Lancaster Farming
Antiques Center

Honey Of A Collection Showcases Beekeeping Treasures

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ROHRERSTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — An extensive collection of honey equipment and beekeeping supplies and books is displayed at Dutch Gold Honey, 2220 Dutch Gold Drive, Lancaster.

Much of the collection showcases pieces gathered by John Moore, a former Ephrata schoolteacher whose family, after Moore's death, donated the pieces to the Lancaster County Honey Producers.

Other pieces are from Ralph and Louella Gamber who founded Dutch Gold Honey. The Gambers started with three hives and their kitchen table, and now ship honey worldwide.

Beekeeping history roots go back centuries. According to Loren Sadler, Stevens, the Egyptians were the world's first practical beekeepers dating back to about 2,500 B.C. The Egyptians' methods eventually spread throughout Europe and then to the new world.

As Sadler handles pieces, some dating back to the 1700s, he recounts a bit of bee history.

Bees, he said, weren't always in the United States. In 1620, European settlers brought bees with them.

"White man's flies" is the name American Indians gave the Apis Mellifera bees, which have multiplied and spread across the states.

Kelly Miller examines an early 1900s extractor printed with the words: Novice's Honey Extractor, Amos I. Root, Ohio.

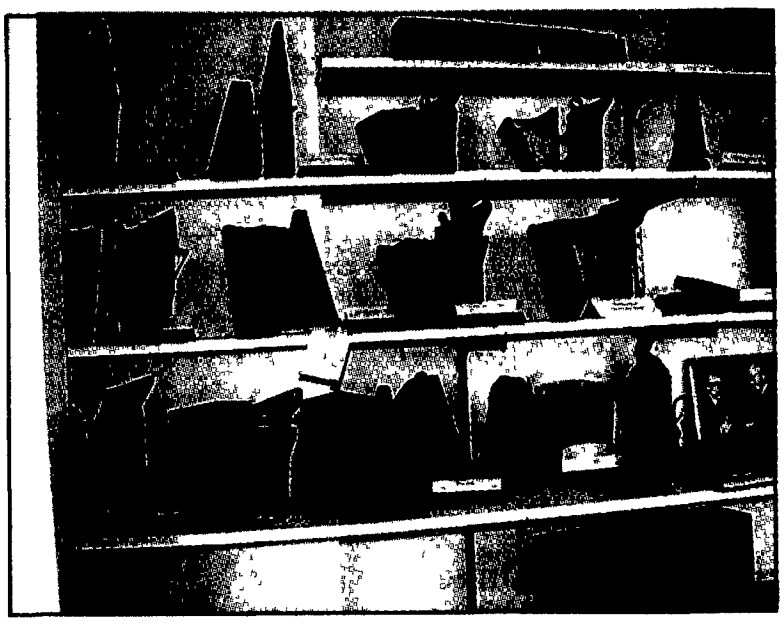
Beekeeping was something a farmer could do at relatively low cost to provide for his own family. Honey and maple sugar were the only sources of sweetness available to settlers. It was considered a wonderful occasion to find a bee tree in the wild. These produced about 25 pounds of honey compared with the average 80 pounds produced by today's modern hives.

Homemade bee gums were often formed in hollowed logs of the gum tree. At the end of the season, a rag was soaked in sulfur and placed into the hive. This method enabled the early settlers to harvest the honey without fear of being stung. The drawback was that the sulfur odor killed the bees. Swarms of wild bees often replaced the lost bees, but eventually wild bees were endangered.

Bee keepers figured out other ways to collect the honey without killing the bees. Smokers, filled with dried grasses or pine needles, with bellows attached enabled beekeepers to puff smoke into the hives. The smoke pacified the bees and also covered the bee scent put out by bees that were on the alert.

Sadler said that beekeepers profited from three major inventions: the hive, extractor, and the foundation in which wax was pressed into a manmade comb to give bees a headstart in forming a colony and producing a more uniform product.

