

Kid's KOrner

Sugarin' Off Time in Pennsylvania

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FORD (Bedford Co.)** — Eight-year-old Rachel Miller sighed heavily as she wiped the frost from the widow pane and stared out at still another snow storm on this late February day in 1856.

"Ah, but Rachel, it's a spring-like snow," consoled her mother as she pulled her daughter's blond hair into tight braids.

"See, it's heavy, wet, like the snows in the spring."

"Oh how I wish it would end," Rachel sighed again. "It's been weeks since we have seen anyone except each other."

It had indeed been a long, hard, winter. Rachel's father had died shortly after harvest last fall. Pneumonia had been Dr. Smythe's diagnosis.

That winter in the Pennsylvania mountains had been difficult. Rachel and her mother had to shovel their way to the barn each morning and evening to milk the two cows which kept them well supplied with milk.

Despite an absence of money, they did have plenty of food. There were rows of canned vegetables and fruits in the basement. Hams hung in the smoke house and a dozen or more hens provided an ample egg supply. Wheat harvested last fall had been ground into flour for bread and the cave behind their log home provided shelter for potatoes, carrots, and a few apples.

Only this morning, Rachel's hopes had soared as the sun had come out and created a warmth they have not felt since long before Christmas. Birds had sung in the tall maple trees near the house. Then, it had grown colder

and the snow started as evening approached.

"Tomorrow," said Rachel's mother. "We will go to the woods and see if the sap is starting to run. This is perfect weather for tapping trees. We are going to make maple syrup!"

"Oh," said Rachel brightening. "Can we invite the Amicks? Can we mother? We could have a 'sugarin off' party."

"Why not," mother beamed. "If the snow isn't too deep until morning, we will begin."

Light had barely streaked across the sky when Rachel leaped from her feather mattress located in the loft of the Miller home.

After helping mother with the morning milking and a breakfast of fresh eggs, bread, and milk, they headed for the woods.

Already the sun had come out and, in a repeat of yesterday, was creating warmth.

In the shed behind the barn they found the "keelers," or buckets Rachel's father had made and, using a special boring tool, bored a hole in the trunk of one of the trees.

"These warm days and cold nights are just what we want for good, sweet, syrup," said Rachel's mother as she wiped the perspiration from her brow. Boring a hole into the trunk was a difficult job for a woman and a young girl. A spile, used as a drain from the tree, was inserted in each hole.

"Now Rachel," she said. "I want you to eat lunch and head for the Amicks. Tell them, the sap is starting to run and we'll be 'sugarin off,' by the weekend. When you get back, we'll do your school work."

It was a three-mile-walk to the

Amicks, and, while Rachel meant to get right home, she did enjoy some talk and play with her friend, Emily. Emily Amick was almost a year older than Rachel and a fun friend. The girls were full of plans for the upcoming weekend.

The sun was already starting to set as Rachel headed down the path for home. Mrs. Amick wanted her to stay over, but Rachel knew her mother would be worried.

By the time she had gone the first mile, huge snowflakes were starting to fall.

By the end of the second mile, darkness had enveloped Rachel. Hunger pangs were starting to set in and the swirling snowflakes along with the white carpeted earth was disorienting.

Several times, Rachel wandered off the path she normally traversed between her home and the Amicks.

Tears were beginning to slide down her freckled cheeks and her braids were freezing stiff. The first snowflakes had only made her hair wet, now she was freezing. Her feet felt numb inside her rubber boots.

In the woods which covered the last mile of her journey, Rachel found one tree looking exactly like another.

She was so tired and cold she wanted to give up and lie down and go to sleep when, suddenly, her foot hit something solid beneath the maple tree. It was one of the keelers she and her mother had placed in the woods this morning.

Elated with joy, Rachel began retracing the route she and her mother had followed. At each tree, she would stop and feel for the wooden spile which they had placed in the trees.

Then, she saw it, a candle glowing in the window.

With relief, Rachel ran the last few steps into the warmth of the log house.

