

is poured into the tank, another opportunity for spillage. It is hard work—a full gathering pail weighs some fifty pounds—and the snow makes everything more difficult.

If a gathering pail holds five gallons, it takes at least two hundred fast-flowing trees to fill the tank and sometimes many more. A team filling the tank five times during the daylight hours has done a good day's work.

From the gathering tank the sap goes to the storage tanks and from there, filtered, it goes to the boilers. The boiling begins while the sap is still being gathered, for if the storage tanks are allowed to remain filled overnight, there will be no place to put the next day's collection and the pails on the trees will overflow. At the peak of the flow, however, the operation is often manned around the clock.

The boiler pans, which come in multiples of three, sit on top of a wood-burning fire box. Sap pans are bigger than syrup pans. The sap flows through U-shaped tubes from pan to pan, as it thickens from sap to syrup. The flow is automatic, controlled by floats (as the level in one pan drops it draws in more from the pan above).

The sap boils for hours with temperatures carefully controlled; at 219°F one gets syrup or—if the syrup is whipped—soft sugar; at 230°F one gets taffy and at 238°F maple sugar.

It takes thirty to thirty-five gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup. An efficient farmer

with 2,000 to 3,000 producing trees may get a gallon of syrup an hour during the boiling process.

There are three basic rules that govern production: the sap must be gathered every day; it must not be allowed to remain more than twenty-four hours in the storage tank; and the pans and all the apparatus must be cleaned every three or four days.

The Party

The gathering of the sap is a rite of spring and often the occasion for a big family party. Everyone works, then everyone feasts.

The party is sometimes on Saturdays, more often on Sundays. The family invites friends and close relatives, and the whole group may number about twenty.

The special menu includes a base of pea soup and many syrup specialties. Eggs are broken into the boiling syrup, emerging half boiled, half poached and very sweet. There are crepes with maple syrup and maple sugar spread on crusty bread and covered with thick country cream. The children make cones of birch bark, fastened with a thorn, and fill them with soft sugar. On the Monday after the party the children take soft sugar cones to school for friends and teachers and the mother sends off packets of syrup, sugar and taffy to friends and relatives who couldn't come to the party.



Making Maple Syrup by Cornelius Krieghoff (1853), 12" x 18", private collection.