

One Hundred Years of Making Maple Syrup on the Ryder Farm  
(1828-1928)

In October 1827, David and Polly Ryder left New York State with their eight children-of which, the eldest was 13 years old. They came to Detroit by way of the Erie Canal and then by sailing boat "The Lake Queen" across Lake Erie. After six days on the canal and seven days on the lake, they cast anchor at the village of Detroit.

David located a temporary dwelling for his family and then thought of where to locate permanently. He learned that there was an Indian trail, leading to the west, along a stream that flowed into the Detroit River. It had been named "River Rouge" by the French.

So, in December, David and a friend named Pickett started on their first prospecting trip. On the second day, they came to a little settlement called Plymouth and there made the acquaintance of a young lawyer named Starkweather. He invited them to stay with him until they found suitable homesteads. They again followed the Rouge River from Plymouth and when about 3 ½ miles east they veered to the north and ½ mile and found what they thought a veritable bonanza. There was considerable clearing for plowing and early planting, surrounded by forest consisting of hard-wood timber. Oak, maple, beech, and walnut predominated-many of the trees measuring three and four feet in diameter. David and Pickett returned joyously to Plymouth that afternoon and Mr. Starkweather located two sections in that locality which they had been exploring and not yet taken.

David formally filed claim to ½ of section 29. March 20, 1828, David had a house raising with the help of twenty hardy pioneers and under the expert supervision of Salmon Kingsley. In this log cabin lived the Ryder family until my father, Charles Ryder was two years old (1856) and they moved into a new home ¼ mile west on the then Plymouth road.

I have no doubt that first spring of 1828 found David and his family tapping the hard-maple trees, for they must have craved sweets and maple syrup and sugar would be that answer. My older brothers tell of seeing (about 70 years ago) when they were children troughs made from sections of basswood logs which had been hollowed out and the spiles, driven into the trees, were made from alder stems. The boys say that they tapped approximately 150 trees each spring. After great-grandfather

David, his son George operated the farm and then his son Charles (my father) with the assistance of my four brothers.

In the early days, the syrup was boiled down in big black iron and brass kettles which were hung from a tripod over a fire in the woods. In later years, a syrup evaporation pan was used. This pan was about four feet square and eighteen to twenty inches deep. It set on a wall of stone or brick under which a fire was maintained. The one that I remember was probably six to seven feet long and was divided into sections. It was a galvanized pan then. The maple sap ran into the first section from a storage tank outside and in different stages of readiness it advanced and came out of the last section the delicious maple syrup we all loved. The maple syrup shanty was a land-mark which came into being in our woods with the use of the evaporation pans. Before then, a shelter for equipment was not essential.

Some years there would be syrup to sell- the price was \$1.00 per gallon. We did not, as a rule, make maple syrup for sale but more for our own use as sweetening or candy. We would often have a group of young people in for an evening of fun. Perhaps some of you recall "boiling down" the syrup and then pouring it onto a patch of nice clean snow out in the woods and letting it harden. There was nothing ever more delicious, so it seemed, than the wax candy thus made.

The maple sap was gathered in pails or "coolers" as we called them. The men used to go through the woods and fill the coolers and then hang them on a wooden yoke over their shoulders. They were then carried to the big kettles or pan. Eventually, horses hitched to a stone-boat were used to traverse the woods and many gallons of sweet liquid were hauled to the "sap shanty" in this manner.

The old rough "sap shanty" was a favorite place for the Ryder children and their friends each spring in the maple syrup time.

Thus passed an era of approximately one-hundred years, the last syrup being made in 1927 or 1928.

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March 1959