

## Frozen Foods: Making the Leap from Harvest to Heritage

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In the wake of UNESCO's (United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) decision to grant cuisine the "official heritage nod" in November 2010, it has become increasingly important that conservation practitioners and scholars begin to examine why and how culinary traditions should be safeguarded.<sup>1</sup> The following paper will draw on my current Masters research to attend such questions, exploring, in particular, the unique challenges faced by the burgeoning field of culinary heritage conservation due to the essential ephemerality of its subject. As will be discussed, this pivotal factor not only complicates the designation process, but also forces us to consider whether that process is able to achieve anything more than the recording of dead or doomed practices for posterity – a bittersweet success, at best.

### **"THE OLDER THE TREE, THE SWEETER THE SAP": CULINARY HERITAGE AND MAPLE PRODUCTS**

When in 2010 UNESCO inscribed its first three culinary traditions – the French gastronomic meal, traditional Mexican cuisine, and the Mediterranean diet, respectively – onto the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Laudan, "Is 'Culinary Heritage' a Good Idea?" *Zester Daily: The Culture of Food and Drink*, November 1, 2010, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.zesterdaily.com/zester-soapbox-articles/691-unesco-culinary-heritage>; Harriet Deacon, "Food nominations to the Intangible Heritage Convention's Lists," *The Archival Platform*, April 18, 2011, [http://www.archivalplatform.org/blog/entry/identity\\_heritage\\_part/](http://www.archivalplatform.org/blog/entry/identity_heritage_part/).

event was nothing short of a watershed.<sup>2</sup> Observers at the time proclaimed it a "significant shift in international recognition of [food] as heritage," and the numerous culinary nominations now under review by UNESCO bear witness to their apt foresight.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite the sudden leap forward, culinary heritage remains an area of conservation very much in its infancy: a firm grasp of its best practices eludes us due to sheer lack of precedent and a dearth of focused scholarship.<sup>4</sup> It is within that void that my research seeks to take a place, gathering ideas from food studies and intangible cultural heritage literature – a category into which UNESCO, at least, has clearly placed culinary traditions – to guide a case study of maple products in Canada. That case study, in turn, allows for a

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, "The gastronomic meal of the French," *UNESCO Culture Sector-Intangible Heritage-2003 Convention*, accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00400>; UNESCO, "Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture," *UNESCO Culture Sector-Intangible Heritage-2003 Convention*, accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00400>; UNESCO, "The Mediterranean diet," *UNESCO Culture Sector-Intangible Heritage-2003 Convention*, accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00394>.

<sup>3</sup> Deacon, "Food nominations to the Intangible Heritage Convention's Lists." See UNESCO, "Criteria and timetable of inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00173#TOC1>.

<sup>4</sup> Deacon, "Food nominations"; Laudan, "What is culinary heritage?" *A Historian's Take on Food and Food Politics*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.rachellaudan.com/2010/05/what-is-culinary-heritage.html>.

fuller understanding of how the emergent insights manifest in the unique and specific context of food.

It is worth noting that, in recognition of their deep roots in Canada's economy, history, and culture, maple products are, as of 2007, a designated National Historic Event (NHE).<sup>5</sup> While maple trees may be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere in upwards of 100 distinct species, only four steadfastly North American varieties provide the "unusually sweet, fine-quality sap" used in the maple products industry: the sugar maple tree, which is far and above the primary sap source, as well as the black, red, and silver maple trees.<sup>6</sup> Although there have been attempts to establish these species elsewhere, it is only in North America that they flourish and that the requisite climatic conditions for the trees' sap-flow mechanism are

consistently met.<sup>7</sup> The optimal environment coalesces with the natural ranges of the four maple types in an area of North America's Northeastern Woodlands called the 'Maple Belt'.<sup>8</sup> Running through southern Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and reaching into the American Midwest and New England, it is in this region that the vast majority of maple sugar and syrup production takes place, and nearly the entirety of today's global maple products supply originates.<sup>9</sup>

To those Canadians living in the Maple Belt, the annual maple sap run and its attendant collection and processing activities - often holistically denoted as 'sugaring' - have represented a "special rite of spring" for more than 300 years.<sup>10</sup> The maple harvest is also historically significant as one of Canada's oldest industries: the first commercial sugaring operation can be placed as early as 1705, though the First Nations developed a strong

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<sup>5</sup> Parks Canada, "Maple Products National Historic Event," *Directory of Federal Heritage Designations*, last modified May 15, 2011,

[http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page\\_nhs\\_eng.aspx?id=12097](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=12097).

