

# Land Of Milk And Maple Celebrates With Maple Sugar Festival

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Somerset Co. Correspondent  
MEYERSDALE (Somerset Co.) — What's better for breakfast on a northeastern winter morning than flapjacks, country sausage, pure maple syrup and steaming coffee? Well, nothing, really, if one's just coming in from the barn after milking the cows at 3 or 4 a.m. in anticipation of a leisurely, hot and hearty breakfast.

That's why the folks in Somerset County — "The Land of Milk and Maple" — celebrate the maple sugar industry with a grand festival each spring. A young woman of charm and intelligence, is named maple queen at scholarship pageant and she presides over the five-day festivities.

The 47th annual Pa. Maple Festival will be held on April 9, 10, 15, 16 and 17. Chocked full of fun and food the festival concentrates on the production of maple products, with a bunch of other good stuff thrown in.

For instance the historical pageant called "The Legend of the Magic Water," which finds a cast of 120 local persons telling about the discovery of maple syrup and history of Meyersdale. It is done through song, dance, and narration.

An educational form of entertainment, Legend has in it the Indian maple celebration, life of the pioneer and the day the first train came to town. Specifically, visitors see and hear an Indian attack, a hoedown, simple hymns to classic operas, can-can girls, and a patriotic grand finale.

The stage in Festival Park reverberates with music and dancing. There are pony and horse pulling contests at the nearby fairgrounds, street, rod and classic auto shows, the 8K race and 2-mile walk, antique car show, queen's ball, oldies dance, big quilt show and grand feature parade.

Also featured, inside the park is Maple Manor, a beautifully restored, historical landmark house whose framework and furnishings are guaranteed to sweep both kids and adults into a former era. See, too, an antique doctor's office, cobbler's shop, country store, and maple camp in the park.

Maple demonstrations are performed in the park, but for those who prefer to witness the real thing, the Somerset Co. maple producers welcome visitors to their nearby maple camps for a great sampling of today's larger industry operations.

Thousands of visitors acquaint themselves with Somerset Co. maple camps each spring, not just during the maple festival, but during the actual maple season that peaks in the month of March.

Producers often attach sales shops to their modern camp sites and offer beautifully prepared maple goodies and gift packs which they will mail, if desired.

Among the popular sugar camps are Wagner's Sugar Camp, West Salisbury, Brenneman's Maple, RD1, Salisbury; Moser Brothers, Meyersdale; Milroy Farms, Salisbury; Hemminger Sugar Camp, Somerset; Walker's Farm Service, Somerset; Floyd Reese, Somerset; Frank S. Bocsy, Stoystown; and Sechler Sugar Shack, Confluence.

Most producer's that are listed in the producer's brochure welcome visitors anytime, but ask that

reservations be made before bringing a tour group. Some are closed on Sundays. And many other smaller operations exist whose camps, including those of the Amish, are found off the beaten paths in southern Somerset Co.

Tapping maple trees, collecting the sap and boiling it down into pure maple syrup is hard, but worthwhile work. While today's maple producers have devised better methods than the first Indian producers of maple syrup — reportedly in the mid-1600s, — their work can go around the clock when the runs are good. That is, the sap is draining out of the trees into metal keelers or plastic tubing, literally by the thousands of gallons. The natural wonder is caused by overnight freezing temperatures and next-day warming trends.

Depending on its sugar content the sap needed to achieve a gallon of pure maple syrup is approximately 50 gallons. That amount can vary 5 to 10 gallons either way, so a person needs some education and experience to get it right.

Selecting a queen for the sweet festival is a major annual affair demanding effort by the hopefuls. The winner receives a \$1,500 scholarship from the Pa. Maple Festival and One for \$500 from the Somerset Co. Maple Producers Asso. Her first and second maids of honor also receive scholarships. And of course, all the girls receive gifts galore.

Somerset County high school senior girls are eligible to audition for participation. The field is then narrowed to some 14 or 15 young women prior to the pageant. They are critically judged in evening gown, talent, and on-stage interview competitions.

The 1994 maple queen, selected on March 5, is Kathleen Thomas, 18, a Meyersdale Area High School senior bound for college next fall at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Her function is one of a gracious hostess circulating at festival activities, welcoming and helping visitors and telling everyone about the Somerset Co. maple industry.

Dott Merryman, Confluence, the 1993 maple queen, performed the coronation of Kathleen. Dott was chosen during high school to sing the national anthem over the public address system at a Pittsburgh Pirate home ballgame. Dott's winning talent number held a captive audience when she sang a cappella, "Via Dolorosa."

Queen Kathleen, a festival volunteer since childhood, was heard to comment that her favorite part of the festival is the food. That's true for hundreds of regular attendees.

