



# Maple Sugaring at Millbrook Village NJ

## A Sweet Discovery

Maple sugar: the Algonquin word is *sinzibuckwud* “drawn from wood.” In one legend, Iroquois Chief Woksis, going hunting in early March, yanked his tomahawk from the maple tree where he had left it the night before. All day long, sap dripped from the gash into a vessel at the base of the tree. Woksis’ wife, finding the vessel, tasted the sap and decided that it would do well in the stew. The aroma and taste of the maple sap so pleased Woksis that the collecting of maple sap began.\*

In colonial times, sugar was expensive. Most maple sap was boiled down into hard dry maple sugar that was easy to store, rather than used to make the sweet syrup we enjoy today. Sugar was also useful as a preservative and enabled jams or *preserves* to last a long time. Tracts for those interested in immigrating to the New World described making sugar from maple sap as a great attraction—sweet, luxurious sugar, right from one’s own backyard !

## A Community Industry

Most early settlers of North America were subsistence farmers whose labor had to provide for all the immediate needs of a family. Maple sugaring required many hands, but occurred in idle time when the weather had just turned warm but spring planting had not yet begun. Sugaring season heralded the end of the winter and was a social and communal enterprise centered around the *sugar shack*. With experience came such refinements as better taps, and iron or copper kettles for boiling.

Maple sugaring was small-scale and labor-intensive and could not compete with the vast sugar cane plantations that came into the United States with the Louisiana Purchase in 1804. After the Civil War, the cost of cane sugar fell considerably, and the import tax on cane sugar was removed. The maple industry declined. In New England, though, the sale of maple syrup remains to this day an important source of cash, and today *sugarhouses* are still part of the scene.

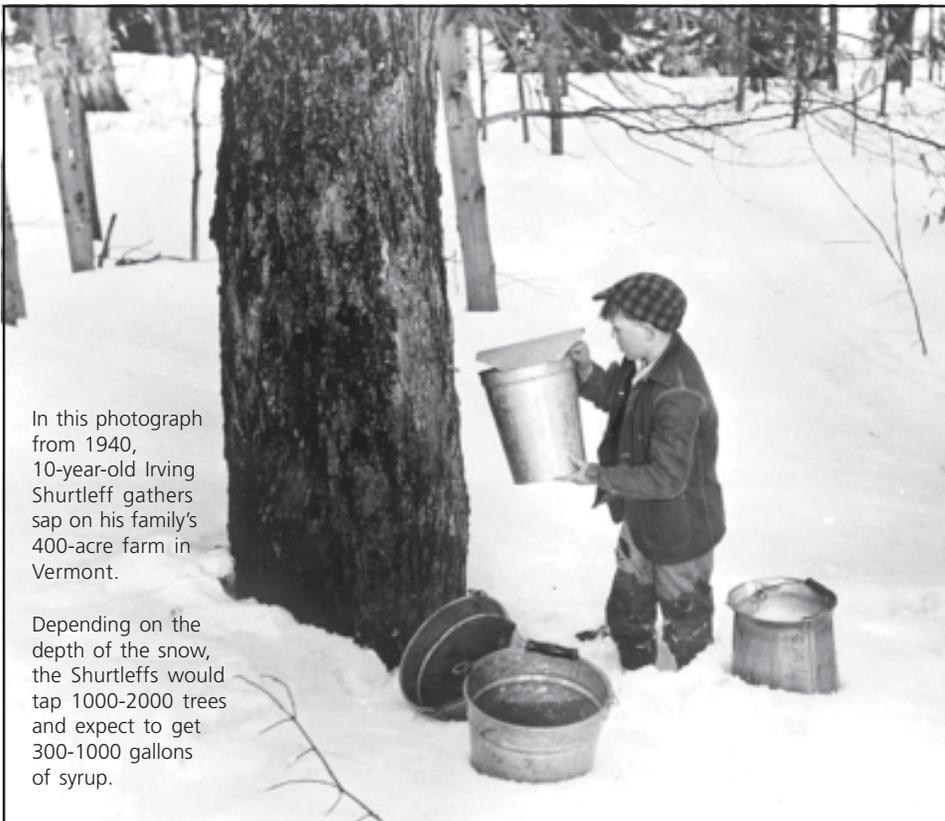
## Maple Sugaring Day

In Millbrook Village, *Maple Sugaring Day* demonstrates all at one time the stages of the sugaring process that would have kept villagers busy for weeks .

As late winter weather fluctuates, rangers tap several trees for sap. (*Tapholes*, about 2 ½ inches deep, do not damage the tree.) On Sugaring Day, sap collected from village maples is boiled down in cast iron kettles over an open fire to evaporate moisture and create the maple syrup. Both woodstove and outdoor cooking demonstrations display the use of maple syrup and sugar in recipes common in the 1800s.

*Maple Sugaring Day is held on a weekend in March, the exact date depends on weather patterns. Updated information is posted under “Events” on the park web site [www.nps.gov/dewa](http://www.nps.gov/dewa). The event is free and is held outdoors; please dress warmly if the weather is cold, and wear appropriate footwear.*

\* Story from *The Maple Sugar Book* (1950) by Helen and Scott Nearing. Chelsea Green Pubs.



In this photograph from 1940, 10-year-old Irving Shurtleff gathers sap on his family’s 400-acre farm in Vermont.

Depending on the depth of the snow, the Shurtleffs would tap 1000-2000 trees and expect to get 300-1000 gallons of syrup.