<sup>6</sup> Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking – The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), 383; James M. Lawrence and Rux Martin, *Sweet Maple: Life, Lore, and Recipes from the Sugarbush* (Vermont: Chapters Publishing Ltd. and *Vermont Life Magazine*, 1993), 16, 18-9; Beatrice Ross Buszek, *The Sugar Bush Connection* (Nova Scotia: Beatrice Ross Buszek, 1982), xiv; "Canadian Maple Products – Situation and Trends 2006-2007," *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*, last modified March 23, 2012, <http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/industry-markets-and-trade/statistics-and-market-information/by-product-sector/horticulture/horticulture-canadian-industry/sector-reports/canadian-maple-products-situation-and-trends-2006-2007/?id=1193169758779#s5>; Tim Herd, *Maple Sugar, From Sap to Syrup: The History, Lore and How-To Behind this Sweet Treat* (North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2010), 16, 18, 44, 46-8; Rose Murray, *A Taste of Canada: A Culinary Journey* (Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 2008), 186; Dorothy Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting: Canada's Heritage Food* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2003), 12. Note that in the interest of clarity and expediency, I will refer to 'maples' (or maple trees) in the broadest sense from henceforth.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 18; Buszek, *The Sugar Bush Connection*, xiv; Victoria Dickenson, "Curiosity into Edibility: the Taste of New France," in *What's to Eat? Entrees in Canadian Food History*, ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 27; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 16; "Canadian Maple Products – Situation and Trends 2006-2007." Very little is understood about the maples' annual spring run, but it is well known that the sap-flow mechanism relies on a particular set of climatic conditions to function optimally: a sunny summer; a fall with a late frost; a cold winter with lingering snow cover; and frosty nights and warm, sunny days in early spring.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Eagleson and Rosemary Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book* (Richmond Hill and Buffalo: Boston Mills Press, 2006), 185; Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 13; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 13; "Canadian Maple Products – Situation and Trends 2006-2007"; Leo H. Werner, "Maple Sugar Industry," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last accessed August 15, 2013, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/maple-sugar-industry>. Very small volumes of syrup production also occur on Prince Edward Island.

<sup>10</sup> Murray, *A Taste of Canada*, 185; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 384.

sugarmaking tradition many centuries prior to that date.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Aboriginal instruction was vital as European fur traders, sojourners, and ill-prepared settlers began to arrive on the continent and sought to engage in the maple harvest themselves.<sup>12</sup> Reciprocally, European participation had a massive impact upon the longstanding tradition.<sup>13</sup> Ensuing decades saw sugaring's culture and methodologies swept up in a tide of change that has never entirely abated, and this fact – in combination with the recentness of the aforementioned NHE designation – renders maple products a fascinating and timely topic for both an exploration of culinary heritage conservation writ large, and the present paper's concentration on the field's tense relationship with food's ephemerality.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 11; Claudia Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings, the History of Maple Syrup in Lanark County* (Burnstown, ON: The General Store Publishing House, 1996), 1, 3; Murray, *A Taste of Canada*, 185; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 18; Dorothy Duncan, *Canadians at Table: A Culinary History of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), 18-9; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 9, 53-4; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 380. Duncan credits the first commercial sugaring operation to a woman named Madame de Repentigny from Montréal Island, opened in 1705.

<sup>12</sup> Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, 60; Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 12; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 28; Julian Armstrong, "Food Traditions of the French Canadians," in *Consuming Passions: papers presented at the 101<sup>st</sup> annual conference of the Ontario Historical Society*, ed. Meribeth Clow et al. (Willowdale, ON: Ontario Historical Society, 1990), 115; Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 15, 19-20; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 60-63; Stewart, *Anita Stewart's Canada*, 10; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 2-3, 6; Margery Fee, "Stories of Traditional Aboriginal Food, Territory, and Health," in *What's to Eat? Entrees in Canadian Food History*, ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 26; Armstrong, "Food Traditions," 115.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 3, 9-10; Murray, *A Taste of Canada*, 185; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 26, 28.

