Walking Tour of Hurry Hill Farm
2012 Pennsylvania Best of Show Maple Syrup

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Hurry Hill Maple Farm and Museum
Open NW PA Maple Taste and Tour and then
Sundays 2-5 pm through end of May
And Sundays September through November
And appointment for groups, tours and speaking presentations
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#1 How HURRY HILL Got Its Name

Charles Billings (1823-1901) came from Vermont in 1846 and built a log house on Hurry Hill. He cleared the land until he had a working farm with buildings and orchard on 210 acres. Charles had four sons and this farm was turned over to son Archie Billings (born 1859). Archie built the original massive barn on top of Hurry Hill. It was three stories high and the barn floor was big enough to have two teams of horses hitched to wagons, turn simultaneously around in a circle without backing up. One day in 1911, Archie was in "town" (Edinboro) with his horse and buggy while his hired man was grinding feed with a gas- powered engine on the second story barn floor. The barn caught fire. Throughout the afternoon Archie was informed several times by townspeople that his barn was on fire but he did not seemed troubled by the imminent loss. After several inquires, he simply replied "Why should I hurry up that hill when there will be no barn to put my sweaty horse in when I get there?" From that day on, the hill at the "top" of Fry Road was called Hurry Hill. One summer day, Archie's wife, Creti, was seriously injured when her long hair became caught in a butter churn pulley. That summer, Archie built an enormous porch on two sides of the house to provide for Creti's recovery. Billings even inscribed "Hurry Hill" in the porch railing and told her to "rest and not to be in a hurry to get well." The script on the railing still exists today.

#2 Settling Hurry Hill

Take time to orient yourself. Fry Road runs north and south. If you face the woods and put Fry Road to your back, you are facing west. Charles Billings settled the Hurry Hill area and bought 100 acres of wooded land for $2/acre. To the south, you can see one of the fields he cleared and a woods – a maple sugarbush (a large number of maple trees). Imagine the fields being covered with a huge maple, hemlock, and beech forest. Imagine the work it took in 1846 for Charles, armed with axe and saws to clear the land by cutting off the trees, removing the tree stumps and rocks from the field to make a farm from a woodlot. The settlement of Franklin Township took place between 1820 and 1850. Near the Fry Road bridge north of the creek, there is small mound which housed a sawmill. You can faintly see the "run" where water flowed around the uphill side of the mound to power the sawmill. When the fields were cleared of trees, sawmills were built nearby and subsequently, log cabins and barns. A barn was built where the brick house now stands. The original bridge built in 1904 was 18 years before electricity came up the south end of the Townline Road (Fry Road). In 1922 each farmer paid $100 to have an electric line run from Edinboro (the nearest town) to their farm. The first Townline School was built shortly after the Civil War on the Fellows land a mile north of here and the second school exists today as a house.

#3 Maple Orchard

As you begin to walk, look to your right, north, up the hill – Hurry Hill. From this vantage point, you can see the Hurry Hill maple orchard we began planting in 1998. Hurry Hill has an interest in sustainable agriculture and by establishing a maple orchard we have preserved sugaring for future maple generations. Five-year-old sugar maple and black maple trees were dug and planted on April 1 1998. The trees were from and old sugar bush just north of here. The sugar bush was a producing sugar bush on Fry Road many years ago when the Harned family tapped it's trees for several generations. David and Georgie Knight own the property now and they have left a wonderful legacy in donating trees for this orchard. We water the newly transplanted trees throughout the summer for atleast two years.

Some trees are destroyed when buck deer rub their antlers on the tender bark. We've tried to deter deer with rotten eggs, human hair, and commercial

products. Snow fence and "hotel" soap tied to the fence seems to work the best as deer detest the smell. Trees must be planted after the frost is out of the ground and before the buds break. Timing is tricky and there is only a small window of opportunity. It will take 20 to 30 years before these maples are ready to tap. People always ask – "why are you doing this? You'll never tap these trees!" True. But I have never tapped a tree I planted either!!

