



The Weekly Historical Note

By: Nicolas Reynolds

June 1st, 2009

The Maple Syrup Ceremony

Adapted from: "W@hta (Maple)" in *Ukwehuwehn#ha Yukwatlihwaht<ty#tu*, July 1995, p. 104-110.

There are a lot of ceremonies that come from the Oneida Longhouse. One of the early spring ceremonies is the Maple Syrup Ceremony. Some Ceremonies follow the phases of the moon, others follow natural cycles of the environment. Maple Ceremony begins only after the first thunders are heard in the early spring. It is then that the trees begin to awaken with signs of life and the precious sap begins to flow.

There are many groups, or camps in the Oneida Wisconsin Community that collect Maple Sap. Each camp begins by burning Native Tobacco and giving thanks for all that there is. It is in remembering to give thanks that we are reminded to have peaceful minds and that there should be no anger among us. <kay<@ke ka>nikuhli=yó (There Should be good minds). It is also asked that there be protection upon those who are working in the woods.

The late winter, early spring-time in the woods can be dangerous so children are asked to be mindful while they are in the woods helping. They are reminded that they could fall because the ground can be slippery while the snow is melting. If it rains, there could be ice, or the wind can cause fragile branches on the trees to break and fall and someone could be injured.

In addition there are animals in the woods that can be easily disturbed by the humans working there. It is also asked during the tobacco burning that they will be at peace and not disturbed by those who go to collect the sap.

Once each of the camps have finished collecting the Maple Sap they still have work to do. Each of them has the long work of boiling down the sap. Sap naturally contains large amounts of water and therefore needs to have the water evaporated to concentrate the sap into consumable syrup. This takes hours and even days depending on how large a container a person is trying to cook down into sap. 80 gallons of sap can be cooked down to just 2 gallons of syrup and the fire must be kept at a constant temperature from start to finish. Often someone is left with the job of keeping the fire going all night long. Those who wish can also continue cooking the Syrup until it crystallizes and turns into Maple Sugar.

Once each camp has finished collecting, cooking, and storing their syrup, the date for the Maple Syrup Ceremony Closing is set by the Faithkeepers. Everyone comes together at the Longhouse and the Ceremony is held. The Great Feather Dance is part of the Ceremony and many people give their personal thanks. The syrup is often shared between friends and family. Like all Longhouse Ceremonies, all of the speaking is done in the Oneida Language. Maple syrup, if stored correctly, can last throughout the year.


