



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
March—April 2019 • Vol. 23 No. 2



## A Sweet Legacy



In March and early April as you drive around the hill towns near Thacher Park, you're likely to see buckets tied to maple trees collecting sap to make maple syrup. Nancy Engel and the staff at Thacher Nature Center are also planning to tap some trees this year.

If you go to a maple bush you will see tygon tubing running from tree to tree to gather the sap more efficiently. Thinking about our plastic and metal-based ways of collecting maple sap and boiling it down made me wonder how Native Americans did it. Writings by early explorers make it clear that the Native Americans were making maple sugar long before Europeans arrived on this continent. Across the millennia, they must have developed techniques using only natural materials.

A friend told me that hot rocks were taken from a fire and put into wooden troughs filled with sap in order to boil the liquid. That didn't make sense. A nature center writer I found on the web concurred – he tried it and ended up with an ashy, acrid mess! Adirondack Native writer Robin Wall Kimmerer<sup>(1)</sup> had the answer. She says that Native Americans used a two-step process. First the sap was put into long troughs. Every night the sap would freeze. Each morning the Indians would remove the ice, concentrating the sugar remaining in the liquid. When it was time to boil down, it took less time to get to the syrup/sugar stage. They put the near-syrup in bark or

wood containers on top of flat rocks resting over the fire where it boiled to the crystalizing stage. Iron pots however were quickly adopted, once French traders introduced them.



*Native American maple-sugaring in the 1930's. Photo shows tipi, birch containers to catch sap, and the process of sap boiling.*

Temporary lodges housed one or two families close to the sugar bush that they worked<sup>(2)</sup>. The frames were left from year to year and re-roofed and sided with bark just before the sugaring season began. Women came on snowshoes to prepare the lodges which had sleeping shelves built along the sides, with furs for blankets. Fires were

built down the center of the lodge and were kept going day and night to keep boiling sugar for the entire season.

A second smaller permanent teepee was built nearby to keep all the equipment needed for making sugar and syrup. There were hundreds of birch bark containers of all sizes and extra bark for repairs; long wooden troughs, paddles for stirring the crystalizing liquid, and other paddles for shaping the sugar. There were coils of string made from basswood and cedar for sewing containers into shape. There was pitch and gum made from balsam for sealing the seams. At the end of the sugaring season, the women would scrub all these supplies in preparation for the following year. With care, birch bark containers could last for five to ten years.

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Before there was plastic, the Indians had birch bark. Containers were fashioned for every aspect of sugaring – from small ones to sit below each tap to large consolidating baskets to store up to 100 gallons of sap. Others stored the finished sugar. Birch bark prevents spoilage of anything stored in it. Indians were even able to put thick syrup in waterproof closed bark containers and bury them to keep them cool. Cared for this way, syrup could keep for up to a year <sup>(2)</sup>.

Native Americans had thousands of years to perfect these techniques. We are their beneficiaries. Come up to Thacher Nature Center at the Park to see how well the sugaring goes this year.

- by Sigrin Newell

(1) Robin Wall Kimmerer, (2015), *Braiding Sweet Grass*, Milkweed Editions

(2) Densmore, Francis (1974), *How Indians Use Wild Plants for Food, Medicine, and Crafts*. Dover

Photo from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maple\\_sugar\\_industry\\_-\\_NARA\\_-\\_285760.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maple_sugar_industry_-_NARA_-_285760.jpg)

## A Wall for the Friends....

The Friends of Thacher State Park, in our effort to enhance and promote our mission to support and advocate for the Park, successfully applied for a grant from Parks and Trails New York and the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. This funding (\$4,080 plus a 15% match by Friends), was used to purchase new brochures, banners and other promotional materials to highlight what we do and to attract new members and volunteers (top picture).

We are especially thankful to the Park for providing permanent wall space in Thacher Visitor Center which was filled with a new custom display, also funded through this grant (bottom right). We would not have been able to complete this work without the assistance of Park staff, who not only painted the wall beforehand, but also installed the image holders. We were able to locate a local vendor to manufacture and install custom lettering, including an acrylic color image of one of our favorite residents of the Park, the Yellow Spotted Salamander. Please stop in and visit our display located on the lower level by the fireplace.

