

BICENTENNIAL BEES

Early Records of Honey Bees in the Eastern United States

Part III

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Maryland

AMONG the provisions that the first settlers were advised to take to the Maryland colony from England in 1634 was a gallon of honey.¹³ Honey and beeswax production was listed at 4,300 pounds in 1850 for Montgomery County. By 1875 beekeeping assumed "... considerable importance," according to Boyd (1879). That author also noted that the mechanical honey extractor was a new way of getting honey from the combs. A Mr. Lewis Clarksburg and a Captain Meigs, both of Boyd Station, were listed as extensive beekeepers. The number of colonies was not given. Scharf (1968) notes that in the "early part" of the 19th century farmers brought honey and beeswax into Hagerstown for sale or trade.

Virginia¹⁴

Bruce (1907) stated that honey was a common article of food in Virginia in the 17th century and that most householders had hives of honey bees. Candles were made of beeswax, myrtle wax, beef or deer tallow. Honey sold for about 2 shillings a pound. One man, in about 1650, was reported to own 13 colonies. Other reports are: in 1648 a Mr. Pelton¹⁵ "had a store of them" (colonies); in 1667 a Mr. Seabull had 7 hives; in 1670 a Captain Croshaw had 13 hives; in 1685 a Mr. Clyborn had 2 hives and an estate inventory in 1728 listed 50 pounds of beeswax, but no hives of bees; Robert Tucker, merchant, Norfolk County, left 1730 pounds of beeswax and 258 pounds of myrtle wax as part of his estate in 1730. Beeswax was an item of export from the James River area: 1 hogshead plus 776 pounds in 1763-64, 2 hogshead plus 4 barrels in 1764-65, and 2,000 pounds in 1765-66.

North and South Carolina

Brickel (1969) reported that in

about 1730 "Honey bees are plentiful in bee hives and hollow-trees. Hives used were bee gums . . . vast quantities of Honey and Wax." Martin (1829) said that in 1740 beeswax could be used to pay poll taxes in North Carolina, because there was a shortage of money. Peter Kalm, according to Benson (1937), reported that in 1748, while he was in the Carolina Colony, several farmers had hives of bees and made a profit from them. He also noted that beeswax was sold or traded for supplies. The above two statements seem to be adequate proof that honey bees were numerous in the Carolina colonies by 1750. The following items were taken from Grimes' (1967) account of wills and inventories: 1 hive of bees in 1730 by Wm. Cartwright, 7¾ pounds of beeswax in 1750 by John Gray, 3 stocks of bees in 1751 by Th. Nelson, 5 stocks of bees in 1754 by Davis Shepard, 5 stocks of bees in 1772 by Levy Creecy, 110 pounds of beeswax in 1773 by Jacob Shepard and 7 bee hives in 1774 by J. Sanderson. About 100 years after the first successful settlement was made in South Carolina, i.e. in 1790, 14,500 pounds of beeswax was exported from Charleston, according to Wallace (1951).¹⁶

Georgia

Two of De Soto's men reported that they found a pot of honey in a tree in the Indian village of Chiaba (Georgia) in 1540. They never saw anything like it before or after, according to Hakluyt (1851). I wonder whether anything was found, or was there an error in translation, or was it honey from stingless bees in Cuba or was it maple syrup? Probably the original record is in Spain.

Mooney (1900) reported that in 1796 some of the Indians living in North Georgia had hives of honey bees and traded honey and beeswax for needed supplies. Hawkins (1822,¹⁷

who travelled in the state in 1796, stated that there was a great deal of honey in the Flint River country of Southwest Georgia. Since Bartram (1792) found honey in bee trees in Northeast Florida in 1773, I think that we can safely assume that honey bees were generally distributed across southern Georgia by the 1770's. The Colonial Records (1904) contain a 1743 report about St. Simons Island in which it is noted that a Mr. Walker had 80 hives of bees (vol. 1). Two hives of bees were given to a Mr. Anderson by Mrs. Causton in 1737 to be placed in a Savannah experimental garden. (vol. 22).

