

Maple Syrup Season 2007 – Summary

The maple syrup operation this year was run by William Mock (long-time friend of St. John's and the Arboretum), Sarah Gainey (Saint John's Arboretum), and Stephen Saupe (CSB/SJU Biology Department). Sarah's main role was as our educational/public liaison while Bill and Steve served as the production managers. Br. Walter Kieffer, OSB., served, as always, as our chief consultant and spiritual advisor. We also received advice and assistance from Tom Kroll, Saint John's Arboretum Director. We were assisted by many volunteers (see below), two of whom deserve special recognition for the countless hours that they spent helping: Kevin Sittauer (a forester) and Gary Gillitzer (an instructor in the CSB Nursing department).

Bill, Sarah, Walter, Tom, and Steve held a "pre-season" planning meeting on November 16th (2006). The main purpose of this meeting was to set the dates for tapping and our festivals, and to divvy-up responsibilities for assembling bags and other tasks. At this meeting we also discussed and adopted a Mission Statement for our operation (*appended*) and we discussed possible renovations to the Sugar House. We generally agreed that we need more space for visitors and we especially want to minimize people (particularly kids) walking around the hot evaporator.

One of our first major activities to get ready for syruping was assemble the sap sacks. Sarah organized this venture which featured about 20 volunteers working together in the garage (Fig 1). We followed up the fun with pizza and assembled about 800 bags about three hours.

On Saturday, March 10 we were joined by over 75 volunteers to help tap our trees. Walter was the main tapper with Steve and Sarah pinch-hitting when he needed a rest. We put out about 800 taps. While the crew tapped, Bill and others assembled and cleaned the evaporator and sugar shack. A highlight of the day was a pre-tapping ceremony that featured a prayer by Br. Walter (*appended*) and a Native American blessing by Jane Barth. By the end of the season, classes and other visitors installed more than 150 additional taps for a grand total of 965 taps.

The first day that we collected sap was 18 March and our last day was 14 April. We pulled the taps on 21 April. Our final cleanup day was 5 May (see Table 1).

By the end of the season, we made 116 gallons of syrup (Table 2). Considering that we put out 965 taps and historically make 0.7-0.8 quarts of syrup per tap, we expected to make about 170 gallons of syrup (= 965 taps x 0.7 quarts/tap x 1 gallon/ 4 quarts). One reason why our yield was lower than anticipated is because the weather wasn't particularly cooperative. It was either too warm or too cold for adequate sap flow resulting in too few "sap days" (night temperatures were below freezing followed by daytime temperatures above freezing). Interestingly, during the early part of the season there were some wonderfully warm days but there was little sap flow except from trees in low-lying areas. We (and local syrup-makers) attributed these low sap flows on what should have been a good "sap day" to frozen soils. With little snow cover and a rather severe cold snap in mid-late winter, it resulted in a very deep frost line, which apparently slowed the flow of sap from most trees. As a consequence, we only collected 3675 gallons of sap, or an average of 3.8 gallons per tap. Based on data to 1972, our historic average sap collected per tap is 7.4 gallons.

Although the flows weren't great, we were fortunate that the sugar concentration of the sap was higher this year than average. Our sap/syrup ratio this year was 31.7, which is considerably better than our average 40.1. Based on the Rule of 86, our average sugar concentration this season was 2.7%, which is much better than our historic average (2.0 %).

Although our syrup production was a little disappointing, the number of people who visited our operation was definitely not. We were assisted by approximately 153 total volunteers who donated more than 600 hours of service (and this doesn't even include the actual syrup team leaders). Our volunteers included members of the monastery (e.g., Fr. Bruce Wollmering, Br. Knute Anderson, Br. Mark Kelly, Br. Gregory Ebensteiner, Br. Brad Jennings, Br. Benedict Leuthner), students, alumni, staff, and friends of St. John's. As a thank you to our volunteers, we handed out small 40mL bottles of syrup and buttons with the maple syrup logo and 'Saint John's Maple Syrup Crew' on them. We hosted two Festivals that were attended by more than 600 people (and more than 100 volunteers) and one festival was featured in a full-page article in the *St. Cloud Times* ("Participants tap, taste maple syrup," March 25, 2007). We were also featured in an article in *The Record* ("Sap-collecting season begins", March 15, 2007).

