

Planting Time



Sugar leaves

The field slaves started working shortly after roll call at dawn. Any extra grass or shrub must be burnt. The enslaved use machetes to dig cane holes. The cane tops are then placed at the bottom of each hole and covered with dirt. Cane plants take about fifteen months to mature while rations take a shorter time- approximately one year or twelve months.

The slaves worked until about eight or nine o'clock when they pause for breakfast which has been prepared by the elderly female slaves. The average breakfast consisted of a lot of starch, just as their second and last meal about mid-day. This time they are allowed about two hours because this meal is prepared by them, also it is to give them enough time to work on their provisions grounds or 'rest'.

Harvest time

The field slaves are armed with their machetes, ready to cut the ripe canes. They cut the canes in specific lengths known as ***fraggotts***. This allows for easy rhythm and efficient use of time. Some sang digging songs while they worked. The planter and overseer allowed them to do this since they noticed that it made them concentrate more on the task at hand. To the slaves, they catch a rhythm and it made the work seem easier and the heat more bearable. Also gave them a chance to reminisce of Mama Africa or anything else that they pleased. Vigilant watchmen were on the look out for **pilferers**- slaves who stole joints of canes for sale to each other.

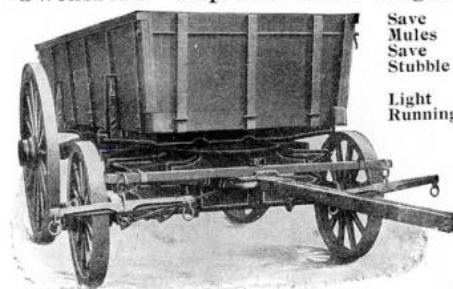


Harvesting sugar cane

The slaves then place the cut canes in bundles tied with cane wisps and load them onto waiting carts called **wains**.



"OwensborO" Improved Cane Wagons

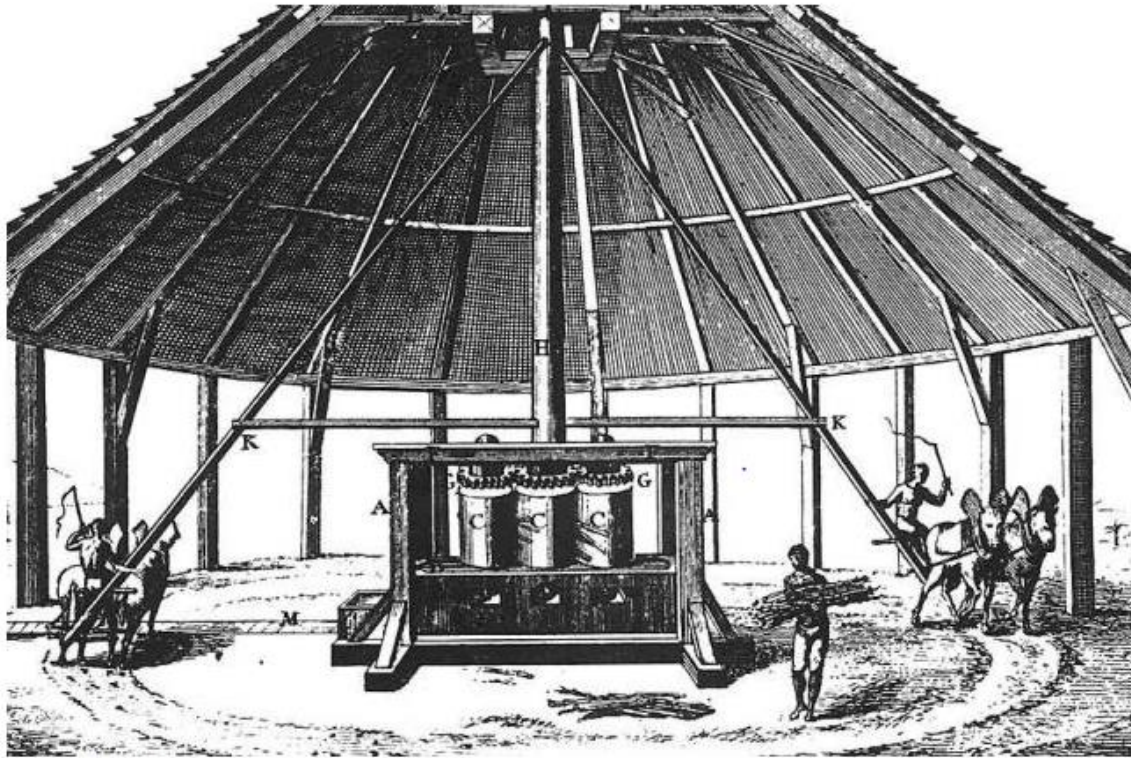


The Mill

Three types of mills were commonly used on the estates at this time. They are: wind, water and animal mills. For efficiency most estates try to have two functioning type of mills. This is expensive but in the long run it saves time and money.