#4 First Creek

The first creek you are crossing tells a little history of Hurry Hill. This creek is one of the headwaters of the Conneautee Lake (Edinboro Lake) – and is part of the French Creek Watershed. There is a blue sign in the maple orchard asking you to tread lightly in the Edinboro Lake Watershed. Just 1 mile north of Hurry Hill – the water flows to Lake Erie and the Great Lakes Watershed. The history of Edinboro begins when the area was occupied by the Eriez, Iroquois and Cornplanter Indians. They referred to the area as Conneautee, which means, "Land of the Snowflake" or "Land of the Lingering Snow." Edinboro is known for long winters and a good sugarin' history. Old timers always say that Edinboro boasts two seasons – mud and snow. Usually 150-300 inches of snow or more fall on Hurry Hill Farm each year. Snow and cold weather are two essential ingredients of a good sugar season.

#5 Bluebird Houses

Watch for wildlife. You might get lucky and see bluebirds, turkey, squirrels, pheasants, bear, and deer. On February 4, 1998 near the sugarhouse during the first night of boiling, coyote pups were heard and seen. In July 2003, two adult coyote and 5 pups made this field their playground. During tapping in Feb 2008, a bald eagle was spotted. Many blue bluebird houses are established around open fields on Hurry Hill Farm. Want to help a maple tree??? Put up a blue bluebird house!! Bluebird's favorite food is the gypsy moth and the gypsy moth is a very real pest to sugar maple.

#6 Giant Maple Tree

This giant sugar maple tree is more than 200 years old. A smaller tree than this one was cut down on Hurry Hill in 1997 and it had 180 visible growth rings. The largest living sugar maple has a trunk more than 23 feet around and it is

located in Norwich, CT. This tree is 18 feet around – the largest in the sugarbush. We don't tap the tree anymore but happily leave it knowing its hollow openings serve as the local wildlife condo!

#7 Perfect Maple Trees

The perfect maple has an 80% crown of leaves and 20% tree stump. These are great shade trees, real beauties in the fall with brilliant yellow, orange and scarlet leaves. It gets plenty of sunshine here on the edge of the woods and in the spring the sap pails are often running over with sweet sap. The maple tree is really a natural sugar factory. Photosynthesis is the process by which chlorophyll and sunlight work within a tree's leaves to make sugar from carbon dioxide and water. This high-energy sugar feeds the tree while it grows in the spring and in the summer. The leftover sap in the fall is sent to the sapwood in the tree roots and tree trunk to be stored as starch for the winter. Just before spring, the frozen sap thaws out, mixes with water from the roots and CO2 gas in the tree and then "runs" up and down and around the tree to feed the buds. When the leaves open, photosynthesis begins again. When we tap a tree – a mere 10% of the tree's sap goes into our sap buckets!

#8 Old Tapholes

This sugarbush is very old and many maple trees are healthy despite the fact that they are on the decline. Sugar maples are resilient – they have and can survive a lot of stress. The sugar maples worst enemy is old age. Their second worst enemy is the unknown. Maybe an ice storm? Maybe the Asian Longhorn Beetle that destroyed all the maples in China and has recently come to the US and Canada? The ALB came to the United States on boats loaded with shipping pallets. The ALB has been found in Chicago Illinois and Long Island and Central Park in Manhattan New York, Toronto Ontario, Cincinnati Ohio, and most recently in Boston Massachusetts just off of Interstate I-90. If you ever see several ½ inch holes in a tree with fine sawdust at the base, let your finding be known. All sightings of the damage by the ALB have been discovered by the casual observer. Please be alert and don't move firewood.

Notice the old tap holes on this piece of wood and in this tree we recently cut down. Each tap hole yielded an average of 10 – 12 gallons of sap per season: that yields about one quart of pure maple syrup. The season of "Mud and

Snow" - warm sunny days (above 40 degrees) and frosty nights are ideal for sap flow. Tap holes are 2 inches deep and 5 /16 inch in diameter (old tapholes are 3/8 inch). A "health" spile is gently hammered into the hole and a bucket and cover is placed on the tree. Each year, we adjust the placement of the taphole; therefore, tapping hardly fazes a growing, productive tree. Tapholes heal over as if they were a mere scratch. Sugar Maples can live upwards to 400 years – they are a tolerant tree. When we tap each spring, we stay at least 12" above or below and 6" to the right or left of old visible tapholes. When does the sap "run" (or drip?) Some of it is guesswork but the old timers say:

When the wind is in the east, Then the sap will run the least.
When the wind is in the west,Then the sap will run the best.

