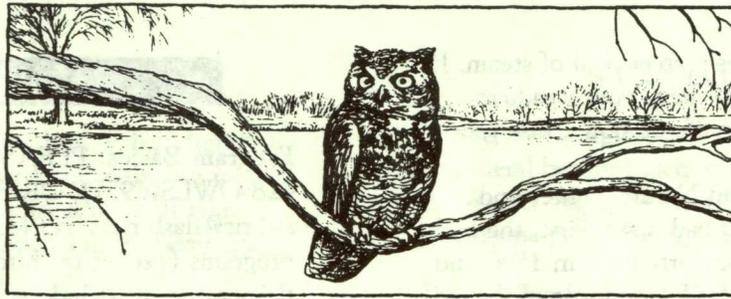


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## SUGAR MAPLE: *Service with a Spile*

--Mark Spreyer

*The land-holder who appropriates a few rods of land to the preservation or cultivation of the sugar tree not only increases the value of his estate, but confers a benefit upon future generations.* --Supt. of the 1860 U.S. Census

My first permanent job as a naturalist was at a New York nature center that tapped maple trees as an educational program and sold the syrup to raise funds. As my career progressed, I continued to drill holes in maples whether they grew in Illinois or in the suburbs of Minneapolis. So, it's no surprise that I'm an unabashed sugar maple enthusiast.

Part of the fun of tapping sugar maples is that it gets you outside just as spring is getting underway. The best weather for collecting sap is when the days are above freezing while nighttime temperatures drop below freezing. Around here, that's usually late February through much of March.

Since sugar maple is an indigenous tree, maple syrup and sugar are North American products. Native Americans introduced us to this wonderful treat. There are various legends about how the Indians learned about maple sap. In my favorite version, a brave was taking a nap under a tree when his wife brought over a cooking pot, a not-so-subtle hint that he should get some water. Not about to do "woman's work," the man threw his tomahawk into the tree and stormed off. Sap soon dripped from the axe into the bowl beneath.

When his wife returned for the pot, she saw that it was full of "water" and used it to cook stew. When husband and wife got together for dinner, they

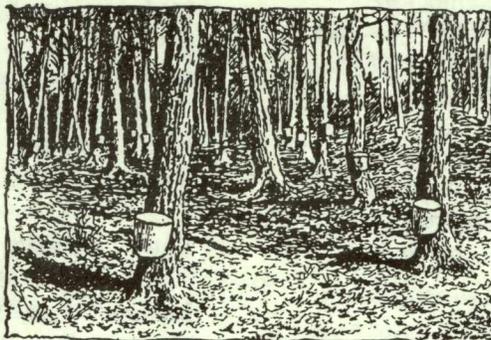
discovered, much to their delight, that the meat was covered in a sweet and tasty sauce.

Early in the 19th century, the movement to abolish the slave trade found a friend in maple sugar. In his 1824 *Compendium of Agriculture*, William Drown wrote, "The cane sugar is the result of the forced labor of the most wretched slaves, toiling under the cruel lash of a cutting whip. While the maple sugar is made by those who are happy and free."

Of course, tapping maples with tomahawks is hard on the trees. Nowadays, we use a brace and either a 3/8" or 7/16" bit. You only need drill the hole two to three inches in and at a downward pitch. Remember, a tappable maple ideally is larger than ten inches in diameter at breast height. Next, you need a spile or a tap. These can be purchased from a specialty supplier or fashioned from a sumac twig.

Buckets are the time-honored way of collecting sap although any container such as plastic bags or milk jugs can be used. If you are using a small container, you will need to check them often as a good tree will fill it quickly. How much sap do you need? A lot. You can figure 35 - 50 gallons of sap for one gallon of syrup or eight pounds of sugar. Most trees will produce ten to twelve gallons of sap during the season.

One of the reasons genuine maple syrup is so expensive is that it takes a great deal of energy to boil the sap down to the consistency of syrup. Sap averages 1-3% sugar while syrup is 65% sugar. It takes about five hours to boil down five gallons of sap. As you can



## STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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imagine, the process produces a great deal of steam. If you try it indoors, be warned-- keep your windows open or an exhaust fan going. If you don't, kiss your wallpaper goodbye!

In regards to the Stillman Nature Center and syrup, I've got good news and bad news. First, the bad news. Whoever owned this property back in 1860, did not follow the advice of the Superintendent of the 1860 U.S. Census given at the top of this story. So, this "future generation" is not benefiting.

This brings us to the good news. Thanks to The Garden Club of Barrington, generations in our future will benefit. As you may know, **The Garden Club** sponsors the "nature lady" program that has been running in the Barrington schools since I was a student at the old Hough Street School. In other words, a long time!

To honor **Susan Hargreaves**, the former head of the nature ladies and a Stillman Board Member, The Garden Club arranged to have two Sugar Maples donated to Stillman. They are planted along our new accessibility trail which will be officially opened on May 7 (see page 3).

As these maples are only a couple of inches in diameter, it will be quite a while before we can tap them. In the meantime, I suggest you visit the Ryerson Conservation Area in Deerfield. Every weekend in March, they'll be tapping trees and boiling sap. If you decide to visit, don't forget to call 948-7750 to check their schedule.

Since I'll be retired (or worse) before Stillman's maples can be tapped for syrup, I'm going to drown my sorrows with another fine North American product, Tennessee whiskey. After all, sugar maple charcoal is used to mellow Jack Daniels.