## THE ESSENTIAL EPHEMERALITY OF FOODWAYS: A ROADBLOCK TO CONSERVATION

Those in food studies often speak of "foodways," which figures food as "a network of activities and systems – physical, social...cultural, economic, spiritual, and aesthetic,"<sup>15</sup> and it is only when these foodways are ongoing that true "cuisines" emerge.<sup>16</sup> As Mintz writes, "[Cuisine] means people using ingredients, methods, and recipes on a regular basis...eating the same diet more or less consistently."<sup>17</sup> Somewhat counter-intuitively, however, foodways and cuisines are also "markedly ephemeral," a quality upon which the drive to safeguard traditions will likely stumble.<sup>18</sup> There are three overarching manners in which the transient and fleeting nature of food manifests: (1) its production and preparation methods; (2) its ingredients, or, more generally, the physical objects eaten; and (3) its consumers, referring to both who they are and their ability to experience taste.<sup>19</sup> Each

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<sup>15</sup> Lucy M. Long, "Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness," in *Culinary Tourism*, ed. Lucy M. Long (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 96, 104; See also, for example, Peter Scholliers, "Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present," in *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Warde, *Consumption, Food & Taste* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 180.

<sup>19</sup> As discussed in Paul Freedman, "Introduction: A New History of Cuisine," in *Food: The History of Taste*, ed. Paul Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 9; Jeffery M. Pilcher, "Cultural Histories of Food," in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffery M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47; Andrew P. Haley, "The Nation before Taste: The Challenges of American Culinary History," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 46; Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, trans. Albert

raises a number of challenges to the technical feasibility of culinary heritage conservation, as I will now deconstruct.

## **HUMAN MOBILITY AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF CLAIMS TO CULINARY OWNERSHIP**

To start with the ephemerality of *who* consumers are, it is important to first acknowledge that a sense of ownership over a culinary tradition is key to understanding it as ‘culinary heritage.’ According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage is defined as “...the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – [and] the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – *that communities [and] groups...recognize as part of their cultural heritage,*” and likewise a cuisine “require[s] a population...believe[s], and *care[s]* that they believe, that they know what it consists of, how it is made, and how it should taste.”<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, the language in the latter quotation is quite telling, for it *is* very much by way of belief, or maybe even faith, that groups find security in their claims to certain foodways. As a natural outcome of human mobility, “...new foods [are constantly] re-embedded – in local life, in new lands, in new cultures,” and thus thinking of a culinary tradition as representing a particular place or people is a rather troubled proposition.<sup>21</sup> The ‘Columbian

Exchange’, the transfer of diseases, plants, and animals sparked by Europeans’ discovery of the Americas, provides a classic example of this.<sup>22</sup> Foodstuffs like wheat, olive trees, and cattle were brought to the New World, while the diets of the Old were transformed by novelties such as tomatoes, which subsequently “assumed important [if not defining] positions in cuisines from Italy to India.”<sup>23</sup> It can therefore begin to be seen how the ephemerality of food’s consumers can create substantial difficulties not just in accurately recording a foodways or cuisine’s origins for the purposes of documentation and designation – which is, of course, an issue – but also in achieving consensus about whether one collective or another might legitimately claim an expression of culinary heritage as ‘theirs’.

Turning to the case study, the mere fact of the maple products’ NHE designation indicates their perceived fundamentality in Canadian culture. There are however myriad other ways, in which Canadians express ownership over this foodways, ranging from straight-faced to silly: on the one hand sugaring has its own ‘Heritage Minute’; on the

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Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” Article 2, 17 October 2003, <http://unesco.org> (emphasis added); Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 96. A similar concept is expressed in Scholliers, “Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging,” 7 and Alison K. Smith, “National Cuisines,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffery M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 444.

<sup>21</sup> Mintz, “Eating Communities: The Mixed Appeals of Sodality,” in *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*,

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American Studies Vol. 106, ed. Tobias Doring, et al, (Heidelberg, 2003), 21-22. See also David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 18, 169; Smith, “National Cuisines,” 447; Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, “Conclusion: Today and Tomorrow,” in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to Present*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld under the direction of Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 552; Long, “Culinary Tourism”, 402; Donna R. Gabaccia, “Food, Mobility, and World History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffery M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 308; Smith, “National Cuisines,” 449.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Earle, “The Columbian Exchange,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffery M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 341; Flandrin and Montanari, “Conclusion: Today and Tomorrow,” 553.

