



Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

February 2023

All board members of the Johnson Historical Society would like to extend a sincere wish to each and every one for a Happy, Safe and Healthy 2023. In December we welcomed a new member to our board, Leslie Martin. We have one more opening and we encourage anyone who might be interested to apply for the position. We invite you to stop by the Holcomb House for a visit and to attend our programs during the winter and spring months. Watch for details on these interesting programs.

ROGER JONES BIO

Roger Jones lived with his wife Georgia on Clark Avenue in Johnson. He graduated from Johnson High School in 1930. He worked at the Vermont Asbestos Company from 1936 to 1940. Soon after 1940 he went to work for Vermont Electric Cooperative as a master electrician. In 1950 Roger was asked by Walter Cook to head up the new appliance division, a job which he held until his retirement in the mid to late 1970's. Roger always had a great love for bee keeping. Following are stories that Roger wrote about his first interest in bees and his work with them over 70-75 years.



Roger checking a bee frame

A STORY BY ROGER JONES

ON HIS ADVENTURES AND LOVE OF BEE KEEPING

My father kept a few hives, possibly as many as 5 or 6. Winter losses were common. Years when the hives were empty from winter losses, Dad and my uncles and cousins would go "lining bees", find a bee tree which they would cut and save the swarms. If this was done early enough in the summer, the colony built up and would store enough during the fall golden rod flowering to carry them through the winter. My father kept his bees in a lean to type shelter facing east. He would partially enclose this shelter and pack hay around the hives. All his hives were *single story 8 frame with frames or "racks as he called them".*(A single story is a wooden box that serves as a home for the bees. The box holds the 8 frames where the queen lays her eggs, brood is raised and the workers store honey and pollen for food.)



In the spring after dandelion and apple bloom my mother would fix up an 8 frame with beeswax sections--boxes as they called each section were fixed with small *strips of foundation "called starters". They were usually less than one inch wide. *(Strips of foundation are pressed wax for bees to build their comb on.)

In June swarms would emerge. I would hear them say "the bees are going to swarm, they are hanging out" and Mother would keep an eye on them as my father was usually out working in the field. After the swarm had clustered on a low bush or post Mother would put on a bee veil and hive the swarm. With luck they would get a *super of clover or basswood honey. In any event, the "boxes" were removed before the golden rod bloomed in order that they might fill up for winter. *(A super is a hive box holding frames of comb placed above the brood chamber to collect excess honey. A healthy colony might fill several supers in a single season.)

One bee hunting expedition with Uncle Lewis Whitcomb I remember very well. I was 11 years old



when we found a colony in an old dead elm tree, in fact I had spotted them first with all the enthusiasm of a boy. I teased can't we save them? Uncle Lewis said have you got a hive? I didn't have one and Uncle Lewis said I will make one for you. Soon I had a hive of bees of my own.

By the time I graduated from Johnson High School in 1930 I had three hives of bees and I was a subscriber of "Gleanings in Bee Culture" and had a copy of ABC-XYZ of Bee Culture.

The 1930's were in the height of the Great Depression. Jobs were scarce and at best low wages. Seeing a help wanted ad in the January 1933 issue of Gleanings, I wrote and applied for the job with Mr. H. B. Gable in Romulus, NY to begin April 1st and to work until October or November. The pay was to be \$30.00 a month plus room and board.

Mr. Gable had 520 colonies of bees in eleven yards scattered throughout Seneca and Cayuga Counties. After 352 miles and two days driving I pulled into the Gable yard on the afternoon of March 31. I began work the next day, 7 AM to 5 PM. The work was hard, sometimes hot and very tiring but I stuck with it. If I should live to be a hundred and ten, I will never forget that first day.

Mr. Gable, for whom I worked the entire bee season, was my mentor and teacher of his method of bee colony management. All of his 520 colonies were examined for strength, queen clipped, which reduces the chance of losing the swarm, and her condition noted, if failing she was replaced.

Beginning with the dandelion honey flow we checked every hive for queen cells and in many cases the frames with the youngest larvae or eggs were put on the outside and supers of combs added. This was done every 10-14 days, with supers added until the middle of July when the extracting began.

