BICENTENNIAL BEES

Early Records of Honey Bees in the Eastern United States

Part IV

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Louisiana

THE earliest dependable reference to honey bees in this state that I have found was by Dunbar (1817). He said that on October 21, 1804, new settlers near Catahoula Lake, in what is now Lasalle Parish, found an abundance of excellent honey in bee trees. He ate some that day with his supper. It is possible that the bees from the Natchez area swarmed to the Catahoula Lake area. Kilpatrick (1851) said "Honey bee numerous; wild in the woods," when he discussed Concordia Parish, but he made no mention that beekeeping was carried on by the early settlers. Cutting down bee trees was the occasion for neighborhood social gatherings between about 1820 to the Civil War, according to Williamson (1940). Beeswax candles for religious purposes were lacking at times in the early 1720's, according to Baudier (1939). Some candles were obtained from Santo Domingo. At times tallow candles were used for masses. This indicates that local beeswax was not available for candlemaking.

An attempt to obtain a honey crop by moving 1,000 colonies up the Mississippi River by barge was made by C. O. Perrine, Chicago, in 1878. In brief, the trial was not successful. For more details see Pellett (1938). Fifteen beekeepers met at Shreveport in 1876 and formed the Southwestern Bee Keepers' Association. Some idea of the volume of beeswax brought into the port of New Orleans for sale or export is shown in the following table:[20]

Beeswax	1845-46	1840-41	1836-37
Barrels	1,200	300	255
Pounds	4,900	16,000	1,800

Menn (1964) reported that according to the data in the 1859-1860 census, 99 "large plantations" (50 or more slaves) in Louisiana had apiaries. They produced about 8 per cent of the total state honey crop. The largest amount of honey produced per plantation was in Bossier Parish (northwest Louisiana): each of two plantations reported a production of 1,000 pounds of honey; one reported 200 pounds of beeswax and the other 250 pounds. Note — figures in the census were rounded off. The number of colonies were not given.

The best known Louisiana beekeeper, in the latter part of the 19th century, was Paul L. Viallon of Bayou Goula. He was a pharmacist, importer and rearer of queen bees, seller of bees, queens and hives, a honey producer, beehive manufacturer and an occasional writer to the bee journals. His comments about beekeeping can be found in the American Bee Journal and Gleanings in Bee Culture in the 1870's and 1880's.

In his history of Louisiana DePratz (1774), for the period 1718-1734, considered that the myrtle wax tree *(Myrica cerifera)* was ". . . of the greatest blessings with which nature has enriched Louisiana." Myrtle wax was an important item of export for a number of years. Then DePratz went on to say "The Bees of Louisiana lodge in the earth, to secure their honey from the ravages of the bears. Some few indeed build their combs in the trunks of trees, as in Europe; . . ." He also wrote about bears and the custom of some settlers in the Natchez area to put out a mixture of milk and honey to attract the bears so that they could be killed. DuPratz never mentioned that his party took honey from the combs in the trees nor that beeswax was available. I am skeptical that the bees in the ground were honey bees; they probably were solitary bees or wasps. Honey bees might enter a hollow tree at ground or near-ground level, but I have never heard of them nesting in the ground in Louisiana. And, if they did so, how could that protect the honey combs from bears? Neither can I believe that bears were baited with milk and honey — perhaps someone was telling a tall tale to DePratz!

Texas

A number of people with whom I have discussed the contents of this manuscript uniformily were certain that the Spaniards must have brought honey bees into Texas, especially when the Spanish missions were established. The information that I have obtained is to the contrary. Father Morfi's long account of the Spanish occupation of Texas, as translated by Casteneda (1932) does not mention beeswax, honey or honey bees. He says that oil from nuts was burned in the sanctuary lamps. This probably is an indication that beeswax or other candles were not available. Parks[21] stated in a letter to me that he had not been able to find any records of honey bees in Texas prior to the early 1800's. The statement by Buckley[22] that ". . . the wax for candles . . . were all but exhausted," in 1717 and 1718 in East Texas, suggests that beeswax was not available in quantity. An unnamed traveler's account of a journey in Texas in 1834 contains this statement ". . .; and the honey-bee swarms, and has made her favorite haunt in Texas . . . and the bee-hunter is constantly employed to secure the honey and wax for exportation and trade."[23] Honey was occasionally found in bee trees in the eastern part of the state in 1835 while Lincecum (1906) was exploring that area. In 1841, according to James Hook, beeswax, among fur, hides, lumber, cotton etc., was exported from Texas. Dumas stated that an A. Sterne, in 1842 in Nacogdoches, produced fine honey in his apiary.[24]

Wilhelm Bruckisch, 1802-1877, was a well-known early bee man in Texas.

He was born in Silesia where, as a young man, he became active in apicultural affairs. He emigrated to near New Braunsfel in 1853 and continued his writings about beekeeping. Besides his books on bee culture (in German) he provided an extensive and scholarly paper on beekeeping for the U.S. Patent Office Annual Report.[25] As early as 1860 he advocated state and federal research on bee culture problems and the formation of a national beekeeper's society.

