

It's Drizzlin' Pure Maple Syrup In Somerset County

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SALISBURY (Somerset Co.) — "Stack about three of them hot pancakes on a platter and pass the maple syrup, please. While you're at it spear me a couple links of sausage to go with 'em."

Some folks would insist upon grammatical correctness in that request but they couldn't inhibit the gusto of that first savory bite tantalizing their palate.

Every year around this time that fare rises to glorious heights of popularity as visitors to the Pennsylvania Maple Festival converge upon Meyersdale and Salisbury to sample pancakes and maple syrup served by local Lions Clubs.

It's a time of jubilation, when old and new friends celebrate the Creator's simple gift to mankind — sap from sugar maple trees. With the help of gravity it drips prodigiously when late winter nights are cold and the days are pleasantly warm.

If a spile has been inserted in the tree's lower trunk, sweet water rolls out the little spillway, splashing drop by drop into a collection vessel. It's boiled down, filtered several times, monitored and checked some more until, finally it reaches syrup density and a beautiful amber color.

According to official reports Somerset County ranks first in the

state in maple production. Yet, the state's overall production lags well behind all of New England, New York, Ohio and even Michigan.

Somerset County, however, has an extremely high concentration of sugar maple trees and maple producers who take the season seriously. Some of the backyard tappers are never counted because the syrup they make is for personal use only, including farmers and non-farmers.

That's why some 35 members of the Somerset County Maple Producer's Association feel they've earned the right to celebrate. In the space of a few weeks they've given hundreds of thousands of gallons of sugar water the tender loving care needed to evaporate it into thousands of gallons of maple syrup. And that excludes time spent creating other taste-teasing by-products of the sticky stuff.

On April 22, 23, 28, 29 and 30, the 48th Annual Pennsylvania Maple Festival will be held in Meyersdale with a newly crowned queen, Rebecca Cogan of Somerset, reigning over the numerous events. She, her two maids of honor and court of princesses, will welcome the throngs of visitors and direct them to demonstrations, historical places, area maple camps and the ever-popular pag-

eant "Legend of the Magic Water," presented at the Meyersdale High School.

The Maple Queen Scholarship Pageant won by Miss Cogan stresses education. As its winner she received a \$5,000 savings bond from the Pennsylvania Maple Festival, Inc., and a \$500 scholarship from the Somerset County Maple Producers Association, and many other gifts.

Danielle Svonavec, Rockwood, the first runner-up got a \$2,000 savings bond while a \$1,000 savings bond went to second runner-up Jennifer Brown of Friedens.

Gary Blocher, owner of Milroy Farms Sugar Camp is the current Maple King. His successor will be named on April 21, the day preceding the festival since Blocher is ineligible to succeed himself in that capacity.

The new king will have received the highest combined scores in classes of this year's syrup, sugar cakes, sugar crumb, sugar-soft (maple spread or cream); individual collective exhibit and gift pack. All entries must have been produced in Somerset County.

Blocher comes with an enduring maple background, from his late father, and his mother's family as well. He said this year's weather fluctuations hurt production elsewhere.

"Production-wise, Somerset

County was fortunate this year," he said. "Some other localities were less fortunate with the weather conditions. The Northeast, for instance, was too cold then suddenly last week it got too warm."

He said that locally the quantity of production was about average,

but the quality was really good. Milroy Farms Sugar Camp is on the River Road, RD1, Salisbury, a family operation that includes his wife Frances, son Jason, and mother Thelma Blocher.

Planned by the Pennsylvania Maple Festival, Inc. the seasonal
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This is a familiar sight in Somerset County where trees are drizzling maple syrup.



Some Somerset County sugar camps have kitchen units and sales rooms attached to their modern facilities these days. Here, Dorothy Jeffrey, veteran of maple sugarin' exhibits the variety of by-products many county producers keep in their shops the year around.

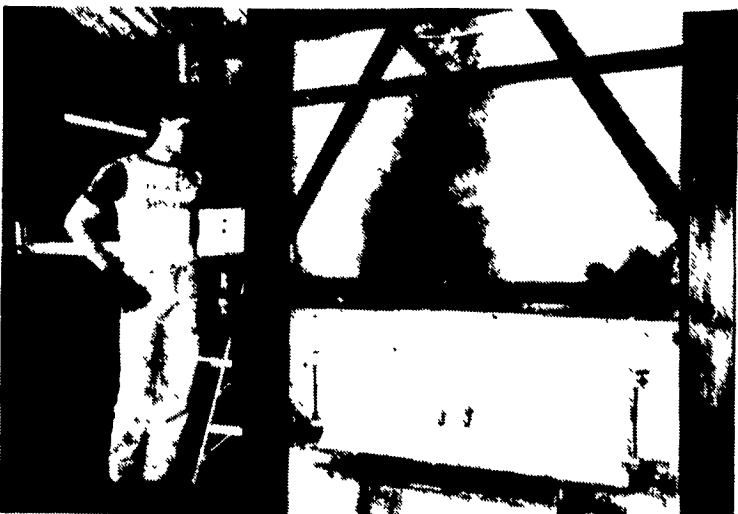


This hand-crafted sugar wagon was constructed and used by William Wagner, great-grandfather of Dale Jeffrey who operates Wagner's Sugar Camp, West Salisbury. No longer used, the wagon is exhibited at the camp on the Tub Mill Run Road. Wagner's and many Somerset County maple producers welcome visitors to observe their operations.

HOMESTEAD NOTES



Dale Jeffrey, owner of Wagner's Sugar Camp, Tub Mill Run Road, West Salisbury, is testing maple syrup at the complex-looking steam finishing unit.



Making maple syrup in Somerset County is important business since the county ranks first in the state's maple production. Here, Brian Arnold, an employee at Wagner's Sugar Camp, West Salisbury is routinely checking the sap evaporation process in the "piggy-back" boiler.