

MUSEUM NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MONROE COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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**Monroe County
Historical Museum**
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Museum Hours
Wed., Thurs., Fri., Sat., & Sun.
all year long
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Archives Hours
Wed., Thurs., Fri., & Sat.
all year long
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Maple Sugaring
by Geoff Hoerauf

The start of maple sugaring marked the beginning of winter's end and the start of the New Year's food production activities. The River Raisin's Native Americans were not the only people to produce maple sugar; French habitants and British citizens also participated in maple sugaring. Maple sugar remained an important commodity for the entire region's residents; especially in the late winter, when preserved foods started to diminish. Although the processing of the tree sap into sugar required large amounts of time and effort, the sugar it produced served an important role in the daily lives of the region's inhabitants.

According to Alexander Henry (a late 18th Century trader living north of the Mackinac Straits), early Spring is the best time to make sugar; especially when the daytime temperatures are warm and the collected tree sap's water froze at night. The frozen water rises to the top of a storage container, and a free flowing sugar/water mixture settles to the bottom of the container. ¹ When the ice obtained a thickness of a modern quarter, Henry wrote "...the greatest quantity (of sugar) is produced..." ². At this time, tree sap and sugars, which were stored in the roots over the winter, start to flow up to the tree's branches. The sap's sugar concentration reaches its highest concentration during this time of year, and as a result, this high concentration of sugars in the sap yields the highest ratio of processed sugar per volume of sap. In the Detroit River Region, this time corresponded to late February and March.

All hardwood trees have high sugar content in their spring sap. Since it has the highest concentration of sugar in its sap, the Sugar maple became and remains the most favored tree used to gather sap. Other tree species, however, were and continued to be used as a source of secondary sap. These trees included the Silver maple, Yellow birch, and White birch. An area that contained a large stand of Sugar maples was referred to as a "sugar bush". Depending on the tree's size, a single tree may have one to three taps; thus, the number of tree taps, not the number of trees, determined the size of a sugar bush. Jonathon Carver recorded that a typical sugar bush contained approximately 500 to 900 taps, but there were some accounts ³ of sugar bushes containing over 1,000. The sap from these "bushes" was processed in "sugar camps".

In order to produce maple syrup and sugar, the Native Americans and European-Americans would travel to

their sugar bushes and establish camps to produce maple syrup and sugar. The processing of tree sap into maple syrup and sugar occurred in camps referred to as sugar camps. Sugar production could last for several continuous weeks, and as a result, people would focus their majority if not entire time at their camps processing the sap into sugar. The sugar camps often contained non-permanent structures located near the sugar bushes. Besides providing shelter for the workers, the structures also served as storage areas for utensils, sap, sugar, and tools. The Native Americans, who were more migratory in nature, would often relocate their entire family to a sugar camp for the duration of the maple sugaring process. The location of the sugar camp and the expected amount of work dictated whether an entire European-American family or only several family members would travel to and stay at the sugar camps. A sugar camp located more than several miles away and work expected to last several weeks would often necessitate the relocation of the family to the sugar camp as workers.⁴

When both men and women worked at the sugar camps, the processing of sap into sugar followed gender specific roles. The men would tap and drain the trees to draw out the sap. The men used hollowed out wooden spigots pounded into the tree trunks. Buckets, placed under the spigots, collected the dripping sap. The men also had the responsibility of carrying the collected sap back to the sugar camps in large containers. The Native Americans used large birch bark containers, called mococks, to haul the sap to the sugar camps. The European-Americans often used yolks, wooden supports carried on shoulders, and buckets to transport sap to the sugar camp. If the men and boys had sleds available, they would use them in transporting the containers to the sugar camps. The camp fires used to boil down the sap into sugar would burn 24 hours a day, and as a result, the fires consumed a large quantity of wood. The men and boys had responsibility for gathering fire wood and tending the fires. The women had the responsibility of monitoring the sugaring process so that the highest grade of sugar was produced. This included monitoring the boiling sap to maintain the appropriate rate of boiling. If the sap boiled too vigorously, the women would use deer fat to slow down the rate of boiling in the kettle.⁵

Alexander Henry reported that his sugar camp used 12 boilers or metal pots to make maple sugar, and that these boilers contained from 12 to 20 gallons each. As the sap boiled down, the sap became syrup, what is referred to today as maple syrup. Usually, some of the syrup was removed from the fire and stored for later use.⁶ When the syrup became thicker than modern day molasses, it was transferred to a granulating trough. The women would use the trough to stir and grind the syrup until it solidified and became granulated sugar. Mococks, birch bark containers often used for storing dry goods, served as storage vessels for the sugar. If snow was present on the ground, the mixture would be poured directly from the hot kettle onto the snow. The cold snow would cool the syrup/sugar mixture the consistency of modern day taffy.⁷

