

Maple Syrup Season 2008 – Summary

by

Stephen G. Saupe (*CSB/SJU Biology Department*) &
Sarah Gainey (*St. John's Arboretum*)

15 September 2008

Overview

This report documents the activities of the Saint John's Maple Syrup operation during 2008. By any measure, we had an extremely successful year. There were a record number of volunteers and visitors, we made a large amount of syrup, and we initiated construction on an addition to the sugar shack.

Staff

This year the operation was run by Br. Walter Kieffer, OSB., William Mock, Sarah Gainey, and Stephen Saupe. One notable and welcome change this year is that Br. Walter's monastic responsibilities enabled him to take a much more active role than the past few years. This year Br. Walter returned to his role as chief syrup-maker. Tom Kroll, Saint John's Arboretum continued to provide logistical, administrative, and technical support. Four volunteers in particular should be especially recognized for their help. Kevin Sittauer and Gary Gillitzer, who spent countless hours at the shack last year, as well as this year, were joined by Al Meyer and Dan Weber (retired director of the St. John's Power Plant). These four individuals were valued members of the syruping team and should be considered Associate Syrup Bosses.

Volunteers have always been crucial to our success and this year was no different. We were visited and assisted by many students, faculty, staff, and friends. We asked each volunteer to sign our logbook and record the number of hours that they worked. Overall, we recorded 108 volunteers who contributed 584.5 hours to the operation! Even more remarkably, this figure doesn't include the countless hours spent by the syrup bosses and associates. To thank our volunteers, we gave each a small (40mL) bottle of syrup and a "St. John's Maple Syrup Crew" button.

Tapping

We tapped trees on Saturday, March 1st. Though this is a little earlier than necessary since historically the best flows occur from mid-March to mid-April, we tapped early because otherwise students would be gone for Spring Break provide. This year we held a mini-festival to celebrate the opening of the season. We provided coffee, hot chocolate and pastries for the attendees and gave each participant a 'Saint John's Maple Syrup Crew' button. The celebration began with a Native American blessing by Jane Barth and a prayer by Br. Walter. A highlight of the celebration was the debut of the "Maple Syrup Song" written by Arboretum intern, Melissa J. Bach. The song was performed by MJ, Molly Ewing, and Danny Vitali. Following the music, we gave a brief history of syruping at St. John's and then explained how the tapping process would work. Crews headed out into the woods following Br. Walter as he tapped about 600 trees. On the following Saturday (March 8th) we installed an additional 200 or so taps with a smaller crew.

Since squirrels destroyed a large number of bags in 2007, we opted to return to using buckets to catch the sap. Once we used all of our available buckets, we used sap sacks to collect sap. By the end of the season, we had placed out approximately 1000 taps.

We pulled taps beginning the week of April 7th.

Clean Up

One of the drawbacks of using buckets to catch sap is the need to wash them at the end of the season. This year the Arboretum sponsored "Bucket Washing Day", recruited a number of volunteers, and washed up the buckets in a jiffy.

To clean the evaporator we decided to try something recommended by the Kroll family who make syrup in Long Prairie. At the end of the season we filled the evaporator with sap and simply let it ferment. On Sept 10th we power-washed the pans and they were as clean as we've seen them. The acids and byproducts of the fermentation seemed to do a good job of scouring the pans. Although we were initially a little dubious about the outcome, this method seemed to work well. If we were to do this again, one suggestion would be to top off the liquid in the pans as it evaporates to insure that the entire inside of the pans get cleaned. One reason that motivated us to try this method is that we didn't have time to wash the pans at season end because a crew was initiating construction on the new addition (see below). In fact, volunteers were removing the old roof even as the final syrup was juggled.

Festivals

Once again we held two festivals (March 29 & June 5). The festivals featured maple syrup sundaes, live music, a children's nature area, tours of the sugar house, educational lectures, tapping demonstrations, a Native American area and a costumed voyageur. Overall, the two festivals were by a total of about 900 people. Part of the success for our turn-out can be attributed to advertising by the Arboretum.

Publicity

To our knowledge, there were several articles written about the operation including:

- 2008. Saupe, Stephen G. "Sugar Shack Renovation Begins." *Sagatagan Seasons* 11 (1): 4, Winter.
- 2008. Brown Bell, Allison (photo). "A sticky situation." *St. Joseph Newsleader*, April 4, Vol 19 (14), p 1.
- 2008. Voigt, A. "Sights, sounds, syrup: Foreign students tour operation." *St. Cloud Times*. Sunday, March 30, 2008.
- 2008. Durken, D. "The Abbey Chronicle." *Abbey Banner*, p 27, Spring.
- 2008. Miesen, Melanie. "Arboretum bears sap." *The Record*. April 3, 2008.
- 2008. Advertisement in *The Record*. April 3, 2008.
- 2008. Sittauer, K. "Everything old is new again." *Sagatagan Seasons* 11 (3): 3.

