

The Maple-Sugar Story

by William J. Hopkins

Once upon a time there was a farm-house, and it was painted white and had green blinds; and it stood not far from the road. In the fence was a wide gate to let the wagons through to the barn. And the wagons, going through, had made a track that led up past the kitchen door and past the shed and past the barn and past the orchard to the wheat-field; and through the wheat-field to the maple-sugar woods.

One day, when the winter was almost over and it was beginning to get warmer, Uncle John got out the old oxen. And they came out and put their heads down and he put the yoke over and the bows under, and he hooked the tongue of the sled to the yoke; for the snow was not all melted, and enough was on the ground for the sled to go on.

Then he put on the sled his axe and Uncle Solomon's, and a lot of buckets and a lot of wooden spouts he had made, and the big saw. Then he put little John on the sled and said "Gee up there," and Uncle Solomon came too, and they walked along beside the sled. And the old oxen walked slowly along the track past the barn and past the orchard to the wide gate that led into the wheat-field, and there they stopped. And Uncle John took down the bars and the oxen went through the gate and across the wheat-field, and stopped at the wide gate on the other side of the field. Then Uncle John took down those bars and the old oxen started and walked through and along the little road in the maple-sugar woods until they came to a little house beside the road, and there they stopped.

Then Uncle John opened the door of the little house; and inside, it was about as big as a little room that a little boy sleeps in. And in one corner was a chimney, and in front of the chimney was a great enormous iron kettle, set up on a little low brick wall that was just like a part of the chimney turned along the ground. In the front was a hole in the low wall, so that wood could be put in, and at the back, under the kettle, there was a hole into the chimney, so that the smoke would go up the chimney and out at the top. And in one corner of the little house were some square iron pans.

Then Uncle John put two of the buckets down in the house, and the big saw; and he shut the door and the oxen started and walked along until they came where were some maple-sugar trees, and there they stopped. Then Uncle John and Uncle Solomon took their axes and went to the trees and they made little notches in the trees, low down, so that there was room to put a bucket under. And they drove a spout in each notch and put a bucket under each spout. And then they went to other trees and made a notch in each tree and drove in a spout and put a bucket under and so they did until they had used up all their buckets.

Then the old oxen walked along until they came to a pile of wood that was cut up all ready to burn; and there they stopped and Uncle Solomon and Uncle John put the wood on the sled. Then they said: "Gee up," and the oxen walked back to the little house, and they took the wood off the sled. And the wood was in great long sticks, too long to put in the place under the kettle. So Uncle John got the big saw from the little house and he and Uncle Solomon sawed the wood into small sticks and piled it up nicely.

Then they put the saw on the sled and shut the door of the little house and the old oxen started walking back along the little road, dragging the sled, with the saw and the axes and little John. And they went through the gate into the wheat-field and Uncle John put the bars back; and they went across

the wheat-field and through the gate at the other side, and Uncle John put those bars back. And they walked along past the orchard and past the barn to the shed.

And Uncle John unhooked the tongue of the sled and took off the yoke, and the old oxen went into the barn and went to sleep.

The next morning, Uncle John and little John started along the little road, past the shed and past the barn and past the orchard; and they climbed over the bars into the wheat-field, and went through the wheat-field and climbed over the bars into the maple-sugar woods. Then they walked along until they came to the little house, and Uncle John opened the door of the house and took out the two buckets he had left there.

Then they went to some of the maple-sugar trees where they had put buckets the day before, and the sap was dripping slowly into the buckets—drip—drop—drip—drop—and the buckets were nearly half full. So Uncle John poured the sap from those buckets into the empty buckets and went along to some other trees and poured the sap from those buckets in with the other, and the buckets he carried were full. So he took them back to the little house and emptied them into the big kettle.

Then he went to other trees and filled the two buckets again with the sap that had dripped, and emptied that into the kettle. And so he did until he had taken all the sap that had dripped.

Then he put wood under the big kettle and lighted it, and the fire burned and the sap got hot and after a while it began to boil. And while it was boiling, Uncle John stirred the sap once in a while with a wooden stirring thing he had made. And when it had boiled a long time, he dipped out a little with the stirrer and went to the door and dropped it in the snow, so that when it got cool he could see whether it was boiled enough. But it wasn't done enough, and he let it boil longer, and then he dropped some more in the snow; and this time he thought it was about right for maple-syrup.

So he dipped sap out of the kettle into a keg that was in the little house, until the keg was full. And then he put the bung into the bung-hole and set the keg in the corner.

Then Uncle John put more wood on the fire and the sap boiled a long time. And at last he thought it was done enough for maple-sugar; and he dipped some out with the stirrer and went to the door and dropped it in the snow. And when it got cold, he saw that it was hard, and was just right for maple-sugar. So he took the little square pans that were in the corner of the house and he dipped the boiled sap from the kettle into the pans and set them in the snow outside.

Then he let the fire go out, and when the sugar in the pans was hard, he brought it into the house, and shut the door and started along the little road, and little John after. They walked along through the maple-sugar woods and climbed the bars into the wheat-field, and walked across the wheat-field and climbed the bars at the other side, and walked along past the orchard and past the barn and past the shed to the kitchen door, and there they went in.

The next morning, Uncle John and little John went to the maple-sugar woods again, and Uncle John got some more sap and boiled it and made maple-syrup and maple-sugar. And so they did every day until they had taken all the sap that the trees ought to give.

Then Uncle John got out the old oxen and they put their heads down and he put the yoke over and the bows under, and he hooked the tongue of the sled to the yoke. Then he said "Gee up there," and

the oxen started walking along past the barn and past the orchard, and Uncle John took down the bars at the wheat-field and they went through and across the field, and he took down the bars at the other side and they walked through and along the road in the maple-sugar woods until they came to the little house.

There they stopped, and Uncle John opened the door and put the kegs on the sled, and all the little squares of maple-sugar and all the buckets and all the spouts that he had pulled out of the trees. And he shut the door of the little house, and the oxen started and walked back along the road through the maple-sugar woods into the wheat-field, and Uncle John put up the bars. And they walked across the wheat-field and through the gate at the other side, and Uncle John put up those bars; and they walked along past the orchard and past the barn, and little John came after.

Then the old oxen dragged the sled to the place where they kept the things that were to go to market, and Uncle John took off the maple-syrup and the maple-sugar and put them in that place. But some of the maple-syrup and some of the maple-sugar he put in the cellar for themselves to use; for little Charles and little John and little Sam liked maple-sugar and they liked maple-syrup on bread. And there was enough maple-syrup and maple-sugar to last them a long time and a lot to go to market besides.

Then Uncle John unhooked the tongue of the sled from the yoke and put the sled in the shed; and he took off the yoke and the old oxen went into the barn and went to sleep.

And that's all.

Source:

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