The processing of maple sap into sugar and other forms played an important role in region's resident's lives. The production of maple sugar often helped avert starvation in the late winter.⁸ The residents also used the sugar for sweetening vegetables, cereals, meats, medicines, and fish. If the sugar lasted until summer, the sugar was mixed with water to make a summer drink called switchel. After the prime Sugar maple sap collection period had passed in late spring, the habitants would continue to collect sap from the trees. This late season sap had lower sugar concentrations and more nutrients which gave the sap a poor taste; however, the habitants would use this inferior sap to make maple water vinegar.⁹

(1) Henry, Alexander, **Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776**, James Bain, ed., pg.70

(2) Ibid, pg. 70

(3) Johnathan Carver, **The Journals of Jonathon Carver and Related Documents, 1766-1770**, Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1976, pp.134

(4) Densmore, Frances, **How Indians Use Wild Plants for Food, Medicine, and Crafts**, Dover Publications, Inc., 1974, PP.308-313

(5) Densmore, PP.308-313

(6) Henry, pg. 70-71

(7) Densmore, PP.308-313

(8) Major Arent De Peyster to General Frederick Haldimand, 1 June 1779, Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collection, Volume 9, page 383

(9) Eustice, Sally, **History from the Hearth: A Colonial Michilimackinac Cookbook**, Mackinac State Historic Parks, 1997, Pp. 191-3, Densmore, PP.308-313

COME ON YOU WOLVERINES!

**The First Week in October will be
Custer Week in Monroe!**

MONROE'S CUSTER WEEK: For many years now, Monroe has sponsored a "Custer Week" during the first week in October to celebrate our most famous Civil War personality. Last year, the Monroe County Museum stepped up and sponsored the event. With minimal marketing, we literally had every chair in the building filled. Evidently, if you sponsor it, they will come!

THE CUSTER CONFERENCE: With success fresh in our minds, we will be sponsoring a weeklong series of events that we are calling the Custer Conference. Each night the museum will be hosting an event that will be related to the life of George Armstrong Custer. In addition, just for this project, the museum will be developing a special exhibit displaying the famous pictograph's made by the great Lakota Chief Sitting Bull, as well as George Custer's dress sword.

The city will come alive with living history encampments, a Civil War era taste fest, a walking tour, and period music. On Friday, October 6, the Museum, Monroe Community College, and the Monroe Historical Society will be hosting a lecture by nationally known Custer expert and frequent guest on the History Channel, **DR. PAUL HUTTON**.

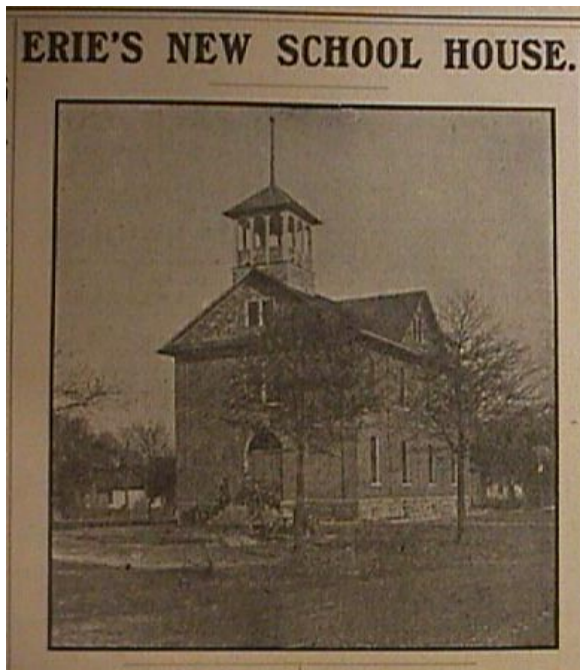
CIVIL WAR SEMINARS: We are inviting all of the local Civil War Round Tables and reenactment units to participate in Civil War seminars on Saturday afternoon, October 7. They will be providing a series of short 30-45 minute presentations on a Civil War related theme. These will be offered to the public free of charge and used to encourage regional awareness of Civil War history.

THE CUSTER CUP CHALLENGE: At the conclusion of the presentations, we will present the Custer Cup Challenge. The CCC will be a trivia competition between the various groups. Like the Stanley Cup, the winner's names will be engraved on the cup and they will have the honor of keeping it until the following year.