<sup>23</sup> Earle, “The Columbian Exchange,” 344, 349-350.

other, when Jason Segel announced he would be making a movie about the 2010 Quebec syrup heist, Canadians bemoaned that the opportunity had slipped through their more rightful fingers, though, as *Maclean's* magazine noted, "...because we're Canadian and we love it when anyone from Hollywood sits up and takes notice of us, we'll be good pseudo-patriots and trudge out to see the film regardless."<sup>24</sup> This claim to sugaring might seem uncomplicated at first blush, for as stated the Maple Belt is the only region in the world where the four industry tree species flourish and one can find a centuries-spanning history of sugarmaking. Moreover, while the practice certainly traverses the United States-Canadian border, on average Canada contributes approximately 85% to the maple industry's total production, and the US only 15%.<sup>25</sup> Yet despite these realities, sugaring has not been immune to the impacts of human migration - and these have, in the past, caused much debate over the rightful claim to the tradition's invention. Scholars typically identify the First Nations of the Northeastern Woodlands as the first sugarmakers given the "astonishing universality" of origin myths, archaeological findings, studies of regional linguistics, and post-European archival resources. However in the 1980s and 1990s a small group of researchers emerged who pointed to the lack of pre-European documentation and asserted that the first sugarmakers were in fact French explorers and

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<sup>24</sup> Historica Canada, "Syrup – A Part of Our Heritage," *Syrup - Historica Canada*, last accessed August 15, 2013, <https://www.historica-dominion.ca/content/heritage-minutes/syrup>; Barry Hertz, "How did a maple syrup heist movie slip through our fingers?: Canada's film industry has been scooped by Hollywood," *Maclean's*, September 25, 2013, <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/how-did-a-maple-syrup-heist-movie-slip-from-our-fingers>.

<sup>25</sup> Stewart, *Anita Stewart's Canada*, 11; "Canadian Maple Products – Situation and Trends 2006-2007"; Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 185.

missionaries.<sup>26</sup> While these claims are mostly dismissed by maple community as "wrongheaded and flimsy," as maple historians Lawrence and Martin write, "the doubts...cast over the origins of sugarmaking [are] pervasive... [and to First Nations] the assertion is patently hurtful and borders on racial arrogance."<sup>27</sup> Thus, in concluding this section, suffice to say that while the official federal plaques commemorating maple products read they were "known and valued by Aboriginal peoples long before the arrival of European settlers," a legacy of substantial and meaningful conflict underlies that not-so-innocuous statement.<sup>28</sup>

## **CHANGING PRODUCTION METHODS, PREPARATION PROCESSES & INGREDIENTS**

Foodways are also fleeting in relation to their production methods and physical ingredients. To first expand on the former, examples from the case study proliferate. Today, for instance, maple sap is usually collected using vacuum or gravity pumps and vast networks of plastic pipelines, although for centuries it was gathered by chopping deep diagonal axe-cuts into maple tree trunks and inserting a piece of reed or bark to tap the resultant

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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 9, 53-61; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 380; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 1; J.F. Pendergast, *The Origin of Maple Sugar*, Syllogeus 36 (National Museums of Canada: Ottawa, 1982), 37; J.F. Pendergast, "The Sugarbush Site: A Possible Iroquoian Maple Sugar Camp," *Ontario Archaeology* 23 (1974): 31-61; C. I. Mason, "Prehistoric maple sugaring sites?" *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 10 (1985): 149-151; C.I. Mason, "Maple sugaring: a sticky subject," *North American Archaeologist* 7 (1986): 305-311; C. I. Mason, "Maple Sugaring Again; or the Dog that Did Nothing in the Night," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 11 (1987): 99-107.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Parks Canada, "Maple Products."

flow.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, though the technique of distilling sap via heat survives from sugaring's earliest days, the precise means of doing so has evolved considerably: from boiling sap using fire-warmed stones placed directly into the liquid, to suspending it in metal kettles above sugarmaker's flames, to running it through modern evaporators.<sup>30</sup>

By the same token, maple products and their associated uses have been hugely altered by the passage of time, as well. For instance, today's evaporators produce much lighter and milder tasting syrup in comparison to the flavouring achieved with kettles, and syrup now dominates production and consumption whereas for the majority of the maple harvest's history hard sugar was the more popular item.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, when European settlers became involved in sugaring, they put their yields to recreating recipes from home, thereby expanding the repertoire of traditional maple dishes to include foods like lemon tarts, tea, and chocolate.<sup>32</sup> To give another example, treats now deeply associated with the height of sugaring-off festivities, such as sugar