Sap/Syrup Production

This was a terrific season for syrup-making. Our sap and syrup production are summarized in Tables 1 – 3. We collected 9,360 gallons of sap on 12 different days. The first day on which there was enough sap to collect was March 21 and the last day of sap collection was April 19 (Table 1). By the end of the season we made 227 gallons of syrup which yields a sap/syrup ratio of 41.2 and an average sugar concentration in the sap of 2.1%. One reason for our successful year was a late snow storm that provided ideal conditions to keep the trees

producing sap. Similarly, other local syrup-makers had equally good success. However, reports from other areas of Minnesota that lacked the snow reported an average to below-average year.

Education

We provided educational tours to more than 900 students, from preschoolers to high schoolers. CSB/SJU students also were involved, including ten sections of Biology 221 lab visiting the sugar shack for a lab session. Other groups visiting the sugar shack for an educational program include FYS classes, a group sponsored by the SJU Health at Work Committee, and a Girlfriend Getaways group from northern Minnesota. Sarah Gainey also presented to the OSB Administrative Assembly Luncheon a program about the syruping operation. Stephen Saupe also gave a speech at the 2008 CSB Academic Convocation entitled *Find Your Sugar Shack* which explained how the syruping operation enhanced his sense of community at CSB/SJU and encouraged students to find their own passion and sense of community while attending school.

Licensure

Once again we were inspected by Mr. Hank Schreifels from Stearns County Environmental Services and the operation was approved as a licensed facility. We are proud of licensure and have worked hard to insure that we are a licensed facility. Every year we make improvements to insure that we will maintain our licensure. For example, this year we replaced our old steel collecting tank with a new, food-grade plastic one. The new tank holds 225 gallons of sap rather than 175 as did our previous one.

Sugar Shack Addition

The sugar-makers have long discussed the need for an addition to the sugar house that will be used as classroom space for visitors. Thanks to a generous gift from Mr. Larry Schwietz, the addition became a reality. The first phase of the project was to build the new floor. In February, Br. Walter and Bill, with a little help from Steve built the framework for the walls in the St. John's woodshop. The wall sections were then moved to the site and erected before the syrup season began. As soon as the last jug of syrup was finished, a large crew, supervised by Bill and Br. Walter removed the roof of the existing shack, installed new roof trusses, and then covered them with tin donated from Donlar Corporation. The tin was also used to reroof the woodshed. Once the roof was on, windows and cedar siding were installed. Br. Walter drove through a major snow storm to fight a crowd of bargain-hunters to obtain our new windows at a tremendous discount. The shack was stained brown in July by a large crew that included about a half-dozen Arboretum students and staff members. Throughout the summer, Br. Walter, assisted by Gary Gillitzer, Bill and others put on shutters and completed numerous other tasks. In early September, a FYS class helped for an afternoon doing general clean up of the area in order to prepare for the upcoming season. Plans for the winter include adding wood paneling, a small cook stove, and building stackable benches for use in the addition when classes visit.

Date	Sap collected (gal)
21 Mar	225.0
25 Mar	825.8
27 Mar	434.3
29 Mar	1125.0
2 Apr	1125.0
3 Apr	675.0
5 Apr	495.0
8 Apr	879.8
10 Apr	200.3
14 Apr	2025.0
15 Apr	675.0
19 Apr	675.0
total	9360

Date	Syrup (gal)
29 Mar	27
30 Mar	19
3 Apr	25
5 Apr	21.5
9 Apr	28
14 Apr	35.5
15 Apr	31.5
17 Apr	32
20 Apr	7.5
Total	227

# sap collection days	12
Tanker loads of sap	42.6
Total sap collected (gal)	9360
Syrup produced (gal)	227
Ratio (sap/syrup)	41.2
Sugar concentration (%)	2.1
Number of volunteers	108
Hours of volunteer time (<i>excluding leaders</i>)	584.5
Effort ratio (hours volunteer time/gallon syrup)	2.6
Student class visitors	Over 900



Fig 1. Molly Roske and Melissa Bach entertaining at a maple syrup festival (photo by Amy Saupe)



Fig 2. Tending the fire in the Native American area at a maple syrup festival (photo by Amy Saupe)



Fig 3. Participants enjoying maple syrup sundaes at one of the festivals (photo by Amy Saupe)



Fig 4. Sugar house addition (photo by Br. W. Kieffer, OSB)