We provided educational tours to more than 600 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. In addition, Diane Veal-Jones CSB/SJU Symposium class used our operation as part of a service-learning experience, and two other symposium professors, Jean Lavigne and Pam Immelman, brought their classes for a sugar shack tour. Karen Bengtson used the maple syruping classes as an introduction to running effective field trips for her pre-service education majors. Her students not only participated in the field trips with 5th graders from Discovery Elementary, but also were able to visit their classroom before and after their field trip to see how the teachers incorporate it into their daily curriculum. Additionally, Arboretum intern Rob Matuska wrote a market research paper investigating the role of natural foods such as maple syrup in the local economy. We also gave two formal presentations about the operation –a CSB/SJU Friday Forum (ca. 25 attendees), and Central Minnesota Audubon Society (20 attendees).

As always, we had a fantastic year and enjoyed sharing this Benedictine tradition with many people; our visitors learned first-hand about the Benedictine values of work, community, and land stewardship.

Our yearly statistics are summarized in Tables 1, 2 & 3.

Date	Sap tanker loads	Sap collected (gal)
18 Mar	2.3	402.5
19 Mar	2.5	437.5
24 Mar	2.5	437.5
28 Mar	1.2	210.0
8 Apr	1.0	175.0
12 Apr	6.0	1050.0
13 Apr	5.0	875.0
14 Apr	0.5	87.5
total	21	3675

Date	Syrup (gal)
24 Mar	8
29 Mar	32
14 Apr	32
15 Apr	25
20 Apr	15
26 Apr	4
Total	116

# sap collection days	8
Tanker loads of sap	21
Total sap collected (gal)	3675
Syrup produced (gal)	116
Ratio (sap/syrup)	31.7
Number of volunteers	At least 153
Hours of volunteer time (<i>excluding leaders</i>)	At least 617
Student visitors	Over 600



Figure 1. Sarah demonstrating sap-sack assembly to volunteers



Figure 2. Walter Kieffer, O.S.B. leading the group in a prayer of thanks for maple syrup. To his right is Jane Barth, who followed Br Walter and presented a Native American offering of thanks.



Figure 3. Steve Saupe looking pensive before the start of tapping for the 2007 season.



Figure 4. Bill Mock (green jacket) and Br Walter setting the pans in the evaporator.



Mission Statement

The mission of the St. John's Maple Syrup operation is to continue the long-standing Benedictine tradition of making maple syrup from the sweet sap of the abundant sugar maple trees (*Acer saccharum*) that grow on campus. Approximately every other year since 1942, the monks and their friends have gathered together to tap trees, collect sap and boil it down to produce a heavenly confection that is a testament to the forest stewardship of the Benedictine community. In addition, we strive to provide opportunities for the St. John's community, including monks, students, and the public at-large, to learn about and participate in the process of making this sustainable forest product.

adopted: November 2006



A Blessing - by Walter Kieffer, O.S.B. (*for the opening of the 2007 maple season*)

Oh, God of all goodness.

In the beginning you created the earth and divided it between the lands and the waters.

On the lands you created all kinds of vegetation; plants and trees of all kinds, and commanded them to cover the earth, providing both shelter and food for all.

Of the multitude of trees you have given us in this forest, you gave us the sugar maple to provide your gift of sweet sap from the healthy trees, and fuel for the cooking from the old and culled trees.

Today, following the rich traditions of our native brothers and sisters, we ask your blessing on this spring ritual of sapping.

May all the tap holes be clean and of a correct depth.

Help us to tap the spiles correctly – hard enough to seal the spile and hold the bag, but without damaging the tree, splitting the wood and losing the sap.

We ask your blessing on this season's collecting, boiling, jugging, cleanup and wood restocking.

May you reward our labors with a fruitful harvest.

Lord, we ask your blessing on all nature.

Protect the woods and waters of our lands for generations to come.

Bless all who come out to work, observe, and visit.

May we be ever mindful of all gifts you provide for us.

We make this prayer as always through Christ our Lord, and in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.