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<sup>29</sup> Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 47-8; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 1, 81; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 89; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 16, 82; Stewart, *Anita Stewart's Canada*, 10; Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, 16; Murray, *A Taste of Canada*, 185; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 381.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 68-9, 97. See also Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 15, 20, 23, 53; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 33; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 1, 3, 6, 12, 42, 83; Armstrong, "Food Traditions," 115; Murray, *A Taste of Canada*, 185; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 381-2; Stewart, *Anita Stewart's Canada*, 10; Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, 16; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 17-8, 20-3; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 1, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 16, 46-7; Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 20; Herd, *Maple Sugar*, 32; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 65, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, 60; Bernard Audet, *Se nourrir au quotidien en Nouvelle France* (Sante-Foy, QC: Les Editions GID, 2001), 231; Catharine Parr Traill, *Canadian Settler's Guide* (Toronto: Toronto Times, 1857), 142.

pie and *le tire* (translation: maple taffy) only gained their quintessential place in the Maple Belt imaginary after sugar shacks began to be built in the late 19th century, and subsequently became the major sites where families, friends and communities would gather to celebrate the arrival of the maple season.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, and on a direr note, it must also be mentioned that sometimes ingredients and foods are not just altered by time, but may disappear entirely, and that this is a very real threat to the maple industry as the impacts of climate change begin to be felt.<sup>34</sup> As indicated, the maple tree's sap-flow mechanism is wholly reliant upon the right confluence of environmental conditions. As a result, maple producers have already started to witness earlier tapping dates, shorter sugaring seasons, and

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<sup>33</sup> Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, 60; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 66; Buszek, *The Sugar Bush Connection*, xvi; Stewart, *Anita Stewart's Canada*, 10-11; Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 7, 30, 67; Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 14. Buszek (*The Sugar Bush Connection*, xv) expands on the meaning of the word "sugar-off", describing how "originally it referred to the conversion of sap to syrup but this colloquialism soon took on other meanings – the period when the sap is running (sugaring-off days), the Sucrerie as a designated place (the Sugar-off); a time of merriment that could take a variety of forms (Sugaring-off party or a Sugar-off)."

<sup>34</sup> Haley, "The Nation before Taste," 56; Brenda Murphy, Annette Chretien and Laura Brown, "Maple Syrup Production and Climate Change," *Ontario Maple Mainline* (Spring 2009), 6, accessed [www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp\\_id=12610&filter\\_category=1](http://www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp_id=12610&filter_category=1); Katie Edmonds, "Maple Syrup has economic and cultural impacts: WLU study looks to measure the importance of the industry and what's at stake in climate change," *The Observer*, Oct. 2, 2010, 17-8, accessed [www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp\\_id=12610&filter\\_category=1](http://www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp_id=12610&filter_category=1); Daniel Lamhonwah, "A GIS-Based Approach to Projecting the Response of Sugar Maples to Climate Change in Ontario, Canada" (Masters Research Poster, Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Guelph, March 2011), accessed [www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp\\_id=12610&filter\\_category=1](http://www.wlu.ca/docsnpubs.php?grp_id=12610&filter_category=1).

drops in the quality and quantity of sap yields.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, these are likely just hints of what is to come, for it is projected that less than 100 years from now, rising global temperatures, drought-like conditions, and increased disturbance events will see the sensitive tree species at risk of serious decline.<sup>36</sup>

In light of such evident and extensive transience, those who wish to safeguard culinary heritage are clearly faced with a number of dilemmas: how can a culinary tradition having undergone decades, perhaps even centuries, of change, ever be properly, precisely, and thoroughly documented? If we must choose, which version or versions ought to be safeguarded, and why? And what can conservation efforts really hope to achieve, especially given that we can neither stop the clock nor rewind it? We cannot call a halt to climate change, and we cannot turn back time to when everyone boiled sap via stones. Furthermore, we must consider that, ethically, earlier iterations of some culinary traditions simply *shouldn't* be recovered: "people change their diets for good reasons," explains historian Rachel Laudan, and there are certain practices we should "record and remember their labor, not preserve."<sup>37</sup>

