



International Maple Syrup Institute

A Forum for International Dialogue & Collaboration

MAPLE'S VOICE: THE CREATION OF THE IMSI

This article is assembled from excerpts of Bill Clark's Memoir "Forty Years and Five Days" and from his article "IMSI Was Born Out of Difficult Industry Times" published in the March, 2015 issue of *The Maple News*. It was graciously transcribed by Betty Ann Lockhart.

In South Burlington, Vermont, the Aiken Maple Research Lab under Dr. David Garrett was booming. Development of a "Sweet Tree" Program, tubing testing and improvements, evaluations of equipment and containers and finally the development of new maple products were all under way.

Then came 1974. Three years of over production of commercial grades of syrup . . . leading to very low prices. At just about this time, the Arab oil embargo went into effect and oil prices began to shoot up. Large blending companies had continued to cut back on their use. Things looked bleak indeed. In August 1974, the Vermont Maple Industry decided to call an emergency meeting in Vermont to evaluate the problem. Canadian Government Officials and some Canadian processors were even invited. Dr. David Garrett led much of the discussion. The Industry needed new markets for dark syrup. But how could this be accomplished? Was there any way to work together for the better of all when you had two countries, two languages and two very different ways of doing business?"

Dr. Garrett offered a bold suggestion, "Form an international group of producers and processors encompassing both the U.S. and Canada". The room fell silent - - - A totally crazy idea! U.S. and Canadian processors had never worked together. You had two governments, two languages, and producers who had NEVER even sat at the same table with processors!!

Dr. Garrett didn't give up. No one had offered a "Plan B". "Let's give this idea some consideration" (more mediation and discussion). Two hours later, it was agreed to meet in November in Montreal, Canada to see if this indeed would be feasible. Vermont packers were reluctant to get involved in this venture. Nonetheless, come November, Dr. Garrett, Dr. Jim Marvin and I headed north to Montreal for this meeting.

This was my first trip to Montreal. We arrived at the fourth floor of the Quebec Department of Agriculture Building. Around a large series of tables were seated all the top brass of the entire Maple world. A thought went through my mind as to "how did a "peon" like me representing a few Vermont Maple producers ever wind up here?" Around this table sat the maple giants of the world, many ferocious competitors with one another, now brought together as one for a common cause. . I saw such "Greats" as Gilles Croteau, General Manager of the 4,600 member Plessisville Co-op, the world's largest; Adin Reynolds, owner of Reynolds Sugarbush, then the world's largest sugarbush, tapping 125,000 trees in two States; Don Green, President of Delta Foods, Delta Ontario; Allan Austin, General Manager of Canada Starch in Montreal; Jean-Pierre Potvin, Quebec Department of Agriculture; Dr. David Garrett, Director of the USDA Maple Lab., South Burlington, VT and the list goes on.

A commission of five Canadian members and five U.S. members was created. The committee took it from there. The charge was to create a marketing organization that could work to the benefit of all. It was a mighty challenge. Should Maple producers be sitting around the same table as packers and processors? What involvement should government have? How could all aspects of such a group be formed and fall within the laws of two different governments?

The meetings were long and more were scheduled, alternating between Burlington, VT and Montreal, QC. Every meeting ran into seemingly hopeless deadlocks. Dr. David Garrett led much of the discussion throughout these meetings, continuing to point out that working together was the only good solution.

At each meeting a consensus was forming. Maple producers were to be included, voting powers were weighed, balance of power between the Canadians and the U.S. was evaluated. Gradually, the organization was formed. Articles and bylaws were written, a name was chosen, "The International Maple Syrup Institute" (IMSI). It had to then be chartered as an international organization in both countries. Three of us became the charterees, Adin Reynolds of Wisconsin, Gilles Croteau of Quebec and I, Bill Clark of Vermont. In the U.S., it was chartered in the State of Delaware, in Canada it was in Montreal.

A final meeting of all concerned was held in Plattsburgh, NY on February 20, 1975. The proposed bylaws were accepted and The International Maple Syrup Institute (IMSI) was born. A core Board of eighteen Directors was selected and IMSI, the widest based maple marketing group in the World, became a reality. Later in 1975, IMSI hired Claude Tardif as its Executive Manager, yet much work remained to be done.

Canadian matching funds were available to the group, but would require a one third match by the U.S. side. A hurried plane flight to USDA in Washington, D.C., didn't gain us much on that. In January, several of us flew to Detroit. . . Drs. Marvin, Garrett, and I, to meet with Adin Reynolds and officials of the USDA Northeast Forest Service Division. This proved more fruitful, with the USDA willing to provide matching funds in the form of Maple research monies, to be utilized at the Senator Aiken Maple Lab in South Burlington, VT.

The above is only a very, very brief account of my memories of IMSI . . . ***it is more crucial than ever that maple folks in both countries work together. Either country's problems are both country's problems.***