The bee journal, *Moon's Bee World*, published from 1873 to 1877, by A. F. Moon of Rome, Ga., was a short-lived attempt to stimulate beekeeping in the South. It contains some interesting items from southern beekeepers of that time. A Dr. J. P. H. Brown, Augusta, advertised imported Italian queen bees for sale in the 1880's.

Florida

Barton (1802) stated that the honey bees in Florida, after having been introduced by the Spaniards, had by 1785 "increased into innumerable swarms."¹⁸ Unfortunately, he gave no details as to the source of his information. Bartram (1792), on the other hand, recorded his own experiences. He noted that he and his friends cut down a bee tree on the banks of the St. Johns River in 1765 and obtained considerable honey. In several instances he was given a drink consisting of honey in water in northern Florida by plantation owners. The Indians in East Florida traded beeswax and honey to the Spaniards in Cuba and to white traders in the area for trade goods. In 1765 De Brahm, according to De Vorse (1971) began an official land survey in East Florida. He noted that honey bees, honey and beeswax could be taken from hollow trees. Bees were

frequently seen and honey obtained for his use. Contrary to the statement made by Barton (see above) Villalon (1867) stated that honey bees were brought to America by English colonists and that the Spaniards first introduced honey bees in Cuba in 1764 when they fled from Florida. I believe that if Spaniards brought bees to Florida they would have left some in Cuba.

Alabama

The earliest record that I have found for honey bees in Alabama was provided by Bartram (1792), who was told by a Dr. Grant that there was one hive of bees in Mobile prior to 1773. The exact date of arrival and the people involved were not given. Swarms of bees were abundant in the woods of Alabama after the Territory began to be settled by white men, according to Hawkins (1794). In the vicinity of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers in 1796 he found that a Mr. Bailey had 20 hives of bees. "... he says that they do well and that there are wild bees in the country in every direction." Hawkins also wrote that some hunters had seen honey bees west of the Mississippi River.¹⁹ Owens (1900) verifies the Hawkins' report for he says that by 1792 beeswax was taken from inland areas to Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans with furs and other trade items. Owens also noted that honey and beeswax were brought to a trading post at St. Stephens, on the Tombigbee river, in 1807 by Indians and white settlers.

Mississippi

There were a number of colonies of bees in the Natchez area by 1770-1775, according to Claiborne (1880). He said "It was a common sight to see 100 bee hives in a far yard, and both buckwheat and clover were then grown especially for the benefit of those Epicurean manufacturers. Beeswax and honey were articles of export." I have not learned when the first colonies were brought into the state or when the first swarms were seen. Perhaps the first hives brought to Natchez came by way of boats or barges down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. It is unlikely that they were brought overland by wagon. By 1819 bees, honey and beeswax were commonly found in Mississippi according to Linneceum (1905). He was a storekeeper in 1819, when he traded goods for honey and beeswax. The paper, *Natchez Free Trader and Daily Gazette*, Nov. 23, 1841, records that a diary of two men traveling through Jones County (in eastern Mississippi) contains the comment that

wild bees were commonly found and that dozens of bee hives were seen on every farm, according to Claiborne (1906). The Mississippi Beekeepers' Association was formed November 15, 1873 at Jackson. (Continued next month)

REFERENCES

¹⁹ From C. C. Hall's *Narratives of early Maryland 1633-1634*, 460 p., Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. This is a collection of letters and reports to Lord Baltimore and others. Among the items pertaining to agriculture and trade there is no mention of honey bees or beeswax. This suggests to me that there were no honey bees present in the woods at that time.

¹⁴ Partly from scattered references in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* and from Virginia State Library records through the courtesy of Jack Dalton, librarian.

¹⁵ He used to make metheglin "a good liquor." At that time there were many swarms in the woods and bee hives in the householders' yards.

¹⁶ Author's note — I have been unable to learn whether honey bees were brought to the Carolinas by man or whether they were swarms from Virginia. Neither have I seen a comment of what became of the honey that must have been available when the beeswax was prepared for the market.

¹⁷ Col. Hawkins was a U.S. Government Indian Agent for over 30 years. He made a number of trips within the area to visit different tribes.

¹⁸ From *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 3, 1802. As best as I can determine all of Barton's information was second or third hand.

¹⁹ See the Bradbury report, according to Thwaites (1904), in the discussion of Missouri.