I became the Vermont Bee Inspector for the eradication and control of honey bee diseases in 1935. I was introduced to a gentleman in Highgate Center, Vt. who had several colonies of bees which I checked. Nothing had been done with them since they were removed from being wintered. The gentlemen watched me like a hawk as I checked his hives and found them all free of disease. He said to me, "I can see that you have handled bees before". I was asked if I had bees of my own to which I explained I had nearly 100 hives in three locations in Grand Isle County and was increasing the number each year as much as possible. The gentlemen told me that he wanted to sell his bees and that he would like to sell them to me for \$5.00 per hive. We worked out a deal and I prepared to move the bees.



Due to the poor condition of the hives being weathered with rotted areas, I decided there was no possible way to screen or plug them up. The only solution was to handle them with entrances open and use the *smoker and a lot of smoke. It goes without saying that I underestimated the preparation required to move bees during late June or July. Moves had been made on several occasions at that time of year but always with entrances plugged. *A smoker is a device used to calm bees.

The following will always remain indelibly stamped in my memory. I was wearing the same as always when working bees, cotton pants, work shirt, pants with cuffs tucked into my socks, a good hat and bee veil. Another most important item was a jumbo smoker well filled and lighted.

To drive bees in the hives smoke is puffed into the entrance, next I would grab the hive and take it to

the truck and put it on the body, then repeat the process. Now, anyone who has handled bees knows that when disturbing the guards they will rush out and sting the first thing they land on; hands, wrists and ankles are their favorite targets. After placing four hives on the truck, I would climb up and move them to the end of the body. This was repeated until all 30 were aboard. Bees were crawling all over. Each time I placed a hive my courage had to be built up. We drove to the decided location to place the bees and then the unloading and placing of the hives began. By this time I could no longer feel the numerous number of stings, my ankles and wrists were on fire. Some time before midnight the hives were all off. I had a dangerous amount of stings and was feeling a little sick but I got in my car and headed for home with stops being made for a rest in Sheldon, St. Albans and again in Cambridge where I dropped off to sleep. Arrival back to Johnson was before day light, numb but not badly swollen.

Two days later I returned to check on the bees and found they were working strong and apparently none the worst for having been moved. I merely had to straighten and level the hives that were so hurriedly placed. The brood nest would have to be examined and queens located and clipped on my next trip.

My number of colonies was increased as time and money allowed. The increase was made primarily by the purchase of 3# packages of bees bought from D. T. Gastor in Montgomery, AL. These were shipped in April by railway express for \$6.85 per 3# including queen and delivered to Hyde Park.

A gentleman in Richford let me pick 30 hives from his apiary of 60 colonies for \$5 each, these were immediately rented to the Grand Isle Apple Company. This apiary produced a bumper crop that year. Being somewhat short of supers when they were full, a trailer load of about 8 deep supers would be taken to Johnson. They would be extracted and returned to the bees and another load removed extracted and returned. By the time all 30 had been done the first supers returned were full and the process was repeated. All my apiaries in Grand Isle County produced an exceptionally heavy honey flow.



Note the smoker attached to Roger's belt



During the 1940's I kept up to 175 colonies in Grand Isle and Chittenden Counties. I produced many tons of honey marketed under my own label "Sterling Apiaries". I moved my bees back to Lamoille County in 1951. I held the title of Vermont Apiary Inspector from 1935 to 1952.

Honey sign made by Roger

THE ART OF BEE HUNTING by Roger S. Jones, Johnson, Vermont- Written in 2000

After reading an account of bee hunting on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, I decided it was high time some “Old Bee Hunter” set the record straight. The sport of bee hunting is an art requiring the use of simple tools, a degree of skill in using them and a bit of knowledge of honey bee behavior. It is not just an act of one standing beside a patch of blooming flowers watching the bees fly to the woods.

I have been hunting bees for seventy plus years and have found a great many bee trees, wild colonies in tree cavities. Note: all bees are wild by nature

I use a “bee box” or “catch box”—a small square of dark honey comb, a stake about 5 feet with a 4 or 5 inch square of lumber or metal on top on which to place the honey comb, and a bottle of half and half white sugar syrup. There are other items which may be useful. I will describe them later.