1. Animal Mill

This is usually the 'back-up' mill for those estate owners who choose to have two mills. While it is slower than the other two it is more reliable since unlike its counterparts, it does not depend on Mother Nature. It is however slower and considerably more expensive in terms of food for the animals and replacement cost.



An animal mill

2. Windmill

Most colonies in the Leeward Islands use windmills.



A sugar windmill in Barbados

3. Water Mill

Colonies that have an abundant supply or source of rivers, streams such as Jamaica and British Guiana would use water mills.



An old water mill

At the Mill

At the mill, the juice is extracted from the cane. The slaves at the mills pass the fraggotts once by hand through the three rotating iron rollers that crush the cane. Only fifty to sixty per cent of the juice was extracted this way, but there was no time to spare.

The juice flowed from the mill through a wooden trough or gutter that led into the boiling house. An artisan slave, usually a carpenter stands ready to make repairs to the gutter should it break or burst from the constant gushing of the juice. Meanwhile another set of slaves remove the trash from the mill and takes it to the nearby trash house where it is laid to dry for use in the boiling house.

In the Boiling House

The juice flowed through the gutter and into the first receptacle known as a syphon. The juice is then clarified by heating it with a small quantity of lime. The clarified juice was then ladled into successive copper boilers, even one smaller and the heat under it hotter than the previous one. There were usually three such copper boilers. The last one was sometimes called a teache. By the time the juice was finished boiling in this pot or teache, it was reduced via evaporation to a thick syrup which could stretch between the thumb and forefinger. At this stage the boiling was over. The sticky mass was then run off into shallow wooden troughs to cool before it was put into hogsheads in the curing house.



Inside a boiling house

In the Curing House

The hogsheads will spend about three weeks here. They are hung on wooden beams, bottom down, with holes in the bottom, to allow the molasses to drip out into cisterns that are accurately placed beneath.

From the Estate to the Ship

After three weeks the hogsheads are sealed and rolled onto carts (wains). The hogsheads are now ready for their short trip to the port and then on to Europe. An 18th century hogshead commonly weighed about fourteen hundredweight (14cwt.) when it left the estate. But about ten to twenty five per cent (10-25%) of this is still molasses. This will drip out on the journey to Europe.

At the port, the slaves unload hogshead from the carts unto waiting boats called 'lighters'. These will transport the hogshead to the ship. If for some reason or another, the ship has not yet arrived, they will be stored in a warehouse at the port.



Rolling a hogshead

From the Caribbean to Britain

The planter would have made prior arrangements with a merchant, agent or consignee to collect the shipment of sugar as it arrives at the port in England. One such port would be Liverpool or Bristol. He pays the shipping cost and customs duties charged on entry.

The agent makes arrangements to store the shipment of hogsheads in a warehouse until the time of sale. He is awaiting the best price, especially since he is usually paid on a commission basis. Porters at the dock eagerly unload the hogshead for him from the ship to the waiting carts and just as eagerly collect their money and move on to the next client. He then hires and pays draymen to transport the goods to the warehouse that he has selected.

As per arrangement with the warehouse he is charged insurance in case of fire and or theft. The latter was fairly common in those days. He pays rent to the warehouse manager.

The next day or so, he sells the sugar to the highest bidder or hires a broker to do this for him. The goods having been sold, he pays the broker if he hired one, and then subtracts his commission. According to the arrangement that he has with the planter the rest is usually deposited. Depending on the relationship that he shares with the planter, the latter may request certain items or consumer goods such as crockery, items of clothing, watches etc. These would be sourced and shipped to the planter at the next convenient departure of ships for the Caribbean.

What difficulties might a planter face in the marketing of his sugar in the late 18th century?

1. Storms and other natural disasters could delay the ship at sea.
2. The high cost of the marketing process itself. You have already learnt of the number of expenses involved.
3. Risks of attacks and seizure of the goods and ships by pirates.
4. Low price of sugar due to competition