



*Sheldon Historical Society
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MARCH 2026 Newsletter

“MAPLE IS KING”



The February Ground Hog may predict the length of our cold winter; however nothing forecasts the coming of warmer weather as does the activity carried on by Vermonters and Sheldonites in the “Sugar Bush”. Few have experienced or witnessed the deep winter work to prepare the bush. Gone are the days when men and boys in black rubber boots carried tools to bore holes in maple trees where metal taps could be set with a wooden mallet. A few recall

the freezing January and February days traversing their bush to tap and to cull away branches and older trees for next year’s firewood. After the buckets were gathered and stored, we returned one more time to clean up. Not all that long ago, pipe lines to central collection points replaced old metal buckets and then came the newly designed bushes where sap flows directly into the evaporator to be boiled into Maple Syrup. The process changed but MAPLE continues to be king from Town Meeting Day until Tax Day. And then we celebrate the VERMONT MAPLE FESTIVAL and the return of spring.

Granny’s Maple Walnut Squares

Crust

1 1/4 cup flour

1/2 cup butter, softened
square pan.

1/3 cup sugar

Filling

2 eggs, beaten

2/3 cup sugar

2 tablespoons butter, melted

1 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1/4 teaspoon salt

3/4 cup maple syrup

2 tablespoons flour

1 cup walnuts, chopped

Combine ingredients and mix well.

Pour filling over baked crust.

Bake at 375 degrees for 25 minutes. Cool and cut into squares.

Mix together and press into a greased 9-inch

Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes, set aside



Artifacts of the MONTH
From our collection

Sugaring is the basis of our “Artifact” du jour. We have a very modest collection of sap spouts and wooden buckets, which represented a hi-tech leap from the old Abenaki mode of sap gathering.



A wooden sap bucket, 12” tall x 12.5” wide, contains about 3.5 gallons: a good day’s run. Without covers, these buckets also collected rainwater, twigs, and -late in the season- little critters. Spouts from the collection include early primitive wood spiles; a “tin horn” conical steel spout, and several Soule patent spouts showing various improved features. (Donated by Donald Reed) Not shown: a “King sap bag”, another Soule patent invention, replacing the bucket with a flexible, see-through vinyl collection pouch. This novelty held barely half a bucket, requiring more trips to the tree. The flexible sap tube soon made the bag yesterday’s news for larger sugar operators.

Among our collection of artifacts, several hundred old photos assist us in understanding the past. In this photo entitled “1889 Sugaring” Charlotte Northrup Deming (on the right with salt); we witness “sugaring” as it was long ago.

Sugaring with Will Deming and his family on lunch break.



Pre-European Maple History



By Cary, William De La Montagne, 1840-1922. This image is from the Canadian Illustrated News, 1869-1883, held in the Library and Archives Canada under record 458, Public Domain.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5585726>

Indigenous peoples living in northeastern North America were the first groups known to have produced maple syrup and maple sugar. According to Indigenous oral traditions, as well as archaeological evidence, maple tree sap was being processed into syrup long

before Europeans arrived in the region. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maple_syrup

Sugaring Over Time by Andy Cane

There wasn't much "sweet" about living in the new-settled Sheldon in the 1790s. It was a rough lifestyle for those displaced Connecticut emigrants. Then, as now, the long, dark days gnawed the spirits of those winter weary settlers. And then, relief! As - just about now- a small, bright spot appeared, announcing the arrival of sugaring season.

Maple sugar was well known in colonial America, thanks to the early cooperation between natives and their new, uninvited neighbors. The colonists were quick to adopt the native practice of slitting the bark of those abundant maples, gathering the sweet juice and rendering it to sugar cakes. The Indian practice was to reduce the sap to syrup by dropping hot stones into their collected sap. With iron technology, the colonists rapidly improved on the native process: reducing sap in kettles improved the efficiency, increased the quantity and refined the quality of the syrup. Further heating reduced the syrup to sugar, making the sweet easier to store and transport.

Early adaptations included the practice of drilling into the tree and driving a spile, or tap, into the hole. This made it easier to direct the flow of sap into a collecting vessel: a wooden bucket, instead of a gourd or birch bark cup; then tinned steel pails, with innovations emerging with each season until our modern web of plastic tubing arrived in the 1950s.

The wooden spile fell to the conical tin horn tap, which in turn gave way to the cast iron Soule spout, patented by Fairfield farmer George Soule. Sheldon's foundries produced mammoth, 60 and 90 gallon iron kettles, perfect for evaporating the sap. Vermont farmers commonly relied on Sugaring to pay their taxes. In practice, it provided ready cash after a long winter of expense without meaningful income. An ambitious Sheldon sugar bush in the 19th and 20th centuries might hang six or eight hundred buckets. Some few upland farms might tend two or three times that many. Today's farms have found salvation in sugaring, with a few large operations counting 100,000 taps or more, and stringing untold miles of plastic tubes.

I never knew that!

I never asked much about the thin metal tubes that hung in the rafters of my Uncle's sugarhouse. It turns out, that was the final resting-place for a 1901 invention, ungraciously dubbed "goosenecks", which presumed to relieve sugar makers of the impossibly tiresome tree-to-tree task of gathering sap.