The “catch box” I use is 4”x2”x1” with a glass on one side and a slide cover on the other. With this box one can open the slide quickly and place the box over the blossom with the bee on it. Slide the cover and you have the bee. Next place the stake in the ground, put the honeycomb on top with a small amount of the sugar syrup and place the “catch box” on top with the bee in it, withdraw the slide. Next, cover the glass with cloth or your arm so as to darken the box. The bee will soon start to drink the sugar syrup. Carefully remove the box so as not to disturb the bee. The bee will fill up in a minute or two and fly first in small circles around the comb, then in ever larger circles will fly straight for home.



The time should be noted when the bee left and when it returns for another load. My experience has shown that a bee will fly a mile in about 11 minutes. I have timed bees going less than 500 feet in 2 to 5 minutes. After the bee has made 2 or 3 trips one should be able to determine the precise direction (bee line) and a rough idea of the distance.

Usually after the bee has made 2 or 3 trips, more bees will come to the bee stand or stake as this source of nectar has been communicated to the others in the hive. After watching the bees, the bee hunter with a little experience can determine the next move. One may decide to catch the bee or bees as they return and move along the bee line if there is open meadow or pasture. The bee hunter can move as much as ¼ mile if there is little nectar in the flowers and the bees are eager to work.

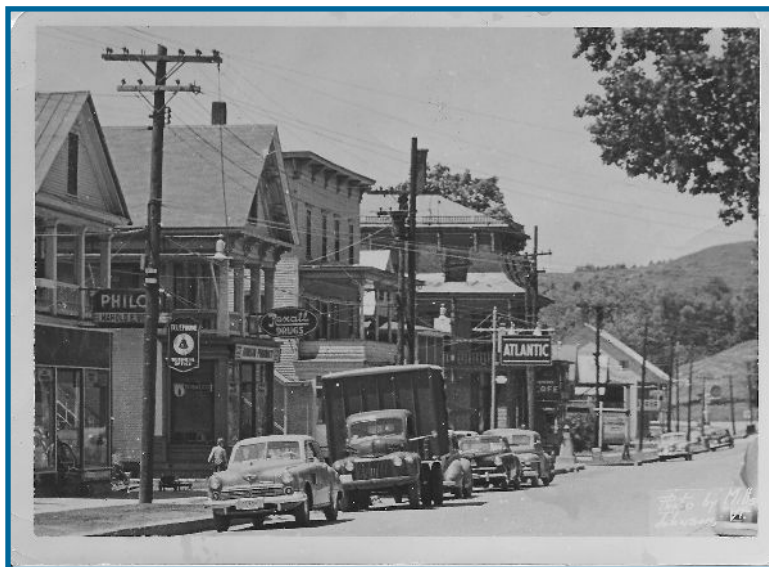
If the terrain is such that you cannot move up on the line, set up as much as a half mile or more at a place where the bees you catch at that location will fly a bee line at an angle to the original line. By marking and timing one can determine how best to move next. Pursue the bees in this manner until you have the time down to 5 minutes or less. Start looking for trees with a cavity. If they are high up in the tree one must look the tree over very carefully as foliage and surrounding trees may make it

difficult to see where the bees enter the cavity.

During the goldenrod season in mid August and / or after a killing frost is an ideal time for bee hunting in North Central Vermont. The area is interspersed with small farms and forests. There are a few beekeepers with a hive or two but very few honey producers with 10 colonies or more.

One final note, on a warm autumn day, after a killing frost, the bee hunter can attract bees to his set-up by applying one drop of Oil of Anise (note the synthetic kind) on a spear of hay or paper towel. I have in the past attracted bees more than a mile from their colony. Use sparingly as you need to localize the place they are searching for the Anise.

Main Street Johnson in the early 1950's



Roger bought his Oil of Anise at the Johnson Pharmacy. Second building in this picture.

Our Mission

The mission of the Johnson Historical Society is to preserve our history by weaving stories of the past with the present, using our collections of artifacts and displays, creating a legacy for future generations.

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