

Item 4-①

TREES IN FOLK CRAFTS

FINAL PROJECT

FOLK-LORE FIELDWORK

TAMMIE PICKERING AND GARY COLLINS

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TREES IN FOLK CRAFTS

ABOUT TREES-

A tree is a perennial woody plant with three basic characteristics that distinguish it ~~from~~ all other plants. 1. Size: In maturity it is much bigger than all other plants. 2. Form: A typical tree has a single stem which bears branches a distance above the ground. 3. Way of life: Under natural conditions trees grow in stands (forests) which dominate their area of land. By the wood of their trunks, their fruits, and the special kind of environment they create, trees influence life on earth more than any other kind of plant.*

Trees supply almost everything: food, heat, construction materials, chemical products, paper, clothing, plastics, and photograph film. They gather and guard our water, decorate life, make homes for animals. All this production is conjured out of air, sunlight, water and rocks, and the supply will be renewed and multiplied when given half a chance.*

There is proof that man has made use of trees in various ways since the beginning of recorded history. One statement about trees was made in the year 525 B. C. by Gautama Buddha:—"The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life activity; it provides protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it."*

As our society begins to depend more and more on industry, man has forgotten or lost the need to know how to take advantage of the many resources the trees have to offer. This paper focuses on some men who have learned or retained the knowledge of a particular craft which deals with trees as

the main resource. David Adams and his father Bill Adams make maple syrup every spring. Opal Littlejohn recalls how sassafras tea was made and used for medicinal purposes. Chester Zimmer is a self taught wood-carver, although he learned carpentry from his grandfather.

ABOUT THE MEN-

David Adams grew up in Princeton, Kentucky on the Dripping Springs Road on a farm very near the farm where his parents reside now (1985). When he was about ten years old he made maple syrup for the first time, with the help of his mother; it was this experience and his "first taste of the real thing" that brought maple syrup to be an annual event with him. There were years when he was in the service, living in other parts of the country that he was unable to make the syrup, but he has made it regularly for several years now. His father William L. (Bill) Adams has helped with the process since he retired, and the maple trees are on his farm. David hopes that his children will want to carry this craft on as a family tradition.

Opal Littlejohn is a retired dairyman who also lives on the Dripping Springs Road in Princeton. His life has been rich with folk ways. Although his occupation was producing milk he is familiar with "hog killing", "country hams", "Coon hunting", and quite a lot of verbal folk lore. His experience with sassafras tea occurred when he was younger, it was then that he observed older people as they dug the roots, made the tea, and drank the tea. This was practiced in the spring of the year to thin their blood. He has dug and drank sassafras tea, but isn't a strong believer in the medicinal value and he definitely doesn't like the taste.

Chester Zimmer was taught carpentry by his grandfather when he was about eleven; the project he learned on was a two-story house they built together. He enjoyed working with wood so he taught himself to make wooden

toys: paddle wheel boats, rings and ball-in-boxes were some of the toys he made. He picked up alot of knowledge about wood working when he was a pattern maker in the navy; this job consisted of making the wooden forms for metal castings. When he left the navy he began whittling characatures and carving reliefs, but his speciality is wooden eagles of all sizes which are very detailed.

R.D. Hodge assisted in this project through library research concerning sassafras tea. He also discribed a craft he recalls from childhood, of making a slide whistle from elderberry in the spring when the bark could be slid easily, this craft was described briefly.

ABOUT THE CRAFTS-

The production of maple syrup is a profitable business in the New England states, but it is very uncommon in the Western-most parts of Kentucky for maple syrup to be made in large quantities. Although Kentucky has a large number of maple trees, syrup is not a good business venture. This is due to the fact that the season for syrup making is very short in kentucky. The first thing you should know before you make maple syrup is that the temperature should be in the 40's doring the day and in the 20's at night. The conditions are usually right in Western Kentucky around the middle of February. Once the weather is right you have to move fast, because it often doesn't hold long, and if it gets too warm the sap will stop flowing good and the flys and ants will gather around your jugs or sugar water. Sometimes the conditions are right only a few days before it gets too warm.

If the weather turns warm and stays that way the trees will start to bud and you will have "buddy sap" which doesn't taste good. Maple syrup which is made successfully depends largely upon the weather and the weather in Western Kentucky isn't always ideal.

The following is a list of the things necessary to make maple syrup, according to David Adams:

1. Maple trees.
2. Jugs or other containers.
3. Pieces of rubber hose about three inches long.
4. Wire (to hold the jugs close to the tree.)
5. Nails.
6. Hammer.
7. Drill (brace) and 7/16 drill bit.
8. Bamboo for spigots about three inches long and about a half inch around.
9. Bleach solution (two percent bleach,) in a spray bottle.
10. Evaporator, wood and matches.
11. Containers for storage.
12. Kitchen range and a large pan.

The process could be considered hard work, and it is rather time consuming. When you have located all of your resources and the weather is right you are ready to begin. Keep in mind it takes around forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup, but look on the bright side a tree might give a gallon of sap just overnight. You can put more than one jug on larger trees, they should be placed about six inches apart.

You begin by drilling a hole about three feet up, and spray the hole with bleach solution to keep it from souring. Drive the bamboo into the hole and place the rubber hose over the bamboo. Put a nail in the tree several inches up from the spigot. Attach the wire to your container securely and place the end of the hose in your container, so you'll be sure to catch every drop. Check your containers once or twice a day and when you have enough sap to fill your evaporator you can begin the boiling process.

Boil the sap in an uncovered evaporator (a large tub will do) until it cooks down and begins to thicken. When the amount becomes small enough for the range top take it inside and complete the boiling process until it's the consistency you like. Can it with the standard "heat process" canning method and it will keep indefinitely.