Actually, at Hurry Hill it runs the "best" when the wind is in the southwest!

#9 Creekbed and Fossils

Sugarin' begins they say when the creek breaks up each spring and the sap begins to run!! Maple sugar is the farmer's first harvest of the year and the end of sugaring has marked the beginning of spring and the farmer's year for centuries. Thawing days with freezing nights start the season. When does that happen? Not just by observing the thermometer but with an experienced eye and hand. Sugaring is both science and old-fashioned art. During the six-week season, the sap flow takes place for only ten to 20 days and is irregular, often with up to a third of the season's take coming through in a single day. Maple sap, which is about 98% water, is condensed into maple syrup through the evaporation process. It takes from 40-50 gallons of sap to yield one gallon of maple syrup. Early syrup runs and runs after a cold spell are light amber in color in with a delicate flavor and generally the color darkens and taste becomes more robust as the season progresses and warms. Syrup can be "buddy" at the end of the season. Once the buds swell, the sap no longer has a good taste. The "fifth" season – between winter and spring- is the sugarin season or as we fondly call it on Hurry Hill – the season of MUD and SNOW!

This rock was taken from this creek and is filled with fossils and is a result of the glacier during the last Ice Age, 15 or 20 thousand years ago. Good glacial soil makes good maple syrup! The sugar maple tree is indigenous only to

Northeast United States, Southeast Canada and areas around the Great Lakes. This region of Canada and the United States is the only place in the world where maple syrup is made. Quebec produces 80% of all maple syrup made. Ontario produces 10% and all other provinces and the U.S. produce the remaining 10% of all maple syrup.

This creek begins at a spring where the local Indians had a meeting ground. A nearby dry creek bed contained arrowheads. By the time this area was settled, illness, starvation, and Indian wars had wiped the natives out and new settlers encountered only an occasional Indian hunter.

#10 Hurry Hill Sugarhouse

Earnest and Cecil Mecham built the little sugarhouse in 1930. The large sugarhouse was built by Paul and Mary Woods in 1958. Two English Tin evaporators have made their home in the big sugarhouse: a 4' x 14' from 1958-1976 and a 5' x 14' from 1976-2004. In January of 2005, we installed a used 4' x 16' stainless steel, lead-free solder "Leader Special" you see here. The four cupolas at the roof peak open and allow 98% water to escape as steam and the 2% syrup is "drawn off" from the front finishing pan. Maple syrup is 33.5% water and 66.5% sugar. We burn dry hardwoods to stoke the fire in the firebox. The firebox heats the evaporator and heat is drawn through and under the back flue pan and into the chimney. While the finishing pan is flat, the flue pan is not. It has 20 flues, or "channels," 8 inches deep and ½ inch wide and 10' long. These flues are filled with boiling sap; therefore, the majority of evaporation takes place in this back pan. The holding tanks hold filtered sap from the gathering wagon. The sap enters the evaporator through a pre-heater pipe and pre-heater float box and the boiling begins. The sap travels through the flue pan mazes and then into the syrup finishing pan where it is tested for the proper density using a hydrometer and graded for proper labeling. After filtering the syrup several times, it is stored in five gallon cans in freezers for later bottling and making maple products. We make many PENNSYLVANIA Farm Show blue ribbon maple products from maple syrup – maple cream, maple candy, and maple mustard, maple barbeque sauce, maple sugar crumb, maple cotton candy and maple peanuts.

The outhouse here was built in the mid-1930's as a result of the WPA (Works Projects Administration) New Deal era of President Franklin Roosevelt. The

WPA created jobs building roads, parks, and public buildings. We transplanted it to Hurry Hill. It is useable. Don't fall in and don't forget to flush!!!

