

Syrup Making

Retired Old Timers Make Past Time A Little Sweeter

Several Clinton Mills Retired Old Timers Mac Cunningham, Plant No. 2; Brevard Patterson, and Lester Ivester, Bailey Plant, had been planning for months how they'd

be cooking homemade syrup this fall.

Patterson looks at the project as a real team project. In May he planted 1/3 acre sorghum cane and earlier this fall began the

tedious job of cutting and stripping each individual stalk.

Once the task was completed, he hauled the cane to the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Compton where the grinding and cooking began.

James Compton is a neighbor of Cunningham and neighbor of Lester Ivester.

Using a grinding and squeezing device that had been "speeded up" by Sam Compton, the three retired men began the squeezing process.

The individuals, taking time to feed the stalks of cane between the well guarded squeeze rollers, watched a steady flow of cane juice empty into 32 gallon cans.

In all, the men fed four trailer loads of cane into the "squeezer", yielding about 450 gallons of sweet sticky juice.

When 120 gallons of juice had been prepared, and emptied into a sectionalized copper pan, the trio stoked large blocks of wood into the cooker.

"I've been involved into this over a 50 year period," stated Cunningham. "You've got to boil and skim away the impurities and cook the juice until about 90% of it is evaporated, leaving a thick, smooth syrup."

Friends and neighbors gathered to watch the process. According to Patterson, "Very few people get many opportunities to see syrup made. It's almost a lost art."

Each vat took about 7 hours to cook, thus providing the men an opportunity to sit around and relive many of their experiences during their long association with Clinton Mills.



Well Guarded—Brevard Patterson carefully feeds sugar cane into well guarded squeezing device.



Steady Flow—Mac Cunningham observes steady stream of cane juice flowing from the cane juice squeezing apparatus.



450 Gallons of Juice—Brevard Patterson, center, pours 5 gallons of cane juice into cooking vessel as Cunningham, left, and Carol Compton holds strainer.



Skimming Important—Brevard Patterson skims impurities off top of cane juice as its being cooked.