Mr. Adams says it is good on cereal, pancakes, icecream and biscuits. You can also use it to make a variety of candies. If you'r a tree lover you can rest easy because this process doesn't harm the tree.

Sassafras tea was once an annually self-prescribed remedy for many, it was said that you should drink it in the spring to thin your blood. Opal Littlejohn doesn't hold to strong to these beliefs, but he does recall the process involved in digging and making the tea.

Like maple syrup, sassafrass tea should be made in the spring before the trees begin to bud, while the sap is still in the roots. The supplies needed to make the tea are listed below:

1. (Big, old) Sassafras tree.
2. Shovel.
3. Ax.
4. Stove.
5. Cups.
6. Sugar, cream, ect., (as you like.)

To make sassafras tea first locate a large sassafras tree measuring at least two or three feet in diameter. Dig at the base of the tree and uncover a large root, about as big around as your arm. When you have found the root you should use your ax to cut it from the tree; cut a section the size you want and remember-the root will keep indefinite. According to common folk beliefs the wood directly beneath the bark on the trunk isn't food for making tea. When you have your root you should peel the bark away with the ax or a knife, because it has a bitter taste. Now your peeled

with the ax or a knife, because it has a bitter taste. Now your peeled block of root should be split into sticks that will fit in a pan. Place a few sticks in a pan with about a quart of water, boil them until the water becomes very red. You have made sassafras tea, but before you drink it you can add sugar, cream or ice cubes, whatever you would like.

The inter view with Chester Zimmer was strictly an interview it did not include demonstrations; so we are not qualified to describe the process of wood carving in this paper.

ABOUT THEIR REASONS-

Most people have a reason for everything they do, but there are those who feel they need not justify any of their actions. David Adams has strong feelings about folk crafts. As many others, he sees that there could be trouble in the future, and his Christian beliefs remind him that it is stated in the Bible that there will be a time when "a piece of bread will buy a bag of gold." It's not this alone that inspires him, he is an out-doors person, he likes nature and his folk crafts are an enjoyed escape from his employment at a chemical plant. He would like to, at some point, be self-sufficient at least where food is concerned, and there are other food ways he practices-he raises strawberries, makes sourdough bread and has made sorghum molasses quiet frequently.

To David Adams working with these folf-food-ways as a hobby "like watching ball games on T.V. is a hobby for some men," and when he retires David hopes to concentrate more fully on his projects. He feels that his small son Nicholas will be interested in learning from his dad, because he shows great interest at this point, but he's too young to do any of the actual work yet.

Through his crafts he hopes to keep a little spark of the past alive and pass it on to the next generation.

Opal

Opal Littlejohn believes that the old ways of life are dying quickly. He recalls many folk ways that he observed when he was younger, he recalls seeing people make cough syrup from the layer between the outside bark and the wood of a wild cherry tree. This substance was gathered and boiled in a sugar sater solution to make "wild cherry cough syrup." A poltis was made from part of the polk plant, to use on the injured legs of livestock, and of course, he recalls sassafras tea. He doesn't practice folk remedies and feels that they have alot to do with "superstition", that they are cures in that they make people who believe in them "think" they feel better.

One folk practice he would like to see preserved is "hog killing" which is a custum with some of his family which is carried out the Saturday before Christmas each year. Although folk remedies aren't beliefs he practices and holds, he is aware of other folk ways he would like to see recorded and preserved.

Chester Zimmer is a minister in the First Christian Church- Disciples of Christ. Often he feels the need for an outlet, which is health for anyone's state of mind. He finds his escape through creative expression, and in addition to wood-carving he paints.

His wood working experiences have been varied and have been involved in the larger part of his lifes activities. It seems that he keeps learning and adding new ideas to his previous knowledge so that his work doesn't become stagnate. He carves figures for fun- like gnomes and hillbillies, he carves reliefs of a variety of things from dogwood blossoms to geese in flight. He makes wooden bowls, scale models, and in is th process of adding walking sticks to his crafts. The most outstanding work he does is carving eagles of almost any size, they take the form of a crest like the eagle on the back of a one-dollar-bill, they are carved in great detail. Although he doesn't consider himself a folk-craftsman he seems to fit the discription

well in that he gained his first knowledge from working with his grandfather and from that point learned mainly on his own.

ABOUT OTHER KNOWLEDGE GAINED-

While interviewing these men we became aware of several other crafts, lores and historical facts, and at this point we will cover them briefly.

Opal Littlejohn explained the "scalding hogs" is a process of putting the hog (which has been killed) into water which is heated in a vat to about 156^o, with a wood fire. This process makes the hair on the hog more easily removed. Opal also explained wild cherry cough syrup which was mentioned earlier in the paper.

David and Bill Adams talked of country hams and some of the processes involved in curing them. They also spoke of the art that is involved in making sorghum molasses.

Bill Adams gave a brief history of the only Civil War battle fought in Caldwell County. The Battle of Grubbs Cross Roads was fought on a sight that is now on his property.

David Adams explained that to make sour-dough bread you need a sour dough starter which is made of bacteria, which you feed with potatoes and flour. This starter will rise the dough without yeast.

Opal Littlejohn told of a folklore concerning the maple tree which has been pecked by woodpeckers. This lore states the belief that each place that is pecked will become a "swirl" and will make what he called birds-eye maple which is said to make beautiful furniture.

In conclusion we would like to include a discription of the sassafras and sugar maple trees, followed by pictures, slides and photographs of those interviewed.

* The resource used was a book entitled 1001 Questions Answered About Trees.