

# History of Maple

## University of Vermont

While there are written accounts of maple sugaring in North America dating back to 1557, the exact origins of sugaring are unknown. Without written documentation to guide scholars, the history is left to speculation about the discovery of maple syrup and sugar.

Early myths about maple are widespread through the Eastern Woodland Indians, including the Abenaki, Iroquois, and Micmac (Mi'kmaq). According to legend, the Creator had at first made life too easy for his People by filling the maple trees with a thick syrup that flowed year-round. One day, Glooskap, a mischievous young man, found a village of his People strangely silent – the cooking fires were dead, weeds had overtaken the gardens. Glooskap discovered the villagers laying in the woods, eyes closed, letting the syrup from the maple trees drip into their mouths. Glooskap brought fresh water from the lake and using his special power filled the trees with water until the syrup ran from them thin and fast. He then ordered his people up, telling them that the trees were no longer filled with the maple syrup, but only a watery sap. He told them they would have to hunt and fish and tend their gardens for sustenance. He promised that the sap would run again, but only during the winter when game is scarce, the lake is frozen, and crops do not grow.

History also remains silent on whether Native Americans boiled down the sap to maple sugar, or if these techniques were introduced by the French explorers and missionaries. But by the 1700s, Native Americans and European settlers alike were using iron and copper kettles to make syrup and sugar. In 1755, a young colonist was captured and "adopted" by a small group of natives in the region that is now Ohio. In 1799 he published his story in [\*An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith\*](#), which includes a description of how the Native Americans made maple sugar:

*Shortly after we came to this place the squaws began to make sugar. 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 colour and became brown and very sweet.*

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, maple sap was produced into maple sugar, a granular, solid block of maple that had a long shelf-life and could be easily transported. Maple sugar was promoted by the Quakers and abolitionists as an alternative to West Indian “slave-produced” cane sugar; Thomas Jefferson even started a maple plantation at Monticello in 1791.

It wasn't until the Civil War that the maple syrup industry was born, with the introduction of the tin cans and the invention of metal spouts and evaporator pans. Most early producers were dairy farmers who made maple syrup and sugar during the off-season of the farm for their own use and for extra income.

Technology remain largely the same for the next century until the energy crisis of the 1970s forced maple syrup producers to change their labor-intensive process. With another surge of technological breakthroughs, tubing systems were perfected, taking the sap directly from the tree to the sugarhouse. Vacuum pumps were added to the tubing systems, pre-heaters were developed to "recycle" heat lost in the steam, and reverse-osmosis filters were designed to take a portion of the water out of the sap before it was boiled. And these technological advances continue today, ever moving the story of maple syrup forward.

An account of the remarkable occurrences in the life and travels of Col. James Smith, during his captivity with the Indians, in the years 1755, '56, '57, '58, & '59. With an appendix of illustrative notes. James Smith, William McCullough Darlington

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**AN ACCOUNT**  
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**COLONEL JAMES SMITH,**  
(Late a Citizen of Bourbon County, Kentucky,)

**DURING HIS CAPTIVITY WITH THE INDIANS,**

**IN THE YEARS**

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**IN WHICH**

The Customs, Manners, Traditions, Theological Sentiments, Mode of Warfare, Military Tactics, Discipline and Encampments, Treatment of Prisoners, &c. are better explained, and more minutely related, than has been heretofore done, by any Author on that subject. Together with a Description of the Soil, Timber and Waters, where he travelled with the Indians during his Captivity.

**TO WHICH IS ADDED,**

A Brief Account of some very uncommon Occurrences, which transpired after his return from Captivity; as well as of the different Campaigns carried on against the Indians to the westward of Fort Pitt, since the Year 1755, to the present date, 1799.

**WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.**

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**Philadelphia:**