## SUMMER HOURS BEGIN IN APRIL

In March, Stillman will be open to drop-in visitors on Sundays from 11 AM to 4 PM. Starting in April, Stillman will be open Sundays from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is available, by reservation, during the week to school classes, Audubon chapters, garden clubs, and other organized groups. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call 428-OWLS or email us and we'll be happy to send you one.

## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses). Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending. *Please, no scout groups.*

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, remember to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

## BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD HOUSE

Many birds, including wrens, swallows and bluebirds, like to nest in tree cavities. You can increase the chances of attracting such birds by placing nest boxes in your yard. Join Jim Kaltsas and Roy Schodtler as they help you assemble your own nest box. Feel free to drop in between the times listed and *please bring your own hammer.*



Date: Sunday, March 19  
Time: 1:00 - 3:30  
Member's Fee: \$3.00/house kit  
Non-member's Fee: \$5.00/house kit

## BIRD BANDING

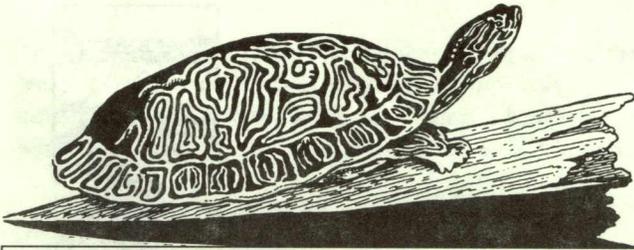
Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, April 2 & May 7  
Time: 9:00AM to Noon  
Fee: None

## MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Sundays, April 16 & May 21  
Time: 8:00AM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up



### PROJECT WET EDUCATORS' WORKSHOP

This workshop, hosted by the Stillman Nature Center, is aimed at educators who want to learn about wetlands. Those who attend will learn what wetlands are, why they are valuable, and what is being done to conserve Chicagoland's remaining wetlands.

Workshop participants will each receive a copy of *Project WET*, a curriculum guide for educators that describes a variety of activities appropriate for K-12 grade students as well as adult audiences. Other wetland informational materials will also be available.

The instructors will be Cyndi Duda, Environmental Education Specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Stillman's own Mark Spreyer. The schedule includes getting into, literally, the wetlands. So please bring (or wear) rubber boots or old shoes, and long pants.

**Reservations are a must.** To sign up, call Mark at (847) 428-OWLS.

Date: Friday, April 28  
Time: 8:30AM to 2:30PM  
Member's Fee: \$12.00  
Non-member's Fee: \$15.00 payable to  
Stillman Nature Center.

## WILDFLOWER WALK

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, may-apple, Virginia bluebell and jack-in-the-pulpit. Bring your camera!



Dates: Sunday, April 30  
Time: 2:00PM  
Age: 10 years and up  
Fee: None

### ACCESSIBILITY TRAIL: OPENING DAY!

For over three years, we've been putting many of your donations towards the construction of our Accessibility Trail. For new members, this is a trail designed to be accessible to all visitors whether they walk, roll in a wheelchair, or are guided by a caregiver.

We're please to announce that the trail's primary loop has been completed and we want to invite all of you to see it for yourself. With this in mind, we've moved our annual outdoor meeting to May so you can enjoy the spring wildflowers and migrating birds as you hike our trail.

Also joining the celebration will be members of **The Garden Club of Barrington**. As described in the cover story, The Garden Club donated two sugar maples to honor **Susan Hargreaves**, the former head of their "nature lady" program. These trees, planted along the trail, will be dedicated as part of our Opening Day festivities.

ALL of Stillman's members, volunteers and their families are invited. We'll provide snacks and beverages.

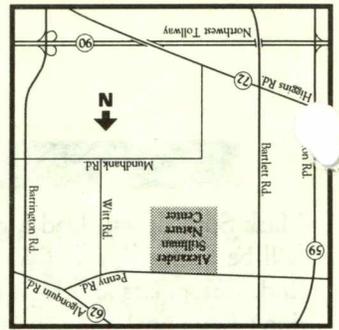
Don't forget to mark May 7th on your calendars. If possible, let us know if you're coming so we have an idea how many people to expect. Just call (847) 428-OWLS and leave a message.

Date: Sunday, May 7  
Time: 2:00PM

### CALLING VOLUNTEERS

Daria Sapp and her indefatigable landscape volunteers *need help*. Duties include buckthorn clearing, prairie burning and wildflower planting.

Stillman has the tools. We need healthy, outdoor-loving bodies to wield them. Thursday mornings are our usual work times. We start at 9:00 AM and wrap up around noon. Questions? Call Daria at 381-5358.



Email: stillinc@flash.net  
 (847) 428-OWLS  
 South Barrington, IL 60010  
 33 West Penny Road

**STILLMAN**  
 nature center



Join us on May 7th for our Accessibility Trails Opening Day.  
 Details on Page 3.

**ALEXANDER STILLMAN NATURE CENTER  
 BOARD MEMBERS**

Susan Allman, President • Jim Kaltsas, Vice President • John Albanese, Treasurer  
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**BOARD MEMBER EMERITUS:**  
 Frank Spreyer

Mark Spreyer, Director & Newsletter Editor  
 Jill Kohler, Newsletter Illustrator

*If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.*

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from \_\_\_\_\_ to the name and address listed below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Student .....	\$10.00
Member .....	25.00
Supporting Member .....	50.00
Contributing Member .....	100.00
Sustaining Member .....	500.00
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Please mail with your check to:

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