For more information call John Gibney @ 734-240-7781

OLD NEWS
by Jim Ryland

Monroe Democrat 10 November 1905



“On Monday, November 6, the pupils of the Erie Village School assembled for the first time in the new building that has been erected to replace the one purposely set on fire last spring by Ex-Principal Leon Schafer. Since that time sessions have been held in the town hall, which made the work

more difficult and more or less unsatisfactory to both teachers and pupils... The building was designed and built by William J. Keegan, of the firm Thomas J. Keegan & Son of this city, and is a thoroughly common sense structure, being made of the best material and designed for comfort and convenience rather than to present an imposing exterior appearance. It cost \$3,500 and the desks and other interior fittings came to about \$500 more. This is just about what the old building cost, but the latter was not half the school building the present one is, for a big share of the money was spent on fancy roofs and outside ornamentation... Pupils are taken through the eighth grade, but it is hoped that within a few years two grades will be added. The work of the graduate has been uniformly good and those entering the High school at Monroe have as a rule made a very creditable showing both for themselves and the village school that gave them their start.”

FROM the ARCHIVES
by Chris Kull

Two Notable Women From Monroe

March is Women’s History Month and there are a number of outstanding women from Monroe. Two described here worked to make life a bit more enjoyable for residents. One was a businesswoman who strove to make a living for her family and at the same time assist in the home life of others by sharing her knowledge of housekeeping. The other wanted to improve the look of the town and instill civic pride in Monroe’s history.

Did you know Monroe had it’s own Martha Stewart in the 19th century? One can hardly flip through pages of old Monroe newspapers without coming across mention of Mrs. Elizabeth F. Haskell. This woman was truly ahead of her time and quite enterprising. She was born in Buffalo, New York in 1818. She married Norman Haskell in 1835 and they came to Monroe.

A description of her states she was “a small, black-eyed woman, with energy to run a sawmill, which in these days she probably would have done, working up through the stages of clerk, private secretary, etc.” She was very energetic and innovative. She and her husband bought a large tract of land near present day Trinity Lutheran Church. Here they built a long, thin, brick house with a porch across the front. At the rear of the house was a pavilion where she sold ice cream and cake. The rest of the property was turned into an enormous garden and orchard.

This garden produced a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. When the hundreds of trees and plants were ready for harvest, they yielded too many crops for immediate sale so; Mrs. Haskell devised a way to handle the surplus. She developed a process to can the fruit in tin cans. Unfortunately she was about 20 years ahead of her time. People were not ready for this form of processed food – there were no can openers!

EYE on EDUCATION

By Lynn W. Reaume



However, evidence of Mrs. Haskell's expertise at canning is found in a small article of the *Monroe Commercial* of 1875. It reads, "**Canned fruit almost 18 years old!** The writer of this ate currant pie the other day made from currants put up in 1857. And the currants had apparently kept as well as they could have done for a single year – The currants were put up by Mrs. E. F. Haskell of this city." She did a good job, there is no record of a *Monroe Commercial* reporter getting food poisoning.

Mrs. Haskell also shared her skill with others. She wrote a book, *The Housekeepers Encyclopedia of Cooking and Domestic Economy*. This guide covered such areas as the dairy, spring work, cooking for the sick, and washing, ironing and folding linen. Everything you needed to know to run an efficient household was in this book.

In 1876, Mrs. Haskell passed away at the age of 58.

Another noteworthy woman from Monroe's past was Mrs. Josephine Van Miller. Josephine McBride, was a descendant of an early French family, the LaFountains. Born in 1839, her first marriage was to Frank Clark. The Clarks ran a hotel located on Washington St. Mr. Clark was also County Clerk and she was his assistant. Descriptions indicate that she ran the clerk's office.

After Frank Clark's death, Josephine married William Van Horne Miller, a wealthy widower. She went by the surname of Van Miller because she liked the way it sounded!

Mrs. Van Miller concentrated her efforts on civic affairs. She formed the Civic Improvement Society and enlisted a group of women to tackle the problems of cleaning up the public square, the river banks, and the old burying ground (what is now Memorial Place). Funds were raised in a variety of ways. An annual baseball game between the city's doctors and lawyers provided \$63 for projects in 1904.

Some of the projects undertaken by the society included marking historical sites in the city on large granite boulders. Some of these early markers can still be found along Elm Avenue. They also erected the monument at Memorial Place and marked the Battle of the River Raisin site on East Elm Avenue. The society was also instrumental in getting the equestrian Custer statue here in 1910.

At the time of her death in 1921, Mrs. Van Miller was also associated with the Monroe Home for Blind Babies and Friends in Council.

These are just two of the many noteworthy women from Monroe's past. Their enthusiasm and their willingness to share their talents with others was a benefit to all of us.

