the spring and summer when nothing else better is available, the common people eat sugar with the bread or spread it on the bread thick and eat it like *Smörgösa*... I have in my travels through the lands of the savages had many good meals of just sugar and bread when no other food was available." (Kalm 1751, 155)

"At the end of the session of this assembly, they brought a kind of bread which they call *Pliakmim*, bears paws, and beavers tails; I likewise eat of the dog's flesh through complaisance, for I have made it a rule to conform occasionally to the genius of the people, with whom I am obliged to live, and to affect their manners, in order to gain their friendship: they likewise brought a dish of boiled gruel, of maize flour, called *Sagamité*, sweetened with syrup of the maple tree; it is an Indian dish which is tolerably good and refreshing." (Bossu 1756, 189)

"It is preferred by the Indians in their excursions from home. They mix a certain quantity of maple sugar, with an equal amount of Indian corn, dried and powdered, in its milky state. This mixture is packed in little baskets, which are frequently wetted in traveling, without injuring the sugar. A few spoonfuls of it mixed with half a pint of spring water, afford them a pleasant and strengthening meal." (Rush 1792, 74)

How did the French Canadiens use maple sugar in their food?

"Pumpkins are likewise abundant in the farmers garden. They dress them in several ways, but the most common is through the middle, and place the inside of the hearth, towards the fire, till it is quite roasted. The pulp is then cut out of the peel, and eaten; people above the vulgar put sugar to it." (Kalm 1749, 2:378)

"Several kinds of berries, which are ripe in the summer season, such as currants, cranberries, which are preserved in treacle; many preserves in sugar, as strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and mossberries. Cheese is likewise a part of the dessert, and so is milk, which they eat lots of all with sugar.... Melons abound here, and are always eaten with sugar. They never put any sugar into wine, or brandy, upon the whole, they and the English do not use half so much sugar, as we do in Sweden; though both nations have large sugar-plantations in their West Indies plantations. (Kalm 1749, 2: 324-5) (Kalm is speaking of white cane sugar usage in New France and gives a notion of the amount of sugar used in a meal. It could be supposed that some used maple sugar was tried in these foods. Kalm explains the use of maple sugar in some of these foods in his article from 1751.)

"It (maple syrup) is also used for various confections and in preserving fruits." (Kalm 1751, 156)

"Maple sugar is said to be better than ordinary sugar for chocolate and just as good as ordinary white sugar for preserving citrons, cranberries, and various other things... In contrast, maple sugar is not as good as ordinary sugar for preserving gooseberries, neither is it as good as white sugar for tea and coffee. However, it is passable in these drinks if milk is added." (Kalm 1751, 155)

"When milk is served it is heavily flavored with sugar, and the sugar bowl is placed on the table so everyone can sweeten his food according to his taste." (Kalm 1751, 155)

How common was the use of maple sugar in the British Colonies?

"The soldiers which were kept on the Land Frontiers, to clear them of the Indians, taking their Range through a Piece of low Ground, about forty Miles above the then inhabited Parts of Patowmeck River, and resting themselves in the Woods of those low Grounds, observed an inspissate Juice, like Molasses, distilling from the Tree. The Heat of the Sun had candied some of this Juice, which gave the Men a Curiosity to taste it. They found it sweet, and by this Process of Nature, learn'd to improve it into Sugar. But the Christian Inhabitants are now settled where many of these Trees grow, but it hath not yet been tried, whether for Quantity, or Quality it may be worth while to cultivate this Discovery." (Beverley 1722, 118)

“The red Maple, or *Acer rubrum* is plentiful in these places (Pennsylvania)...This juice they do no make any use of here; but, in Canada, they make both treacle (syrup) and sugar of it.” (Kalm 1748, 1: 131-2)

“The common people in the northern most English colonies, as well as the French in Canada, supply themselves with a large quantity of this sugar each year. Farmers often have as much as a quarter of a barrel for a household.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

"A very singular method of obtaining sugar and melasses has been lately introduced in New England, especially at a place called Bernardston, almost twenty miles from Athol; and as the vegetable, from which that valuable article may be obtained by this new method, grows in the coldest climates, it promises great advantages to mankind, especially in those countries, which, like New England, are already plentifully stocked with it by the hand of nature. This vegetable is no other than the maple-tree... and several hundred weight of it were in July last brought for sale to Boston in New England, from various towns situated on the eastern and western parts of that province." (Anon 1765, 141)

“The facility and advantages of this pleasing branch of husbandry, had attracted little attention in Pennsylvania, though a few of its inhabitants were in the habit of manufacturing small quantities of this kind of sugar. In the year 1790, it became more generally known to the Pennsylvanians that their brethren in the eastern and northern parts of the union, had long made considerable quantities.” (Coxe 1794, 77)

How common was the use of maple sugar for the French Canadiens?