It was a worried mother who gathered her little girl in her arms. Hot bean soup flavored with salt pork was simmering on the old cook stove and fresh bread was browning in the oven. The combination of scents was heavenly to Rachel's cold nose.

Mother decided to forego reading and writing lessons that day. Instead, she helped a tired daughter to a warm bed.

By the time Saturday came around, Rachel had recovered from her ordeal. The Amicks arrived early in the morning carrying baskets of food, smoked ham, eggs pink from the juice of canned red beets, pies made with canned berries, and plenty of cider for simmering on the stove.

For the next three days, only Mr. Amick went home to do his own farm chores. Otherwise, the Amicks who included Mrs. Amick, Emily, and three, strong, older brothers, carried sap into the shed where a huge fire was roaring.

The water had to evaporate in order for the sap to turn to syrup. It took 50 gallons of sap to create one gallon of syrup.

Rachel and Emily stirred until their arms ached. Just when they were beginning to wonder if the syrup was really worth this much hard work, Mrs. Amick gave them a small cup of syrup.

"Go on girls," she smiled. "You've been working hard. Go on, make some Spotza." Spotza was what happened when you poured the syrup into a dish of pure, white, snow. It was a taste treat beyond compare in those days prior to stores stuffed with chocolate.

The sap had stopped running

All About Sweeteners

Sweet tastes have always been a welcome treat.

In Rachel's day, "sweet" was a lot more difficult to achieve than it is today.

Maple syrup was used to sweeten oatmeal, baked beans, carrots, sweet potatoes, and as a sauce on pancakes.

But, because it took a lot of hard work, it had to be used sparingly.

Actually, sweeteners come from various other sources all grown on farms in some part of America.

Sugar cane grows in many of our southern states and on the island state of Hawaii.

Sugar beets are especially plentiful on Midwestern farms.

Home Alone?

NEWARK, Del. — If you are home alone, you should be careful how you answer the phone or doorbell. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- * Answer the phone pleasantly, but don't give your name.

- * Never tell a caller that you're home alone.

- * Tell the caller that your parent can't come to the phone at the moment.

- * Take the name and phone number of the caller.

- * Don't give anyone your parent's work phone number. If the call seems urgent, call your parent immediately to relay the message.

- * If the same person calls more than once and you don't know the person, call your parent.

- * If someone calls with a prank call, hang up immediately and call your parent. Don't answer the phone or door until your parent gets home.

If the doorbell rings, follow these rules.

- * Be sure the door is always locked.

- * Look through the window or

before the Amicks packed up their belongings and their share of the syrup to head home.

No longer was it snowing in the evening. Instead, the sun, now climbing high in the sky was making every day feel a little more like spring was in the air.

It would be another season of hard work planting seeds in the ground to provide food for another winter ahead. But, Rachel knew, they would also find time for fun and friends. Life was like that on an early Pennsylvania farm.

Corn is also used as a sweetener. You have probably sampled some corn syrup, used in many recipes. We grow a lot of corn in Pennsylvania, but it is even more plentiful in the Midwest.

We still make a lot of maple syrup in Pennsylvania. The states which make the most maple syrup in the United States are Vermont and Ohio.

The process for making maple syrup is still very long and a lot of hard work. Modern ways of heating and more modern methods of collecting the sap have made it a little easier.

If you have maple trees on your farm, you might ask your parents to help you tap a tree.

This is the time of year to do it.

peephole to see who's there.
* Talk through the door to find out who's there and what they want. Don't open the door.

* Don't be fooled by a request to use the bathroom or telephone. Say it's not possible and direct the person to the nearest public facility.

* Never let anyone in unless you've been told to expect that person, even if it's someone you know.

* If someone says he or she is making a delivery or coming to repair something and you weren't expecting anyone, don't let that person in.

* If the person is someone you know or says your parents asked him or her to stop by, call your parents and check.

* If you're expecting a delivery or repair person, have the individual slip an ID card under the door.

* If someone continues knocking, call a neighbor or the police for help.

* Don't be embarrassed when you don't let people in.



It takes lots of stirring to make maple syrup.

