

A Golden Harvest in Spring

Maple Sugaring Season at Weston Priory

WHEN I OFFERED TO WRITE A BRIEF ESSAY on maple sugaring at Weston Priory, little did I realize how great the challenge to do that! For more than sixty years, sugaring has been a rich and vibrant community experience, too complex to capture in a short article. But perhaps it can be summarized in the title to this essay and a short historical recall.

From the Priory Bulletin of 1953, the year Weston Priory was founded:

two monks happened to be discussing one day, along with Mr. Frank Dene, our tenant farmer, the possibility of developing a "sugar bush" in our woods, as a means of support. Toward the end of the talk a visitor was ushered in who turned out to be a Mr. John [Robert!] Moroney, of Ogdensburg

[New York], head of a firm that manufactures equipment for producing maple sugar. He had come to find out whether we might be interested in such an activity, and if so, whether we would accept, as a gift from him, a complete outfit of sugar-making equipment! His generous offer was accepted, of course; and when the equipment arrived, we began work at once in our stand

of maple trees, clearing and storing firewood, putting up a rough "sugar house" with the help of several Holy Name Men from Ludlow [Vermont] under the direction of Mr. Ernest Bush, and making good use of the fine Percheron horse generously given us, along with various essential farm implements, by Mr. Andrew Shannon. -



Bill and Dan, Priory horses, delivering sap at maple sugar house in 1958



Father Robert (now brother John) and a house guest gathering maple sap in 1958

As the title to this article suggests, maple sugaring at Weston Priory was an amazing harvest in spring – a surprising gift in the very beginning that sustained the community’s economy in difficult years, and trained aspirants for the community when qualified teachers were lacking.

For almost seventy years, nature has continued to offer this gift of a delightful harvest before the time of planting. In turn, the brothers and friends have strenuously opened arms and hearts to embrace and harvest the gift. In early years, three thousand taps and buckets were attached to the generous, sturdy Maples – sometimes another tree species was tapped by accident, with no response! Translucent, odorless, taste-free sap was boiled to transform the precious pure liquid into gold or amber sweetness. It was then shared or sold in gallon and half-gallon containers at a very low price. In later years, with the aging of bothers and advances in technology, sugaring at the Priory was adapted to the new times. The Maples remained generous and faithful as ever – true images of God’s love.



In the spring of 2019, two hundred trees yielded 36 gallons of golden syrup which was poured into pint and half-pint containers--with similar benefits for the community as in previous bountiful years. This joyful harvest in Spring continues to be nature’s sign of our faithful and loving God whose life-blood is so generously poured out and shared with our monastic community and friends. ■

- brother John