Spotza probably takes the foods' popularity prize. The Indians, while not calling it spotza, apparently were the first to make it, when they poured boiling maple syrup over the snow, then ate the result.

Today, when the boiling syrup is the right temperature it's poured over cracked ice or into iced water, then eaten immediately. Wagner Camp's Dorothy Jeffrey says "Drop just enough syrup or put in your mouth when it forms a soft-ball."

She says many folks call spotza "taffy." to her, they are different. An important factor for taffy making, she said, is the altitude where



Maple Queen Dott Merryman is crowning her successor, Kathleen Thomas who will reign over the 47th annual Pa. Maple Festival in Meyersdale on April 9, 10, 16, 17.

you live, which determines the degree of density.

"Have your pans greased and ready," she says, "they can be aluminum pie pans. Put them on a cold floor or in cold water. Once you start pouring, never stop," she says. "Never pull back, just keep pouring, and don't try tilting the pans because it turns sugary if you move it."

A large heavy aluminum kettle is good to use, she says. When the temperature on the candy thermometer reaches the proper temperature for the altitude (Usually no higher than 254 degrees) that's when you start pouring, according to this ace of maple goodies.

During cooking Dorothy says, "Don't leave the pan. Add a little fat to the bubbling syrup to break up the air bubbles as it boils. The fat can be cream or butter," she said, adding, "Most importantly, do this drop by drop."

A maple king is also selected from the maple producers entering maple products for judging. Three classes of syrup, three classes of sugar cakes, sugar crumb, gift packs and several other classes. Ed Emerick of RD1, Hyndman, is the current maple king until another is chosen in April.

The grand feature parade of some 175 units, featuring Queen Maple, her maids of honor and court of princesses will be held on April 16 at 5 p.m. The Street, Rod and Classic Auto Show is on Sunday, April 10, while the Antique Car Show is on Sunday, April 17. 8K-5 mile run and 2-mile walk is Sunday, April 10.

Legend of the Magic Water is scheduled for the afternoons of April 9, 15, and 16 at the local high school.

Lions Clubs in both Salisbury and Meyersdale serve pancake meals with country sausage and pure maple syrup the Saturday and Sunday of both festival weekends. They begin with breakfast and serve all day. In Salisbury, buckwheat cakes are also offered.

A good place to sample the local artistic talents when visiting the area, is the gallery of the Tub Mill Arts Association, located at 117 W. Ord St., Salisbury. The arts and crafts show it holds during the festival is impressive.

Meyersdale, where the festival is held, and Salisbury where the major sugar camps are located, are both on Route 219, a major north-south highway, but still a two-lane road.

From Exit 22, Interstate 68 in Maryland, Salisbury is four miles and Meyersdale, about 11 miles north. From the Pa. Turnpike at Somerset, Meyersdale lies some



There's a bit of romance to the old Indian art of making maple syrup each March when sap is collected from maple trees. These beauties fanning upward along the Tub Mill Run creek in West Salisbury, Somerset Co., are dripping sap into their metal keelers. Often plastic tubing is used so sap from many trees runs into a larger collecting tank.

20 miles and Salisbury, about 27 miles south using Route 219.

For detailed festival information call (814) 634-0213.

For information regarding sugar campsites call the Milroy Farms at (814) 662-4125 or Wagner's Camp, (814) 662-2904.

And, now for some recipes.

### NUTTY MAPLE SURPRISE BARS

- 1 package yellow cake mix
- 1 cup margarine
- 1 egg
- a cup chopped nuts
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- 1½ cups maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 eggs

Reserve ¾ cup of cake mix for filling. Grease bottoms and sides of 13 x 9 baking pan. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In large bowl, combine cake mix, margarine and one egg, mix. Press into pan. Bake 15-20 minutes until light golden brown.

Filling: Mix together remaining cake mix, brown sugar, maple syrup, vanilla, three eggs and chop-

ped nuts. Pour over partially baked crust and continue baking 30 to 35 minutes.

### MAPLE SUGAR FUDGE

- 2 cups white sugar
  - ½ cup milk
  - 1 teaspoon vanilla
  - 1 cup maple sugar
  - 1 tablespoon butter
  - 1 cup walnut or butternut meats
- Cook sugars and milk in saucepan for 12 minutes after it begins to boil. Remove and add butter and vanilla. Cool slightly, then beat until thick and creamy. Add chopped nuts and pour into 8-inch buttered cake tin. Cook and cut in squares.

### MAPLE POPCORN BALLS

- 1 cup maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 6 cups popped corn
- ½ cup white sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter

Put all ingredients except popcorn in a saucepan. Bring to a boil and boil for 15 minutes or until it spins a thread in a glass of cold water. Pour onto popcorn. Form balls.

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