William R. Graham, 1828-1903, was a commercial beekeeper and bee supply manufacturer. He was active in the state beekeepers' association. W. R. Howard, 1848-1912, was a practicing physician and a teacher in the medical department of a Fort Worth school. He wrote a treatise on foulbrood, in 1893, that received considerable attention. I have the impression that his findings were not substantiated by later workers. Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Atchley were known for honey production, the rearing of queen bees and manufacturing bee supplies in the 1880's and 1890's.

The Texas State Beekeepers' Association was formed in 1877.

Arkansas

Honey bees were seen in 1818 in what was then called the Arkansas Territory.[26] The members of the S. H. Long's expedition saw a swarm hanging from a cottonwood branch on Aug. 29, 1819 and the same group obtained a small amount of honey from a bee tree near the Canadian River. They recorded that bee trees were seen frequently. In the vicinity of Fort Smith a settler gave them honey to eat with their supper. He had obtained it from one of his "many swarms."

Tennessee

Honey bees were seldom found west of the Blue Ridge mountains prior to 1748-1750, according to Kalm,[27] as translated by Benson (1937). By 1770 settlers were coming into what is now Tennessee in fairly large numbers. The territory became a state in 1796. The Goodspeed Publishing Company (1887) made the following statement "From the first settling of the State it has been the custom of the large majority of the farmers to secure a few colonies of bees . . . as a separate avocation." In 1785 the Tennessee legislative assembly provided that taxes could be paid in beeswax at one shilling per pound. This indicates that money was scarce, or that beeswax was fairly plentiful and even a medium of exchange. Beeswax is listed as an export item from the Knoxville area in 1831, according to Bonser et al (1945), but honey is not mentioned. The 1 million pounds of beeswax and honey (see Table 1) indicate that Tennessee was an important beekeeping state in 1850. John M. Davis, Spring Hill, was a well known queen rearer in the latter part of the 19th century.

Kentucky

The first hive of honey bees was brought into what is now Kentucky by a Colonel Harrod in 1780, according to Barton (1793). He goes on to say that within a few years many swarms could be found in the forests. The importance of Kentucky in honey production is indicated in Table 1. The bee journal "Annals of Bee Culture," published from 1869-1872, D. L. Adair, editor, was published in Hawesville. Some well known writers of that time contributed to the publication. Many present-day beekeepers use a swarm control method, or a modification of it, that was first proposed by G. W. Demaree, (see Pellett (1938). The Demaree method of swarm control was immensely helpful to the industry. Demaree also wrote articles for the bee journals in the 1880's.

The following quoted information was recently obtained from Wm. G. Eaton, bee and honey specialist, Kentucky Department of Agriculture. He obtained it from the Draper manuscript 22C16 — 17; an interview with Nathaniel Hart. Eaton is author of "Sketches from Kentucky's Beekeeping History," Transactions of the Kentucky Acad. Science, vol. 26, nos. 1 and 2, 1965.

"The first honey I ever saw in the country was in Harrod's house in 1786. Harrod went probably in 1784 or 1785 to the Monongahela country and got a bee gum which he said he would steal for good luck. But if they would look they might find something in its place. From where it was taken, Mr. Hart believes they found $2. The gum was taken down [river] by Harrod in a canoe. This visit by Mr. Hart was in company with his teacher, Mr. Worley, and on purpose to get honey. Gov. Shelby gave a cow and calf for a gum which he probably got from Harrod and that was the first Mr. Hart knows of bees in Kentucky."

Table 1. — Production of beeswax and honey, by state, in pounds and in round numbers.*

State	Pounds	State	Pounds
Alabama	900,000	Mississippi	400,000
Arkansas	192,000	Missouri	1,330,000
Connecticut	93,000	New Hampshire	117,000
Delaware	42,000	New Jersey	157,000
Florida	19,000	New York	1,756,000
Georgia	732,000	North Carolina	512,000
Kentucky	1,160,000	Ohio	805,000
Louisiana	97,000	Pennsylvania	840,000
Illinois	870,000	South Carolina	216,000
Indiana	935,000	Tennessee	1,000,000
Iowa	322,000	Texas	380,000
Maine	190,000	Vermont	250,000
Maryland	75,000	Virginia	880,000
Massachusetts	60,000	Wisconsin	131,000
Michigan	360,000		

* From the Seventh Census taken in 1850. The first agricultural census was in 1840. There was no explanation for the peculiar treatment of the wax and the honey. Probably most of the honey sold was in comb honey form. I cannot estimate how much honey was produced in order to obtain the beeswax that is mentioned as an article of trade.

FOOTNOTES

[20] Taken from De Bows Review, 1846, Vol. 1 & 2, New Orleans.

[21] H. B. Parks, deceased, formerly head of the Division of Apiculture, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

[22] From Texas Historical Association Quarterly, p. 2 and 236, Vol. XV, 1912.

[23] De Bow's Review, 10, p. 635, 1851.

[24] Dumas, C. G. Apiculture in Early Texas. A Master's thesis in the library of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, 1952, 259 typed pages. The thesis contains about 60 pages of out-of-state material. As far as I can learn a history of Texas beekeeping by Miss Thelma Burleson has never been published.

[25] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for 1860, p. 268-301; Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

[26] All of the information about honey bees in Arkansas was taken from Thwaites (1904).

[27] Peter Kalm, 1716-1779, was a Swedish traveler in North America from 1748 to 1751. He was a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences. His diaries contain many observations on the people, climate, soils, crops and wild animals of the New World.

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