## GUSTATORY EXPERIENCE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF AESTHETICS

The consumer's ability to experience taste, or "gustatory experience," is the last of the manners of food's ephemerality to be here discussed. There are two aspects to this, the first of which Montanari observes by stating, "[O]ne can study and

reconstruct the gastronomic culture of past centuries with some credibility...[but] consumers'...sensorial training is very different."<sup>38</sup> By tracing the history of sugar, for instance, it becomes clear that many societies are now accustomed to much sweeter foods than they were a couple hundred years ago.<sup>39</sup> For example, in Vermont, changes are presently being introduced to the maple syrup grading system to bring it into alignment with the consumer's newfound partiality for a strong maple flavor. For many centuries, the overall preference was for syrup that could easily masquerade as much more expensive cane sugar.<sup>40</sup> Beyond the physical palate, though, taste is "socially and temporally constructed" and this equally affects the experience of food. As Haley poignantly elucidates:

Even if we could make [it] exactly as our great, great, great grandmother [did]...[merely] recreating the recipe is not the same as understanding how that pie was consumed and what it meant to those who dined a hundred years ago...but the meaning attached to the pie...[was] constructed by a whole set of life experiences and social contexts. It [was] a product of xenophobia and sentimentality, science and economics, and structures of feeling. A pie is never just a pie.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, Chretien, and Brown, "Maple Syrup Production and Climate Change," 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6-7; Lamhonwah, "A GIS-Based Approach."

<sup>37</sup> Laudan, "Is 'Culinary Heritage' a Good Idea?"

<sup>38</sup> Montanari, *Food is Culture*, 67-68.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, "National Cuisines," 447; Mintz, "Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom," 19; Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc.), 195.

<sup>40</sup> Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting*, 14; McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 382; Eagleson and Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, 15; Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 64; Khalil Akhtar, "Maple syrup producers seek better grade of labeling," *CBC News*, Feb. 5, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/m/news/#!/content/1.2521582>.

<sup>41</sup> Haley, "The Nation Before Taste," 55-6.

The implication here is that our ideas about food, and the contexts in which it is eaten, can shape our sensory experience of it; a concept developed more fully by Korsmeyer and Heldke's work in the philosophy of aesthetics.

In *Making Sense of Taste* (1999) Korsmeyer argues for the aesthetic significance of gustatory experiences, traditionally ignored because of their association with "lower" order animal drives, by emphasizing the cognitive qualities of taste, thereby finding foods and their consumption to be invested with meanings "considerably beyond either the pleasures [they] afford or the nutritional sustenance [they provide]." <sup>42</sup> Her argument is founded Goodman's *Languages of Art* (1968), which sets out five key cognitive operations, or symbolic functions, of aesthetic objects. <sup>43</sup> Korsmeyer identifies and adapts three in particular which she believes "fit food quite well": representation, exemplification, and expression. <sup>44</sup> *Representation* is best explained as occurring when 'something denotes something else,' such as the leaf-shaped maple candies that pervade Canadian gift shops. <sup>45</sup> Next, *exemplification* refers to something that possesses a certain property, and in so doing

becomes a reference for that property; apples, for instance, are typically red and therefore may be used to exemplify red; or oatmeal, in North America is "breakfasty" because of its place in what Korsmeyer calls the "rhythm of nourishment." <sup>46</sup> Foods may *express* properties they do not literally possess, too; the aforementioned apples possessing a "sinister" quality for those familiar with the tale of Snow White. <sup>47</sup> Korsmeyer claims that, ultimately, "the pleasure [foods] deliver is often an enhancement or even a component of [these] cognitive significances." <sup>48</sup>

In "The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating," Heldke builds on Korsmeyer's approach to expand the scope of food's cognitive functions and more explicitly highlight how they affect "the literal savor of the food in our mouths." <sup>49</sup> With respect to the first task, Heldke adds that the way we understand the aesthetic value and sensory experience of food can also depend on ethical considerations, such as the working conditions of the people who prepared the food, and the environmental impact of growing it, seasonality and "agricultural rhythms", and the unique geographies certain foods occupy. <sup>50</sup> She then relates how these elements of aesthetic significance, and those initially acknowledged by Korsmeyer, affect gustatory experiences as we "attend to the layers of exemplification, expression [and] representation in which they are embedded." <sup>51</sup> Caviar, Heldke explains, "quite literally taste[s] wrong" if eaten for breakfast, the freshness of June strawberries incites

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<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste, Food & Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1-4, 6-7, 104; Lisa Heldke, "The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating: Or, Why Did This Meal Suddenly Become Less Delicious When I Found Out My Server Has No Health Insurance, the Cook Worked Ninety Hours Last Week, and the Recipes were Published in a Cookbook Whose Author Collected Them from the Women of South India, Whom She Fails to Credit, Even in her Acknowledgments?" in *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink, and Connoisseur Culture*, ed. Jeremy Strong (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 127.

