

# **Stahlman Beekeeping Notes for 2022**

Highlighting Moses Quinby

The father of Commercial Beekeeping in the  
U.S.



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Putting up the Christmas tree and mailing Christmas cards has been the order of what I have done the past two weeks. I will not be issuing a newsletter during Christmas week but I can squeeze in Issue # 52 -- the last day of December.

I have so much to be thankful for -- family, friends and you have helped me continue writing these articles. I often wonder how effective the topics are and each New Year I look back at what I have done and forward to what I want to do.

Several things in beekeeping are repeated over and over each season. For those with a year or two or more experience, I will be making a special effort to address topics such as swarming, hive increases, spring feeding and more advanced topics on honey getting, making money with bees and sharing a bit of beekeeping history with you.

I will also focus on new beekeepers as well. They are testing the water so to speak -- some will check the depth of the water before they jump off the diving board, some will not.

One beekeeper of the past that I do not often mention is M. Quinby. Any new beekeeper can look to him as an example of what can be accomplished keeping honeybees. He said that he "commenced without any knowledge of the business to assist him, save for a few directions about hiving, smoking them with Sulphur, etc." One of the beekeepers of his time discouraged him -- one predicted failure for him because he puttered with them too much. Keeping bees and getting a honey crop was considered "luck." He prefixed to the word "luck" a big P and underlined it! \* A note from his son-in-law Lyman C. Root.

Today, Moses Quinby is considered "the father of commercial beekeeping/Practical American beekeeping."

He spent 25 years experimenting and writing about honeybees prior to writing his book, "Mysteries of Bee-Keeping Explained: Being a Complete Analysis of the Whole Subject in 1853."

Many editions of this book were printed and I own an 1855 edition in my book collection. In fact, that book started me on a journey to find and buy old bee books. I know that

Langstroth is called: “The father of Modern Beekeeping”, because he observed that bees will not attach comb or put propolis in a space called the “bee space.” In fact he was not the first to use frames in a hive or invent frames. He designed and patented a hive that was easy to build and that hive has become a standard hive used universally in the United States and many other parts of the world. (Note – I have visited Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England where the Langstroth hive is not the standard hive). Even in the U.S. today a new beekeeper has a choice of a number of hives and frame sizes to choose from. As in the past, someone is always inventing something new! Or suggesting that another hive design might be a good fit for you to keep bees.

Just to let you know, I am a bit prejudice when it comes to hives: I use Langstroth hives and understand that they aren’t square as one text on the U.S. market today says about the Langstroth hive. “Nature isn’t square and nature surely doesn’t like being manipulated -- guiding new beekeepers to something called “The Warre Hive”.

The hive used by Moses Quinby was simple. Later after the Langstroth hive was introduced to the beekeeping public, Quinby saw the advantages it offered and switched and recommended it to others rather than sticking to his own design.

I love reading Quinby. He calls a spade a spade. He never patented a hive or anything else he used or invented.

The Root family when writing or talking about beekeepers of their time, said this “While I speak of him “Quinby” I do not forget Langstroth, for to do so is to read Romeo without Juliet.\* Page 297 Langstroth and Quinby Colaborers in Pioneer Beekeeping from Gleanings in Bee Culture April 1, 1915.

Items from Quinby’s book Mysteries of Bee-Keeping Explained:

**Speculators supported long enough.**

**We have faithfully supported a host of speculators on our business for a long time; often not caring one straw about our success, after pocketing the fee of successful “humbuggery.” One is no sooner gone, than we are beset by another, with something altogether different, and of course the acme of perfection.**

**Unscrupulous beekeepers are present even today looking for a quick buck by selling nucs with old dark comb, or nucs in which bees and queen are added to a box of comb containing no capped brood, larva, or eggs. Thus, the nuc is nothing more than a package of bees with frames of comb.**

**The adage today is when you pick up a nuc it is yours. Same with a package of bees, or queens. If the bees are really aggressive, it is your problem – not theirs!**

Quinby used a number of quaint saying and axioms. I have used one often to describe a person missing a point or takes some action that results in bad judgement: "I have a rail off my fence or someone has a rail off their fence."

Others include: "What you get for nothing is apt to be mighty expensive!"

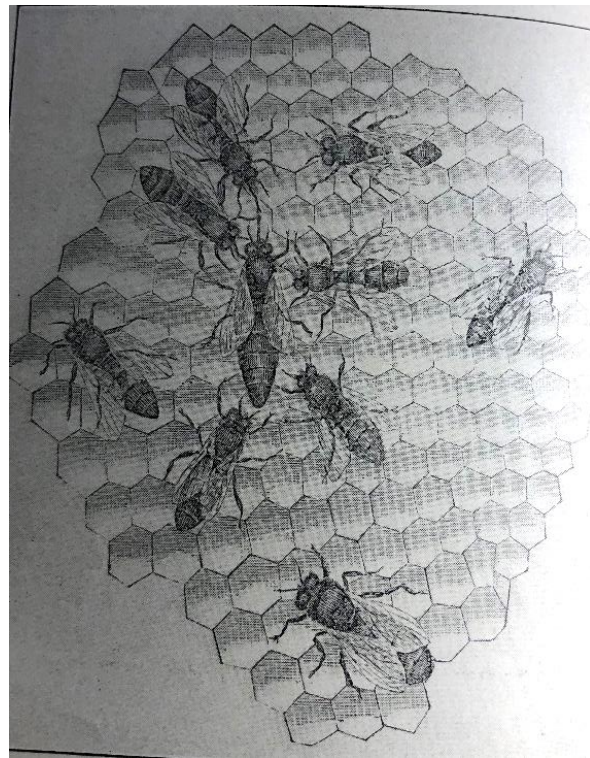
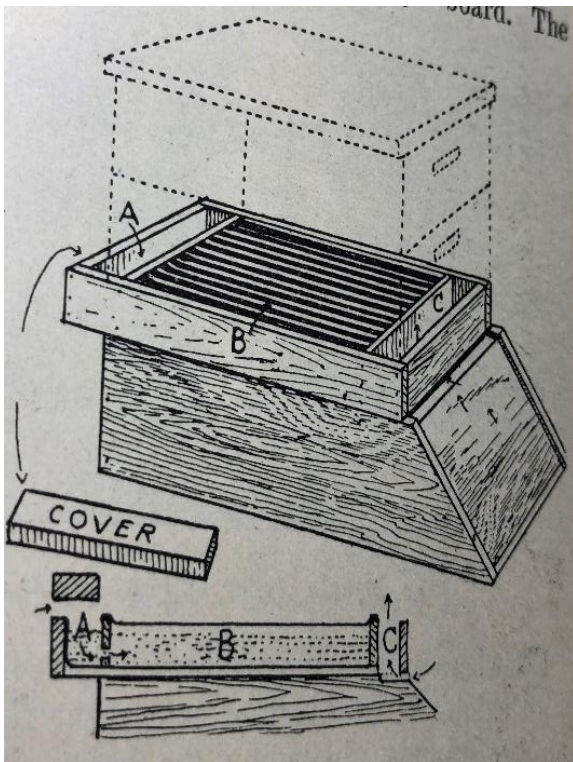
"When a man boasts of acting disinterested, it's safe to say he has an ax to grind."

