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11-17-1952

### Dieffenbach on Bees: Honey and Wax, November 17, 1952

Victor C. Dieffenbach

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Bees.Honey and wax.

Dating back to the time of the Pharaohs, honey was considered as a delicacy fit to tickle the palate of king and priest. Honeycombs were offered by the priest on the sacrificial altar, to make "a sweet smell unto the Lord." But no more in the days of our colonial ancestors. Who would cut down and rob a bee tree, at peril of numerous stings, and then give the honey to the preacher? He would be freely served if and when he called on some solitary backwoodsman to baptize a baby, or perhaps to unite some bashful swain and his rosy-cheeked "bibleing" (darling) in marriage.

Honey was known by the ancients to be very healthy, although it remained for the modern chemist to discover its beneficial ingredients. My grand-mother would fill a big crock with the nicest bunches of grapes (Concord + Isabella) and clean them from imperfect and dried-up berries. She would select only the nicest ones she could find. When the crock was nearly full she would pour in liquid honey until all of the grapes were covered. Then a cloth or muslin was tied over the top of the crock, and it was

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left standing on the cellar floor until close to the holidays. She would take a bucket of lukewarm water and a big dish. She took a bunch of grapes out of the crock, and let most of the honey drip off. Then she dunked it in the bucket, and let the honey dissolve, and then she would lay the bunch in her schüssel (dish.)

When she was finished — when she had as many as she wanted for the time being, she would recover the crock, go over to the big vinegar-barrel, and pour the contents of the bucket into it thru the bung hole.

“Sell gebt gooter essich” (that will give good vinegar) she would say, and it did. And those grapes! I remember when she sent a big boxfull of them one winter, with a friend to some distantly related family in Philadelphia, and was she repaid for her trouble and kindness? A big box full of silks and laces, gloves and stockings (all has-beens or discards) and some candy and nuts. “Quover mix os so goot waww os we selly draww” — (but nothing that was so good as those grapes) she said. Those were her very words. When someone had a bad cough she

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would put some honey in a pan and put in a bunch of "blower-bolsem-taj" (mint) or some "grutta-bolsem" (penny-royal) and boil it; then she added a spoon-full or two of glycerine to it, and let it heat-up; and then she would put it in bottles. It was the best cough-medicine I ever got, and I got a lot of that; all I needed to do was cough, and she'd get a spoon and that big bottle.

If she had no mint (which seldom occurred) she would add a few drops of tar to the honey; (maybe she would do it for a change) but anyway I did not like the substitute - it would also alleviate the cough, but it didn't taste so good. She used honey for lots of remedies.

When one had a boil she made a salve of honey, and mutton-tallow, and camphor. I don't know the proportion of the ingredients - but it was very good to bring a boil to a point so it will open and discharge. Now Dad had a hired-girl, and she had very pretty hair, long and shiny, and she used a pomade that was good, and also very sweet-smelling. She emptied the tin-box, and was going to throw it away, when grandma

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said: "Geb see haas see iss goot fer des blosk der neiv-do!" (give it here - it is good to put this solve in.) So she filled it, and put it on a shelf in the big cupboard in Dad's kitchen, and right alongside of the new box of pomade that Maggie put there. Dad had a boarder - a single fellow that went to school in town; and later he boarded with us while teaching school. He had a big shock of unruly bristling hair. Maggie complained that I was after her pomade; and I insisted that I was not. But once the box with the "geschwaara-blosk der" was on the shelf, we soon discovered the pilferer. Charley was washing his hair one day at the pump, and then he came for hot water, and then more hot water, and finally we heard him cussing. He had got the wrong box, and had rubbed some of that sticky stuff on his hair in the dark, thinking it was the pomade, he washed for an entire day.

I remember when foul. brood hit grand-father's bees, and they all died one Winter. He and grandmother were busy for an entire week cutting out and melting up the honeycombs into wax. He never kept any bees afterwards. but

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my Uncle kept bees as long as he lived.

Wax was used for many, and varied purposes. Candles of wax and tallow would burn for a much longer period than if made of pure tallow, and would also give a much nicer flame. To some of them was added some powder or drug that made them smell very nice when they were used. Wax was used in making waxed-thread for sewing shoes and harness. It was in demand among artisans in the cities. Wax is one of the prime ingredients of "tweik-wax" - (grafting wax) and nowadays quantities of it are used in electrical work.

Wax and mutton-tallow will make a very good waterproofing for leather boots and shoes, if it is put on boiling hot, and the surplus is wiped off. Wax was used by the early settlers for sealing crocks filled with fruit, instead of the modern glass jars. A stone crock filled with fresh fruit and then sealed with a layer of molten wax would be sure to keep from spoiling.

Beeswax - (about 1/100 in bulk) was one of the ingredients of the mortar used for "pebble-dashing" the houses of the early settlers. resin.

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hair from beef-hides, salt, wood-ashes, lime, sand, and fine pebbles, were among the rest of the molten array. The writer has never met-up with it being used as an ~~inside~~ covering on inside walls, save where an addition like an enclosed front porch would change the front outside of the wall into the rear wall of the new room.

Split oakum laths, nailed up and down, were under this plaster. But the writer can boast of some logs in his present dwelling that had been "picked" - gone over on their outer surface with a tool similar to a pick, and left full of small holes or indentations about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch square, and also that much in depth. These holes were put on at random, in a hit-and-miss manner; yet altogether it presented quite a uniform surface. The mortar was now slapped on this splintered surface; and did it stick? It was partly smoothed with a trowel. Some walls, that did not contain so many pebbles, were smoothed off with a wooden float or a board.

From a fragment of an ornament taken from the pediment of an old manor-house

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in Maryland, by my grand father, and brought along home in his saddle-bags, we discovered that wax (bees-wax) may have been used in making the plaster. It came from an ornament in the pediment over the front doorway, and was cinquefoil in shape. It was composed mostly of plaster of Paris, plus some lime, and very fine sand, and had been formed in a mould, and then dried or baked in a kiln. When crushed and put into boiling water, a thin film of wax formed ~~a film~~ on top, after cooling.

Grandfather concluded that the wax (it looked like beeswax) could have come from melting combs of honey-bees, having the porch ceiling of a former era as their domicile. The roof, being torn off or rotted, and the combs exposed to the hot sun, would cause the wax to melt and run down, and soak into the pores of <sup>the</sup> plaster.

Being too far distant to the source of his discovery, and to the great length of time elapsed between finding the tile and later finding that it contained wax (not definitely proved) and undoubtedly at such a later date he would find

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all of the remaining pieces covered over doing the grading of the place, so he never tried to get any more of it. If the surface had been scraped off, and only the inner part used in the test, the matter could have been more fully decided.

(Don't call this "hog-wash" — call it the crude effort of a crude man (but a MAN) trying to further his knowledge — the why and the where-for of things as he found them.)

Wax was among the contents of the itinerant medic's saddle-bags, and he used it in surgical dressings. All this goes to show that while many of the doings and the going-on of our early progenitors, ~~of ours~~ may seem to the eye of the modern highly educated (?) man to be no more than a crude fumbling in the dark, yet some of these "fumbler's" had oft-times been skilled men in their hey-day, and having left their baronial acres, so as to prevent their head from rolling into the gutter, they were now, in their new home, forced to put up with innumerable hardships, and work with whatever tools they had or could improvise. Peace to their ashes.

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Herbert Bauer