<sup>43</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 115-7; Heldke, "The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating," 130.

<sup>44</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 115-136, 155.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-16, 118-19; Heldke, "The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating," 149.

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<sup>46</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 116-19, 128, 132; Heldke, "The Extensive Pleasures of Eating," 149.

<sup>47</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 116, 132.

<sup>48</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Heldke, "The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating," 149.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 129, 135, 148-9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.



more pleasure than the strawberries we can find in stores in January, and “biting through buttery, papery layers of a well-made croissant [can be] altered somewhat bitterly by learning...[the] delicacy is seen by some as a kind of war memorial.”<sup>52</sup>

The maple products case study reveals how the cognitive layers of food present complications for the precarious and somewhat nebulous goal of culinary heritage conservation. Turn-of-the-century lamentations about sugarmaking’s transition indoors to the sugar shack hinged, in part, on the idea that syrup and sugar was enhanced by rusticity and wildness of working “under the broad canopy of heaven.”<sup>53</sup> Along the same vein, the pleasure we today take in maple products might be diminished if we become aware of sugaring’s very industrial nature – that despite what sugar shack tourism and the nostalgic packaging of syrup containers would suggest, it is now by and large the realm of plastic pipelines and power drills rather than tin pails and horse drawn sleighs.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the ability to walk into a grocery store at any time of the year and purchase syrup might reduce the richness of our gustatory experience from what it might once have been when, after a long winter of non-perishable staples like potatoes and salt pork, the taste of fresh maple syrup - spring’s first crop – would have been

nothing short of nirvana.<sup>55</sup> Hence, though conservation practitioners may record and attempt to safeguard various culinary traditions, they can do little to recapture or cease the changes passing centuries have wrought and will continue to exact on consumers’ taste experiences. Perhaps most ironically, the decision to protect certain traditions above others might even cause further change to sensory responses by adding an extra layer of prestige to the foodways’ cognitive meanings.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The ephemeral nature of food represents a significant challenge to the up-and-coming field of culinary heritage conservation. The fleetingness and mutability of the production processes, ingredients, and consumers, of culinary traditions, not only creates difficulties in the technical task of documenting them for conservation purposes, but also raises significant doubts as to whether the resultant designations accomplish much beyond recording practices for posterity. The primary challenge derives from the ephemeral nature of culinary traditions. Some changes simply cannot or should not be averted or reversed, whether because food practices have evolved, key ingredients have become extinct, or the ways in which we taste and experience the cuisine in question have been transformed. All of this suggests that, as our understanding of what may be defined as heritage broadens, so too might the gap between heritage and our ability to achieve active and effective

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 132, 148-9. Croissants are said to represent the metaphorical consumption of defeated Ottoman forces, the Turkish flag being a crescent moon, in the 1683 siege of Vienna.

<sup>53</sup> Rowland Robinson in *The Atlantic* (1896) quoted in Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 70; Smith, *When the Sugar Bird Sings*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> Heldke, “The (Extensive) Pleasures of Eating,” 145, 150-1; Kate Pickert, “Maple Syrup,” *Time*, April 16, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1891523,00.html>; C. Clare Hinrichs, “Off the Treadmill? Technology and Tourism in the North American Maple Syrup Industry,” *Agriculture and Human Values* (Winter 1995): 39-47.

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<sup>55</sup> Lawrence and Martin, *Sweet Maple*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Haley, “The Nation before Taste,” 58; Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, “Intangible Heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation,” in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 105-108; Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

*Mind the Gap: Crossing Borders in Heritage and Conservation*  
Carleton University Heritage Conservation Symposium 2014  
Ottawa, March 22 2014

conservation – a gap we must be careful to mind in  
the future.