They weren't the first attempt to "automate" the gathering process. In the late 18th century, long wooden troughs, laid along the ground, were devised to direct sap from tree to tank: problems with this were immediately apparent: the wood cracked, leaked, and rotted quickly; the channels gathered snow-melt and rainwater as well as the sap; and the slope had to be adjusted to maintain the flow. Later, iron pipes replaced the wood, and funneled "filling stations" allowed gatherers to empty pails into the pipe, eliminating the back-and-forth trips with the large gathering tanks. Of course, waiting for the frozen pipe to thaw every frosty morning, much sap was lost.

The first flexible plastic sap tubing was improvised in 1953 by Vermont farmer James Breen, using surgical tubing. Breen experimented with a small cluster of trees, but soon ordered 1000 feet of tubing from 3M's medical supply division. A curious 3M official wondered about this unusual order, and before long a 3M Vice President – dressed as suited his position, 3-piece suit and tie- came snowshoeing to Breen's sugar woods. And a new industry was born!

Weatherwise



So this is what the old timers mean by WINTER!!!!

Coming Events:

Our Museum is closed for the winter (November through April) but is available by appointment for special events or research. Call 802 933-2479 for information.



Beginning Friday May 29

500 Card Parties

Join us in the spring for more popular
"Barn Quilt Therapy Workshops"
by Kimberly Hess
Dates To Be Announced.



Sheldon
Old
Home
Days
July 25, 2026

"Let Freedom Ring" is the title for Sheldon Old Home Day's Parade and BBQ.

Register your participation in the parade by using our registration form at the end of this newsletter.

We look forward to celebrating your heritage with you on July 25.

Mark your calendar for our next Calcutta and Silent Auction on Friday, September 25th 2026 at The Abbey Restaurant.



Calcutta Fundraiser & Silent Auction



September 19, 2025 * 6:30 p.m. * The Abbey Restaurant

Thank You to our Sponsors!





~ Remember to visit our sponsors throughout the year ~

"QUILTING IN COMMUNITY"



On Saturday, June 13th, 1:00 pm, the Sheldon Historical Society will host award-winning quilter Hope Johnson from Shelburne. Hope Johnson has been quilting since the early 1980's and started her first original design for a honeycomb quilt in 1989. Twenty years later in 2009, "Honey, I'm Home" was completed and received the Best Vermont Quilt award at the Vermont Quilt Festival. This was the beginning of what was to be an ongoing design evolution inspired by the geometry of the hive and the community of regional beekeepers. With the Vermont community in mind, she has expanded her work to include portraits of Vermonters. Hope will have her quilts (and more) on hand to show and tell the story of how one quilt opened a whole new world of experience, personal creativity, community connections and the opportunity to make a difference through her fiber art. Check out Hope's website for more information.

A SHELDON FAMILY



The Big House, Crowe Hill, ca. 1950

THE CROWE FAMILY

This family name first appears in Sheldon history when Robert Crowe, the son of Thomas Crowe moved from Berkshire to Sheldon to work for Joseph Fairbanks. One of his offspring Robert Abel Crowe bought the Fairbanks farm. Robert W Crowe, born October 16, 1893, attended Sheldon schools and Burlington Business College. He married Alice Stephenson in 1915. Robert W and Alice Crowe began married life farming on Crowe Hill. He also worked at the Mill and served in several town and state political positions. Alice and Robert are the only couple in Vermont to have served as representatives of any town. Members of the Crowe family continue to live in Sheldon.

Are you interested in being a Newsletter contributor?
Send your offering to our email for review

Membership

Editor's Note: FUN! Is how you spell "Sheldon Historical Society". Your Society plans and carries out activities year 'round to engage the community. Why not join us through membership? Enjoy our postings on Facebook at Sheldon Historical Society. Visit our website for fun and historical insights, and most of all, join us for many upcoming events in 2026.

As a non-profit public benefit corporation, our Society depends on members for direction, inspiration, guidance and support. Find a convenient on-line form at our website www.sheldonvthistorical.org/society/membership-form, or call for assistance 802 933-2479.

Material gifts to the society are received through our Collections Committee. Your thoughtful monetary donations may be made on our web site, in person, through the PayPal Giving Fund, or via mail to P O. Box 65 Sheldon Springs, VT 05485. Your gift to our 501(c)3 nonprofit organization is tax exempt. Thank you!

Sheldon Old Home Day Parade and BBQ

2026 Parade Registration

July 25, 2026

“Let Freedom Ring”

PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO:

Roger Bennett 1526 Main Street Sheldon, VT 05483 (802) 355-5340

NAME/ ORGANIZATION: _____

CONTACT PERSON: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

Type of Entry: Float, Antique truck/ car, Walker(s), Horse(s), antique tractor
 ATV pulling float, Decorated Golf Cart

Brief Description of Entry: _____

PARADE DATE/TIME: July 25th, 2026 at 11:00 AM. Please arrive prior to 10:00 a.m. at intersection of Pleasant and Center Streets. You will be directed to your line-up location from there.

Absolutely no candy is to be thrown from vehicles; must be handed out by persons walking route.