An 1857 beehive was patented in 1857 by L.L. Langstroth, but he never reaped profits for his invention, because industrious beekeepers could easily copy his invention.



In the 1800s and the early 1900s almost every rural family kept a hive of bees. But few of the hives and related beekeeping supplies have been preserved because many families burned the wooden frames and discarded items they no longer used.

Loren Sadler is a living historian who relishes in talking about the history of beekeeping.

In 1857, L.L. Langstroth from Philadelphia patented a beehive. He had determined that bees needed a ¼ to ⅓-inch space to efficiently make honey. Under that amount, bees filled the space with resin, and a larger space resulted in bees raising more bees. His wooden hive had movable frames with bee space just large enough to discourage bees from gluing the comb solidly to the wall or simply raise bee families.

Although the beehive design became the standard for beekeepers, Langstroth never reaped any profits from his invention. The problem was that beekeepers took one look at the patented hive and went home and made their own. The design was too easily copied.

The first extractor was invented in the 1850s.

Ledgers and rosters from the county's honey producers association chronicle the organization back to 1917.

Another big boost to the industry was the development of the observation hive, which enables people to view how bees work. Scientists often study hives in this way, but more importantly, children and adults can view the working colonies that are often on display at agriculture-related gatherings.

Bees are known for their honey, but they also produce propolis. Sadler said that propolis is an antibacterial substance. If a mouse or bug enters the hive, the bees sting it to death, but cannot remove the carcass. The bees cover the remains with propolis, which mummifies the mouse so that disease from the decaying mouse does not spread.

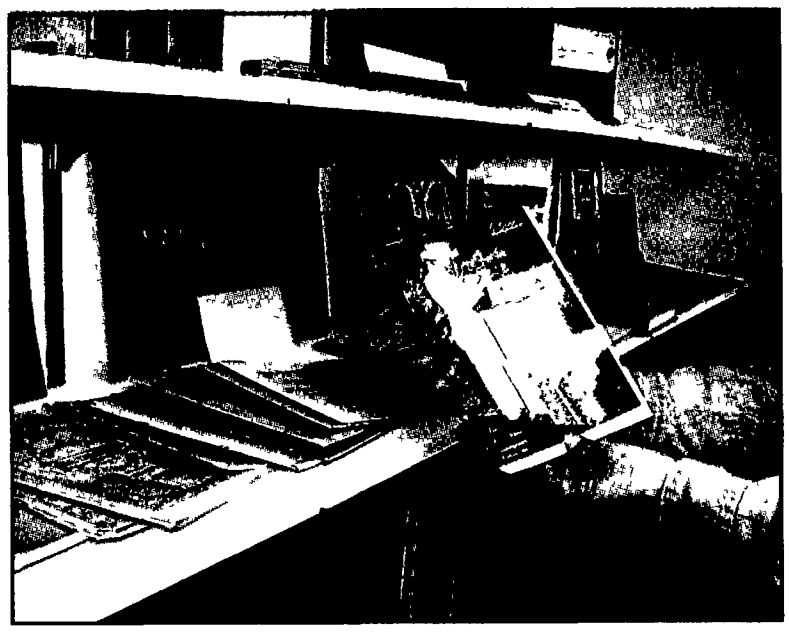
Propolis, Sadler said, is used by many people such as himself to fight pneumonia, earaches, and many other human diseases. Proplis is sold at health food stores in its raw form and as tablets.

Sadler believes that eating local honey can eliminate many allergies. He also uses honey therapy to treat burns, and administers bee stings to multiple sclerosis patients.

Throughout history, honey has been used as an effective antimicrobial agent to inhibit growth of certain bacterial, yeast, and molds.

Those interested in knowing more about beekeeping may call their county extension offices. The beekeeping display at Dutch Gold can be viewed without charge at anytime during the company's opening hours. Call for hours (717) 393-1716.

Sadler holds several smokers, one is an 1889 smoker invented by Bingham. Sadler said the same design is used today by beekeepers.



Booklets and catalogs dated back to 1859 show that little has changed in beekeeping methods.