- article and photos by Bert Schou



Check for updates at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)

### Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees

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As always, call 872-0800 or 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call any board member with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Sigrin Newell, Bert Schou, Brian Horl and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at [cgervasi@albany.edu](mailto:cgervasi@albany.edu)  
Christine Gervasi—Editor



# Friends of Thacher Park Member Form

Member benefits: Newsletter, Scheduled Events Calendar & 10% Discount at the Nature Center Gift Shop. Renewal date follows name on address label.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to become a member of the Friends of Thacher Park. Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

I am renewing my membership. Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

- Individual \$20       Supporter \$40       Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Family \$25       Corporate \$100       Senior (62) \$5
- Student \$5       Benefactor \$100

Please make checks payable to the **Friends of Thacher Park** and send to Bonnie Schaller, 6324 Hawes Rd, Altamont, NY 12009. For more info: [bschaller@nycap.rr.com](mailto:bschaller@nycap.rr.com)



**Hannaford Helps Reusable Bag Program!**  
Exciting news!

The **Hannaford Supermarket** located in **Voorheesville** has chosen **Friends of Thacher State Park** as a beneficiary of the Hannaford Helps Reusable Bag Program! For the entire **month of March**, every time a Community Bag is purchased at the Voorheesville Hannaford we receive \$1! This is truly a great opportunity for us, and an easy way for you to show your support for the Friends. Please go to the store, find the reusable bag rack and buy a few bags!



*For more information about the Hannaford Helps Reusable Bag Program, visit [hannaford.bags4mycause.com](http://hannaford.bags4mycause.com)*

**Save the Date!**

**Saturday, May 4, 2019**  
**9am - 1pm**

Please register online at [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org).



*16<sup>th</sup> Annual*

*Nature Art Exhibit*

*at Thacher Nature Center*

**March 9 through 27**  
**Tuesday through Sunday, 9am - 5pm**

Come and enjoy nature-inspired artwork in a variety of media from local artists!

*Opening Reception*

**Saturday, March 9, 1pm - 4pm**

Come to the reception, meet the artists and enjoy complimentary refreshments! *Check the program calendar for painting and drawing workshops!*

## Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2019

March 13 (at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center),  
May 8, July 10, September 11, and November 13 (Thacher Visitor Center).

**7:00 pm. Come join us!**

Friends of Thacher Park  
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center  
87 Nature Center Way  
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Next:

**Board Meeting**

**7:00 pm at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center**

## The Spring Equinox

The Spring Equinox falls between March 19<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup> when the Sun crosses the Celestial Equator traveling from South to North. It will occur on March 20<sup>th</sup> at 5:58 PM this year. The differences in the dates stem from what time the Sun crosses and the time zones. Due to these variances we will not see a March 21<sup>st</sup> Equinox in the mainland U.S. for the entire 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The next time we will see a March 21<sup>st</sup> Equinox will not be until the year 2101. And by “we” I certainly do not mean any of us reading this today. Not unless you find the fountain of youth.

The Spring Equinox marks the first day of Astronomical Spring. It is one of only two days a year when the Sun rises due East and Sets due West. While the Sun passes overhead the Earth’s tilt is zero relative to the Sun. The Earth never orbits the Sun upright but is always at a tilt of about 23.5 degrees. After the Equinox, the Northern Hemisphere is tilted towards the Sun bringing us warmer weather. It is said that during the Equinox you can stand an egg on its end. True or not it could be fun to try.

There are many sites around the world that were built by ancient peoples to track and celebrate the paths of celestial

bodies such as the Sun. Two of the more well known are Stonehenge in England built around 3000 B.C. and Chichen Itzu in Mexico built around 1000 A.D. All of these long before “modern astronomy”.



*Stonehenge at Spring Equinox  
By Stonehenge Stone Circle*

Many cultures celebrated this day as the start of the new year. Certain crops could begin to be planted, livestock was being born and nature as a whole was starting to be reborn. Some modern traditions got their start from these ancient celebrations. A prime example of this is Easter. The word Easter probably is derived from the word Eostre. It is the name of an Anglo-Saxon Goddess whose feast was celebrated at this time each spring. Eggs were colored to celebrate the rebirth of nature and the Easter Bunny probably stemmed from the wild hares in abundance in the spring for mating. These modern traditions and many others throughout the year stem from what are referred to today as Pagan rituals. So when you eat your chocolate bunny or decorate your Christmas tree quietly thank the Pagan religions that came before us.

—Thoughts from the porch, by Brian Horl

Photo from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stonehenge-stone-circle/16702738378/in/photostream/>

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)