March and April tours start accelerating during these months, leading to May and busy Michigan Week. The Martha Barker Country Store and Navarre-Anderson Trading Post sites will open for scheduled educational tours and the flow of students keeps staff and volunteers quite busy.

Education has always relied on staff, but volunteers are especially critical to meeting the needs of teachers, by hosting tours at our sites. Tours involve greeting visitors, giving them a presentation that is informative and friendly, seeing to special needs, and answering questions as the guide is able. Some tours are short and basic, like at the Country Store museum; others longer and more detailed, as with the Native American presentation at the main Museum. Some have special duties, such as selling candy and small merchandise at the Country store during Michigan Week and Fair Week. Volunteers attend most of our sites- the main Museum, the Country Store, the Navarre-Anderson Trading Post, the Monroe County Vietnam Veterans' Historical Museum, and the Eby cabin at the Monroe County Fair.

Interested? Whatever time you could donate, whatever programs you are interested in, we would be glad for your assistance. Contact me at 240-7784. And thanks to all who help now! (If you are on my list, I'll be calling...)

During February and March I have been giving students at Waterloo Elementary School after school history-based classes. We have experienced some Native American past times, the Great Lakes Fur Trade, the importance and making of paper, the Civil War Soldier (and Civil War ladies) and more. Thanks to Lisa McLaughlin, Waterloo principal, for including the Museum in their after school enrichment!

Even though most of our education activities are elementary school based, we welcome opportunities for older students and adults to experience Monroe County history! Time and again we see adults who are suspicious of history, perhaps due to a past impression thinking history is *only* names and dates, without personal interest or meaning- everyone at the Museum will try and convince you otherwise! It is gratifying to see the parents who accompany their children for our tours edge closer to hear and see the presentations themselves, and who give us their own "good marks"! Two years ago I started giving tour evaluations to teachers who experienced our many tours, with extra forms for parents to also give their impressions. Comments from parents include: "Great exhibits & the kids really enjoyed it" (1-27-06); "Very informative! Enjoyed the presentation and the entire museum" (1-27-06); "Excellent" (12-19-05); "The tour leaders were very very informative and knowledgeable on all

the displays and subjects” (10-6-05); “Thank you for having this tour” (11-8-05); “Thoroughly enjoyed the presentations” (10-13-05).

The appreciation of history is something everyone can have- it’s not reserved for the very smart, or the very unique, though many historians are. Adults here in Monroe can *painlessly* learn about Monroe county’s history, their own history, and the past, with what our Museum and staff offer. A new pride and awareness can foster when someone learns about who and what came before them, and what sacrifices and achievements were made and that we have gained from those accomplishments (or mistakes).

Curious about Monroe County? Curious about your family name in the county? Have questions on the Civil War, or the 1813 Battle *right here* at the River Raisin? Questioning something you’ve heard, who’s who, or wondering about some childhood landmark? (We do too). Whether you have a half an hour or two, stop in at the Museum. Come to one of our special events- watch for these published in the Monroe Evening News, the Monroe County website at www.co.monroe.mi.us, the kiosk in front of the Museum, or fliers that we have at the front desk inside the Museum. Bring your children. Education transcends age. We know, because we at the Museum are always learning.

- April 7-8 Local History Conference at Wayne State University
- April 12 MAS Archaeology Meeting, 8pm, at the Monroe County Historical Museum.
- Coming Events:
- May 20 Farm Day at Navarre-Anderson
- June 24 Log Cabin Day
- July 8-9 Campeau Company Event at Navarre-Anderson
- Monroe County Fair Week
- July 28 to August 5 Civil War Event at Navarre-Anderson
- Sept. 9-10 Custer Week in Monroe County
- Oct. 1-7

COMING EVENTS

March

- March 1 Monroe County Historical Commission, Board Meeting, 7pm, Monroe Museum.
- March 2 1812 Bicentennial Symposium Program by Anthony Pitch, 8:00 pm, Monroe County Community College.
- March 6 1812 Cultural/Historical Events Subcommittee, 2:00pm, Monroe Museum
- March 11 Sugarbush demonstration at Navarre-Anderson Trading Post.
- March 18 Kalamazoo Living History Show, for info contact John Gibney @734-240-7781
- March 19 Friends of the River Raisin Battlefield, business meeting, 1:30pm, Battlefield Visitor Center. Rumrunner Stories, 2pm, Marshlands Museum, Lake Erie Metropark.
- March 21 Algonquin Club Muskrat Dinner.
- March 27 John Gibney on “Michigan & The Underground Railroad”, 7pm at the Ida Branch, Monroe County Library System.
- April 1 Battlefield Reopens