

The Bee Man of Oxford

The first practical movable-comb beehive was invented by Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth, the father of American beekeeping. As a child he loved and studied insects, but his parents considered it an idle habit and did not encourage his hobby. Born into a strict Calvinistic home in Philadelphia on Christmas Day in the year 1810, his early years were spent in what his elders considered useful pursuits. By the time he was twenty-eight years old, he became particularly interested in bees. Now that was an uncharted field, for the first scientific bee journal was not printed until fifteen years later. The only author that Langstroth knew anything about in his early years of beekeeping was one who doubted the existence of a queen bee! In the year 1852 Langstroth patented his epoch-making invention. It was not the first movable-comb hive ever invented, but it was the first one that actually worked; it was so usable and well-planned that the Langstroth hive, with only a few improvements, is yet almost universally used in America and a large part of Europe. In 1853 Langstroth published the first scientific work on beekeeping in the United States, which with his new hive revolutionized American apiculture. He was soon recognized as an authority on beekeeping and whatever he had to say in domestic or foreign bee journals was eagerly read. Many a successful beekeeper started out with a daughter of Langstroth's famous twenty-dollar queen bee.

Lorenzo Langstroth graduated from Yale in 1831 and became a tutor in mathematics at that school while he pursued a theological course of study. From 1836 to 1852 he worked in the ministerial and teaching fields. He suffered from a strange mental disease, a recurring inflammation of the brain, and it is possible that it was ill health which caused him frequently to change his occupation from preaching to teaching, and from teaching to preaching. Finally, he was forced to give up both professions. He then went to Mexico and led a somewhat wandering life until he drifted in 1858 to Oxford, Ohio, where he

Eliz. McFarland (Conversation)

Mother of Haugstroth lived with him when he first came to Oxford - Margaret Dunne Haugstroth. M. L. looked much like his mother Margaret D. Haugstroth and Anna Tucker Haugstroth are both buried in the Oxford Cemetery. Anna Tucker was a music teacher prior to her marriage. Haugstroth went to Mexico to get his nephew, his brother's son. Lizzie & the boy played together a great deal - spent much time making bows and arrows & shooting them. McFarland & Haugstroth exchanged papers & magazines, neither having much money. When the attacks came on he would not look up when he came to exchange papers. He always looked down when he felt the attacks coming on. Never knew what caused them. Was better in his old age. Buried in Dayton because his daughter was too poor to bring him to Oxford. Very devoted to his wife. Visited McFarland's frequently after he went to Dayton. Made it a second home. Came unannounced. Always got up & visited wife's grave before breakfast.

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spent thirty productive years in the study and propagation of bees. Oxford could boast of a university (Miami University) and two colleges for women at that time, and its academic atmosphere was suited to Langstroth's needs and temperament. There he established his family in a simple, though commodious, brick house with land enough around it for experiments with his bees. Around his house lay fields of clover, and across the Colerain Pike lay acres of "Old Miami" woodland, which at that time abounded in wild flowers from spring to autumn. For the delectation of his bees he devoted an acre of his land to a formal garden filled with the flowers loved best by the bees, dividing the box-bordered beds with narrow walks. Along the turnpike, "Father Langstroth" planted linden trees for his bees, and near the house he planted a field of buckwheat. It was his opinion that: "White clover honey tastes clearly of the blossom and is finest of all! Then comes red clover; then apple blossom honey from my own orchard; locust honey from the trees of the campus; then linden, in point of flavor; last of all, buckwheat, not so dainty and not pure gold in the comb." "Langstroth Cottage" is owned today by the Western College for Women and is occupied by faculty members. The grounds bear little resemblance to their former state, but the house is little changed, retaining a certain charm and an air of proud tradition.

One who knew Langstroth intimately when she was a child said: "I need only to close my eyes to see him at this moment, a huge, portly, stooping figure in black bee bonnet hung about with a long calico curtain, softly, slowly, slouching through the garden between the blossoms, and around his hives, the sun shining goldenly, the bees airily dancing above his head as, the world forgot, whole-heartedly he peers into their wise ways, studying, planning, evolving . . . . Those old Calvinistic days were days of 'scare' to little folks, but who could be afraid of Father Langstroth when he came to our house to pray!" His approach set out little legs capering with glee, for with him between us

drifted to Oxford, Ohio, in 1858, where he spent more than thirty productive years in the study and propagation of bees.

Oxford was a quiet little town which boasted of a university (Miami University) and two colleges for women. Its academic atmosphere was suited to his temperament and needs. Here he established his family in a simple, though commodious, brick house, with land enough around it for his bees and his experiments. Around his house lay fields of clover, and across "Old Miami" the Colerain Pike (now known as the Dixie Highway) lay ~~sixty~~ acres of woodland, which at that time abounded in wild flowers from spring to autumn. For the delectation of his bees he devoted an acre of his land to a formal garden filled with the flowers loved best by the bees, dividing the box-bordered beds with narrow walks. Along the "pike", "Father Langstroth" planted linden trees for his bees, and near the house he planted a field of buckwheat. He tasted the linden honey and pronounced it good, but "Yet," he said, "white clover honey tastes clearly of the blossom and is finest of all! Then comes red clover; then apple blossom honey from my own orchard; locust honey from the trees of the campus; then linden, in point of flavor; last of all, buckwheat, not so dainty and not pure gold in the comb." 77