“There is made with this Sugar, a very good Syrup of Maiden Hair, and other Capillary Plants, which is used in France.” (An Account 1685, 988)

“As to the water of the maple which is the sap of that same tree, it is equally delicious to French and Indians, who take their fill of it in the spring.” (Le Clerq 1691, 122)

“The North Americans, Indians as well as French, knew that this sap was sugary. They have done and do every year evaporate the sap until it becomes sugar.” (Sarrazin-Vaillant 1708, 213)

“The French make it better then the Indian women, from who they have learned how to do it.” (Lafitau 1724, 155)

“The red Maple, or *Acer rubrum* is plentiful in these places (Pennsylvania)...This juice they do no make any use of here; but, in Canada, they make both treacle (syrup) and sugar of it.” (Kalm 1748, 1: 131-2)

“Maple sugar, therefore, is the most used in Canada, as much as white sugar is used.” (Bonin 1750's, 145)

“In Canada, both the savages and the French make this sugar, but that of the French is usually the best, for the savages adulterate theirs with flour, either to make it more palatable or to increase the quantity for sale. The adulterated sugar can be melted and separated from the flour, and it can be completely purified.” (Kalm 1751, 153)

“It is possible that this sugar could be greatly improved by refining and then it would probably vie with ordinary sugar. Up to the present time it has been made mostly by savages and farmers for their own use. You can well imagine how far their thoughts go in the direction of improving that which they learned from their grandparents.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“The common people in the northern most English colonies, as well as the French in Canada, supply themselves with a large quantity of this sugar each year. Farmers often have as much as a quarter of a barrel for a household.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“Each farmer uses the products of twenty to forty trees yearly for his household. These useful trees pay well for the small area of ground they cover, and in addition, are ornamental to the estate.” (Kalm 1751, 156)

“Practically every soldier in the French forts manufactures a year's supply of this necessity for himself in the spring.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“In many localities this sugar is considered twice as valuable as ordinary sugar. Although proportionately greater quantity must be used, it is more healthful and more nourishing.” (Kalm 1751, 156)

“If you visit the French you will see no other sugar used.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

“Father Charlevoix, in *Historie de la Nouvelle France*, discusses the subject extensively. He includes much omitted by others, but omits various necessary details, not to mention the fact that he has been falsely informed that this sugar is more tasty than that made from sugar cane.” (Kalm 1751, 152)

“In one corner of the garret (of Mssr. Langlade’s house in Michimackinac) was a heap of those vessels of birch-bark used in maple-sugar making, as I have recently described.” (Henry 1760’s 81)

(Describing the Illinois country) “The country is extremely fertile, wheat and indian corn grow very well, and all the European fruits succeed to a wonder. They make very passable wine from the wild grapes, and their beer is very good, they make indian sugar. There is mines of lead, quarrys of stone, and plenty of salt.” (Aubry 1763, 5)

“The French who are settled at the Illinois have learnt from the Indians how to make this syrup, which is an exceeding good remedy for colds and rheumatisms.” (Bossu 1756, 189)

“The maple is the only sort of raw sugar made use of in the country parts of Canada; it is very generally used also by the inhabitants of the towns, wither it is brought for sale by the country people who attend the markets, just the same as any other kind of country produce. The most common form in which it is seen is in loaves or thick round cakes, precisely as it comes out of the vessel where it is boiled down from the sap. These cakes are of a very dark color in general, and very hard; as they are wanted they are scraped down with a knife, and when thus reduced into powder, the sugar appears of a much lighter cast, and not unlike West Indian muscovado or grained sugar.” (Weld 1799, 220)

Were people in Europe tasting maple sugar?

“It is formed into little loaves which are sent to France as a curiosity, and which in actual use serve very often as a substitute for French sugar. I have several times mixed it with brandy, cloves & cinnamon, and this makes a kind of very agreeable rossolis.” (Le Clerq 1691, 122)

“The sugar is ordinarily sent to Europe in small handbreadth jars.” (Kalm 1751, 155)

What are the French words used in sugaring?

erable- “sugar maple... the English (call it) sugar maple, sugar tree, sugar wood, black maple, hard maple.” (Kalm 1751, 150)

gouttière- “or spout, which was made of basswood, had to be cleaned each spring.” (Baird 1820’s, 30)

gauje- “yoke on their shoulders, then a bucket (of sap) would be suspended on each side. (Baird 1820’s, 29)

casseau - “to set at the tree, to catch the sap, was a birch-bark dish holding one or two gallons” (Baird, early 1800’s, pg. 29) these buckets were “made by sewing the the seams with *bast* (which is taken from the inner bark of basswood), then gummed over with pine pitch.” (Baird, early 1800’s, pg. 30) After the sugaring was complete “the casseaus had the two stitches that held them in place as a dish taken out, leaving them as square pieces of bark; all these squares were tied in packages of a hundred each” (Baird, 1820’s, 33)

cassonde- “*granulated sugar*” (Baird 1820’s, 31)

What are the Native words used in sugaring?

Mukkuk- birch container to hold sugar

Ozekéat- “the Iroquois savages (call sugar maple)” (Kalm 1751, 150)

Sinzibuckwad- “drawn from wood- the Algonquin name for maple sugar” (Nearing 1970, 23)

Ninautik- “our own tree- the Ojibwas” (Nearing 1970, 23)

Sheesheegumawis- “sap flows fast- Objibway for rock maple” (Nearing 1970, 23)

Other uses of Maple Trees

“The red maple, or *Acer Rubrum*, is plentiful in these places. Its proper situation are chiefly swampy, wet places, in which the alder is its companion. Out of this wood they make plates, spinning-wheels, rolls, feet for chairs and beds, and all sorts of work. With the bark they dye both worsted (wool) and linen, giving it a dark blue color. For that purpose it is first boiled in water; and some copperas, such as the hat-maker and shoe-makers commonly make use of, is added, before the stuff (which is to be dyed) is put in the boiler. The bark likewise affords a good black ink.” (Kalm 1748, 1:131-32)

“It is the same likewise with the sugar-maple, the maple which is good for healing scorched wounds.” (Kalm 1749, 2: 317)

“It is very good for the lungs and never causes heartburn.” (Bonin 1750's, 145)

“Sugar made from this tree is said to be much more healthful than ordinary sugar and is unusually good for the chest and its diseases.” (Kalm 1751, 154)

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