

ROSS, S. W.

WILD BEES. 13754

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INTERVIEW

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Elizabeth Ross,
Investigator,
April 27, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. S.W. Ross,
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Wild Bees

Wild bees were numerous in what is at present Cherokee County upon the arrival of the first settlers more than a century ago. Stories pertaining to old-time bee hunters have been narrated, indicating that some of them were quite successful in bee culture. Many years ago in the old Tahlequah district, a man was placed on trial in the District Court charged with the theft of a quantity of sugar from the store of a man who conducted his business in one of the populous neighborhoods. The judge expressed surprise that the defendant appropriated the sugar when he was so successful as a bee raiser that he had more "sweetening" than any citizen in his section. Having been pronounced guilty of the theft the defendant was lashed by the District Sheriff.

Many of the bee raisers trailed or coursed the bees, watching them as they took flight and then following in the direction indicated. The bees follow a straight line always

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and in course of time the men who followed the course of the bees became very proficient, almost invariably finding the hollow trees in which the insects stored their honey. Sometimes the "bee trees" as they were called, were not cut down until long after they were found. The finder made a mark upon the bark of the tree with ax or knife. Others who later came to the same tree and found it marked did not fell the tree as the mark upon the tree indicated ownership, except that occasionally there were youths who having found a marked tree went out in the darkness of night and chopped it down so that they might eat as much of the honey as possible.

Some of those who did not course bees but went forth in search of trees, in which honey was stored, succeeded in finding such trees and chopped them down only for the honey, destroying the bees in some instances, by the use of much smoke. Smoke was made by burning cotton cloth in the near vicinity of the bees.

Bees were sometimes found in caves beneath the hills and in the sides of cliffs. Usually the quantity of honey in the cave was large, the bees having stored it away during a number

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of years.

More than fifty years ago there was an old man who lived in the Sugar Loaf Mountain locality several miles east of the Illinois River, who possessed more stands of bees than anyone else for miles around. This man was an Indian, probably a Creek, of the name of Wildcat, who seems to have raised bees more for the pleasure he derived than for profit. Except for disposing of rather small quantities of honey about the country he seems to have made no effort to sell it in large quantities.

Several years ago when the old Baptist Church at Tahlequah was standing bees found entrance to the upper portion between the ceiling and roof and stored a good-sized quantity of honey before their presence was discovered. Within recent years many of the bees seen in out-of-the-way places extracting honey from wild flowers, are larger than the wild bees first encountered by the pioneers. Presumably they are bees of improved varieties which escaped at the time of swarming and found hollow trees in the hills and woodlands in which to build.