Mills and Molasses

In the early part of the 20th century, the Chinquapin Park area was a wooded place with abundant water. People living along King Street walked to the spring near here to obtain water for use in their homes. Sugar was also grown and processed here. Elizabeth Henry Douglas, who grew up on the other side of King Street, remembered John McGinnis' garden, spring and sugar mill. She saw the sugar cane grow five or six feet tall. "*Then we would go down there, and he'd give us sugar cane . . . the horse would go around and around, and this presser would press the sugar out of the cane.*"

John McGinnis probably processed sugar cane using an animal-powered three-roller mill, similar to those used in 18th-century Caribbean and American plantations. This photograph shows sorghum stalks, which produce a sweet juice, being fed into a mill to make syrup in Orange County, N.C., 1939.

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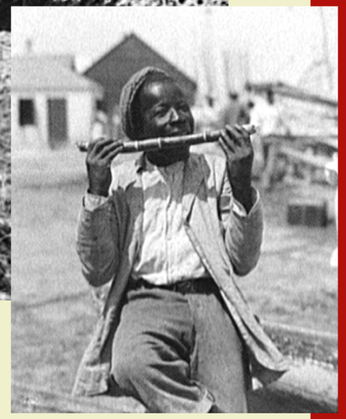

Tasting the juice in freshly cut sugar cane was enjoyable for children throughout the South, circa 1901.

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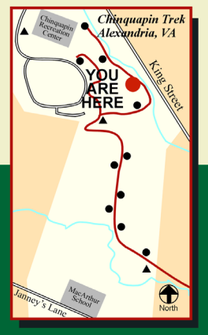
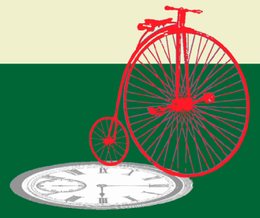
The process of making sugar was tedious. After the sugar cane was cut, liquid was pressed out of the cane. Horse, oxen and wind power were most commonly used to power pressing machines. The juice pressed from the cane was boiled until sugar crystals formed. After the crystallized mass cooled, it was placed in a barrel with holes. The thick syrup remaining in the crystallized sugar then drained through the holes in the bottom of the barrel. Two products resulted from this procedure, white crystallized sugar and the thick syrup, molasses.





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