"Subdue your appetites and you conquer human nature."

"Love thy neighbor as thyself"

Quinby laid the groundwork for commercial beekeeping on an extensive scale. It is reported that Quinby shipped five thousand to thirty thousand pounds of honey to the New York market yearly. He is credited with the invention of the bee smoker, was one of the first to use a honey extractor in the U.S. (He in fact built an extractor which was perfected by A.I. Root -- known as the Novice extractor -- Page 270 Gleanings in Bee Culture April 1, 1915).

He was an inventor much on the order of C.C. Miller. I am including an illustration of a hive feeder he used with his bees. Also included is an illustration from his book copied by many bee books later in the late 1800's. Moses Quinby died May 27, 1875 at the age of 65.



I am reading his book “Mysteries of Beekeeping Explained” again for maybe the third time. It is an out-of-date bee book. I am fortunate to have a copy in good shape. Bee Culture Magazine published an article I wrote about Quinby back in the 1990’s. I was active at that time writing about old books.

Quinby lived in a time of beekeeping transition. His book is still valuable for anyone studying the beekeeping history of the U.S.

We are also living in another time of transition! There is a need to get the most recent information about beekeeping. Books published just 20 years ago are definitely out of date already if they contain no information about mites, CCD, and intensive beekeeping practices.

Keeping up is important! However, I look back at the past history of keeping bees, it is just as important to me as the bees I currently take care of.

Old bee books were written giving advice to new beekeepers. For example, they wrote that only by studying the behavior of bees under the impulses of their instincts and acting in harmony can a person keep bees successfully. “We teach the bees nothing – it is we who must learn from them.” From Let the bees tell you by S.H. Smith, a rare English bee book.

We often think we can provide the bees with all their needs, forgetting that it is we who manipulate them, interfere with their true nature and profit from them.

Early mankind discovered that honeybees could be managed. They could be moved from place to place. They could adjust from building a nest of irregular comb to building straight comb on frames. They could avoid enemies by finding nesting sites in tall trees. And along came man! A brain so much superior to that tiny brain of a honeybee!

Thus, history records man’s efforts to domesticate an insect that provides honey, wax, propolis and more importantly pollination. We have never really domesticated them!

I remember a question on a test given to students that took a beekeeping class at The Ohio State University under the tutelage of Walter Rothenbuhler. The question was:

What is a perfect honeybee? How would you answer that question?

I hope you would not say, “Create a honeybee that does not sting!” That was the wrong answer! He would quickly point out that the honeybee had a number of enemies including the beekeeper that would take its surplus honey!

As far as Quinby goes, the last chapter in his book deals with this question: “Why the word luck is applied to bees!” He begins: “Some have been successful, while others have failed entirely; this has suggested the idea that “luck” depended on the manner stock were obtained; and here again there seems to be a variety of opinions, as is the case always, when a thing is guessed at.”

“I could understand how a farmer would often fail to raise a crop, if he depended on chance or luck for success, instead of fixed natural principles. I found that in good seasons the

majority of people had luck, but in poor seasons, the reverse, and when two or three occurred in succession, then was the time to lose their luck.”

He answers his own question as follows: “My advice therefore is, that reliance should be placed on proper management, instead of luck.”

I am including a poem sent to me by Yael Avissar. It is good when my readers help me with information and topics. Honeybees are well represented by poets. One that I like is appropriate at this time of the year. I added it below Yael’s poem.

Avissar, Yael (yavissar@ric.edu) To:you [Details](#)

Today is the birthday of Emily Dickinson, and I have come across a lovely little poem of hers that I would like to share with you:

### **Fame is a bee.**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

Fame is a bee.

It has a song—

It has a sting—

Ah, too, it has a wing.

### **From the long Trail by Rudyard Kipling**

There’s a whisper down the field where the year has

shot her yield,

And the ricks stand grey to the sun,

Singing:

‘Over then, come over, for the bee has quit the clover,

And your English summer’s done.’



**The definition of the word ricks used in the above poem:** Meaning of rick in English rick noun [ C ] uk / ɹɪk / us / ɹɪk / (also hayrick, uk / ˈheɪ.ɹɪk / us / ˈheɪ.ɹɪk /) **a large pile of straw or hay (= dried grass)** that has been built in a regular shape.