"Langstroth Cottage" today is little changed. It is now owned by Western College for Women and is occupied by faculty members. The orchard, the formal garden, the field of buckwheat, the clover fields, and many of the linden trees are gone. On either side of the house, modern homes built of gray stone, now stand in place of the fields of nectar-laden flowers. But "Langstroth Cottage" retains a certain charm and wears an air of proud tradition, which attracts even those who never heard of the "bee man of Oxford." 66

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~~Jeanie Brooks, author of Under Oxford Trees, and who knew Langstroth intimately when she was a child, said:~~ "Here Father Langstroth

lived the greater part of his beautiful life in consonance with the creatures he so well cared for and loved. [I need only to close my eyes to see him at this moment, a huge, portly, stooping figure in black bee bonnet hung about with a long calico curtain, softly, slowly slouching through the garden between the blossoms, and around his hives, the sun shining goldenly, the bees airily dancing above his head as, the world forgot, whole-heartedly he peers into their wise ways, studying, planning, evolving . . . . Those old Calvinistic days were days of 'scare' to little folks, but who could be afraid of Father Langstroth when he came to our house to pray! His approach set our little legs capering with glee, for with him between us and our deserts we felt safe, even on our knees with closed eyes, while we speculated, peeping now and then between our fingers, on what treasure of bird-feather, a bit of bark, glistening pebble, or shell would come for us from those capacious pockets of his linen duster." / 68

Friends have described Langstroth as a blond, rosy-cheeked, portly gentleman. He had a pleasing countenance, a twinkle in his eye, and an infectious smile which could captivate a solitary listener or a convention audience. He was <sup>an</sup> ~~able~~ speaker as well as a skilful and facile writer. One of his disciples said that ~~he~~ was "a poet, a sage, a philosopher, and humanitarian, all in one, and, best of all, a most devoted and humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ." Certain it is that he was loved by young and old in Oxford. Tender in sorrow, faithful in friendship, sympathetic in joy, he made his life a benediction to the community in which he lived; the healing touch of his hand had power to bless and hearten his neighbour.

It has been the privilege of the writer to hear many a reminiscent tale told by quaint old ladies whose childhood was colored and enriched by his rare ability to reach the heart of a child by means of a game or a story. He often said that he judged a child by its reaction to his story-telling. It was the delight of the neighbourhood children to trot at his heels, <sup>and</sup> ~~watching~~, to observe with wide-eyed

One would dwell upon the beauty of the story; another would implore him when  
~~One or little~~  
danger threatened. ~~One hard-boiled~~ youngster ~~of that day~~ demanded to know  
"What's food for fairies?" Another ~~little~~ materialistic urchin showed scant  
sorrow for the sad fate of a man who was killed by a bear, and ~~promptly~~  
wanted to know how much the other man got for the bear's skin. Her sympathies  
were clearly with the survivor and the victor in the tale.

Langstroth suffered from a curious form of melancholy, bordering upon insanity. Naturally of an exuberant and joyous nature, he became moody and morose as the shadow drew near to oppress him. Even the children of the neighbourhood recognized the approach of that sinister foe, a recurring inflammation of the brain, by his grave face, his slower step, and lack of friendliness. They were saddened because they could no longer trot at his heels to watch him at work in his carpenter shop, or indulge in wide-eyed observation while the pleasant old man pinched into an angle of a comb-frame a tiny bit~~p~~ of beeswax. The attacks sometimes lasted for months, and usually came on in the winter time. He shut himself away from his family during that time and devoted himself to his chess-board, studying the knotty problems of that game until the shadow lifted. Days of agony and pain, days of despair and desperation, dragged wearily along, while Langstroth fought the demon of melancholy by consummate concentration upon a game which he thoroughly disliked when he was well. Superbly he battled with the unseen foe, weeks upon weeks, and months upon months, incredibly fasting, and incredibly resisting the scourge of insanity. He, who loved humanity so much, could scarcely bear the sight of a human face. Even his loved bees he loathed while in the gloom~~s~~ of that strange mental affliction. When the attack passed, he tossed aside the chessmen and shyly took his place with his family.

In August, 1836, Langstroth was married to Anna M. Tucker, who bore him a son and two daughters. The son died of tuberculosis contracted

in the army during the Civil War. Mrs. Langstroth became an invalid, and was the object of his most tender solicitude until her death in 1873, after which he rarely failed to keep a daily tryst at her grave on the beautiful hillside only a little way down the Colerain Pike from his home. Finally, in 1887, Langstroth uncomplainingly gave up his loved home in Oxford, and went to live with one of his daughters in Dayton, Ohio. It was there that he met death as beautifully and gallantly as he had lived. He was speaking of the love of God, preparatory to administering the holy sacrament in the Wayne Avenue Presbyterian Church (Oct. 6, 1895), when he was stricken by a heart attack, and died suddenly and quietly. One who witnessed his death said that "As he fell back a ray of sunshine glanced through a window and rested directly across his serene face." Upon the gray granite which marks his last resting-place in the Woodlawn Cemetery at Dayton is inscribed a fitting epitaph:

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