#11 Sugarbush

From this point, the entire sugarbush can be viewed. Imagine that Indians gashed trees and used the sweet sap to boil venison. Imagine early pioneers and farmers using oxen and stoneboats and teams of horses pulling bobsleds to collect sap. Imagine making sugar cakes to sell and leaving at 3 am by horse and wagon for the market in Erie. Imagine lugging buckets of sap through mud and snow just for the fun of making maple syrup! Imagine fragrant steam rolling out of this sugarhouse every spring as the tractor and wagon roll up to the sugarhouse with another 25 barrels of fresh sap. With the exceptions of nearby I-79, laptops, cell phones (and now ipads and iphones!!) not much has really changed in the process of sugarin' at Hurry Hill. These could be the same trees used every spring for centuries past and into the next century.

#12 Adirondak Shelter and Open Arch

These rocks darkened by fire indicate that at some point in time, someone had a fieldstone fire pit "arch" in this maple sugar grove. Imagine this flat pan over the open arch boiling syrup. Someone long ago made syrup and perhaps maple sugar here. WHO?? Native Peoples gashed notches into the maple trees and inserted a wooden splint. The sap ran down a wooden shingle and into a birch basket, clay pot or hollowed out log, which made a wooden trough. They heated "boiling" stones to "red hot" and put them into the sap to boil off the water. Or perhaps if they had clay pots, they used them over a fire.

Imagine that pioneers used giant iron pots to make syrup and then smaller ones to stir maple sugar. When explorers, traders and pioneers arrived in America, Native Peoples already had well-established methods for turning sap into sugar – that's why we call the place where syrup is made, a sugarhouse! The Native Americans would have traded items with the explorers to acquire an iron pot. They celebrated the sugar month or maple moon with ceremonies and dancing.

Documentation in the mid-1700's indicates wide use of sap as a social and medicinal drink. In the colonies maple sugar was more available and less expensive than the heavily taxed cane sugar coming in from the West Indies. Unlike cane sugar, maple sugar was not produced with slave labor. Our third

president, Thomas Jefferson, thought that if we were to be truly independent of Great Britain we should harvest maple sugar and plant maple trees. Maple sugar was the only sweetener in America for nearly two hundred years.

Pioneers used the brace and bit hand drill and wooden spiles to tap the trees and wooden buckets to collect the sap and cast iron pots to boil the sap. Syrup was boiled down to make maple sugar crumb, cakes or loaves for easy storage. This sugar was traded, bartered, sold and used year round in American households. The pioneers celebrated the "sugaring-off-time" with sugar-on-snow parties, sugar-stirs, and taffy pulls. Hurry Hill uses a gas powered "tapper" and metal buckets with lids, a tractor and wagon to gather sap and a sugar house in which to boil sap down. Hurry Hill celebrates "the coming of spring" with maple hot cocoa made with sap, hotdogs and eggs boiled in sap, and maple apple squares!

#13 Peepers

We have come to the end of our Walking Tour. The spring peeper frogs peeping three nights on Hurry Hill mark the end of the sugaring season. Frogs sense the warmth of spring in the creek and ponds and know when spring is here. Hurry Hill hopes to carry on the sugaring tradition for many more centuries. The sugarin' season is filled with miracles and Hurry Hill recommends a book for all "armchair sugarmakers." A classic, wonderful, maple sugaring book, Miracles on Maple Hill by Virginia Sorensen was written in 1957 when she lived in Edinboro. The book is true to the art of making maple syrup. Miracles on Maple Hill won the Newbery Medal for excellence in children's literature. "Warm and real…packed with incident, country magic, family love, and people to remember; it has substance and spiritual worth." The New York Times Book Review.

We are grateful for your interest and help in preserving maple sugaring. We feel that Hurry Hill Maple Farm exemplifies Dr. Benjamin Rush's words to our third President, Thomas Jefferson in 1791:

"the general happiness which heaven seems to have prepared for mankind will be derived from the manufacture and general use of Maple Sugar."