

Langstroth

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Perhaps Ohio beekeepers give little thought to the fact that for nearly forty years they lived among us one of the two greatest men the beekeeping world has ever known. Practically every industry and every department of learning may be traced to some original investigator, some pioneer whose efforts paved the way for the progress, was Rev. L. L. Langstroth, "Father of American Beekeeping." For in spite of false claims made by others and for others, the two bright, particular stars in the firmament of beekeeping are unquestionably Langstroth and Huber.

It is true, that Langstroth was not living in Ohio at the time of his wonderful invention, as he moved to Oxford in 1858. During the fifteen or more years that he had been interested in bees, he had lived in four different states: for more than twice that period of time he lived in Ohio, and Ohio justly and proudly claims him as her own.

Perhaps some beekeeper of the younger generation may ask, "What was it Langstroth did?" and some older beekeeper might reply "He invented the movable comb hive". This would be true and yet far from the whole truth. Langstroth did not make the first movable comb hive, yet he did make the first hive of this kind that had practical value. Yet the movable comb was not the thought uppermost in his mind in working out his problem. It was to make a hive having frames necessarily movable, that would provide what is now known as a bee space all around it. The swinging frame with the top bar extended at each end and resting on rabbets near the top of the hives provided this bee space. The cover also was removable, and this enabled the beekeeper to take out each frame without injuring the bees, note the condition inside the hive, and so have almost absolute knowledge and control of the colony at all times. It is stated in the A. B. C. and X Y Z of Bee Culture that so perfect was Langstroth's work that there was little left for future inventors to do and so-called improvements on his hive were usually so many steps backward.

Other hives have been invented and forgotten; for modify it as you will, change its shape, its size, and whether you have left a "Jumbo" or the little "pastoral hive of the Old World, with frames 10" x 11" because the only means of transportation was by camels back, yet you cannot get away from the swinging frame with the bee space all around it. That was the important feature of the Langstroth invention, and proclaimed the real genius of the man. Practically every intelligent beekeeper in this country today is using a Langstroth hive, and this is also true all over the world where modern methods of bee keeping are to be found. To state more fully how much the beekeeping world owes to Langstroth, I may quote Mr E R Root who said, "Imagine, if you can all the frames in all the hives of bees suddenly becoming immovably fixed, never to be taken out again except as they were cut out, and you will have a fair idea of what beekeeping had been through all the centuries until the dyas of Langstroth."

Great as is the debt that modern apiculture owes to Langstroth for the invention of this hive it owes him equally as much for the first scientific and popular book on beekeeping in the United States, which made his hive and its manipulation known to beekeepers. It was recently said to me of the copy of this book once owned by Mr. Quinby, "It was the very book that made Quinby the successful beekeeper that he was"; and Mr A. I. Root freely acknowledges his indebtedness to this same book and to its author and in his characteristic way he says, "May God reward and forever bless Mr. Langstroth for the kind and pleasant way in which he unfolds to his readers the wonders and truths of creation to be found inside the beehives."

It has been my privilege during the past few months to gather information regarding Mr. Langstroth's life, for very little is really known. Descended from the distinguished old French House of Lorraine, he rarely spoke of this, because, as he said to his children and to his grandchildren, "We must not be vain about these things." One of the most interesting letters I have received was from that prince of

European beekeepers, Mr Phillip J. Baldensperger, of Nice, France. After a delay of two months, he wrote that when he received my letter of inquiry, he was in the south of Morocco at a place from which he could not even send letters. He mentioned the articles that appeared in the French bee journals in 1895-96 after Father Langstroth's death, commenting on the life and work of the Great Bee Master. "I am a true Langstrothian," he wrote, "and it was the work of Langstroth that revolutionized beekeeping throughout the whole world, whether the name of Langstroth is ever heard or not." I talked with older residents of Oxford, who knew him for thirty years as a beekeeper, a neighbor, and a friend. Truly,

None knew him but to love him

Nor named him but to praise.

"He was one of the great men of Oxford," said Madame Hughes, mother of the president of Miami University. And among the great men of Oxford have been four governors of Ohio, three governors of other states, one President of the United States; Ebenezer Lane, founder of Lane Seminary; Mr. W. H. McGuffey, of McGuffey Reader fame; David Swing, founder of the great Central Church, Chicago; Whitelaw Reid, U. S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James, and others of scarcely lesser fame.

I wish it were possible to relate to you all that I heard concerning his rare education and scholarly ability; his familiarity with classics both ancient and modern; his great interest in all worth-while events of the day; his hopefulness and courage, and the remarkable powers of his mind; his dignified yet ever kindly presence; and the many incidents of his every-day life that proclaimed the real goodness of the man.

The old home stood on the east side of the village, adjoining the Western College grounds. It now belongs to the College and is used as a residence for teachers. The outside of the house is but little changed-- a cement floor in the porch instead of wood, the shutters removed, that is about all. The orchard that he planted at the back of the house is gone. To the south is still a large vacant tract where once his beehives stood and his garden of old-fashioned flowers that was the admiration of Oxford. In the front and along the roadway still stand six massive basswood trees that he planted, two others having been torn out by a tornado a year ago. Also, not much is changed inside the house. At a turn of the winding stairway there is a niche in the wall where his photograph has been placed by the daughter of one of his old friends, now in charge of Langstroth Place, as it is called.

One thing that was mentioned in particular by all those who had known him best, was his great devotion to his invalid wife, a care and devotion as great as that which in the late President McKinley won the admiration and love of the whole nation. And when at last she was gone, every morning that his health and the weather would permit, he took the long walk through the campus ravine, down the road and over the hillside to the little cemetery where his wife and mother lay at rest.

To leave this hallowed spot, the comfortable home with beautiful surroundings, the friends who had known and loved him for nearly thirty years, was one of the saddest events of his life, and one of his most unselfish deeds. Yet he bore it with uncomplaining cheerfulness, just as he had done all through life when compelled to give up so many of his cherished hopes and plans.

Eight years later, he was asked to preach the communion sermon in the Wayne Avenue Pres. Church, at Dayton, where he was then living. Four generations of the Langstroth family were present at the service. This brief account was written to me by his grandson a short time ago: When Sunday morning came, he was not feeling quite so well as usual, and was not able to stand while delivering his sermon. He apologized for having to remain seated, and said, "It is about the love of God that I want to talk to you this morning, what it has meant to me, what it means now, what it will mean"--he stopped, a wondering look came into his radiant face, and in a moment more he was gone, to realize immediately what the love of God would mean through all eternity.

Out in Woodlawn Cemetery at Dayton, Ohio, one of the beautiful cities of the middle west, a pile of gray granite marks his last long sleep. On this stone is inscribed:

Rest thou in peace, thy work is done;
Thou has wrought well, thy fame is sure;
The crown of love which here has won
For useful deeds, shall long endure.

How long this shall endure is the question I want to ask today. In our last news letter I stated that there lay before the beekeepers of Ohio the opportunity to do the finest thing that has ever been done by any state association--to establish a memorial to Father Langstroth.

He was a man, tak him for all in all,
We shll not look upon his like again.