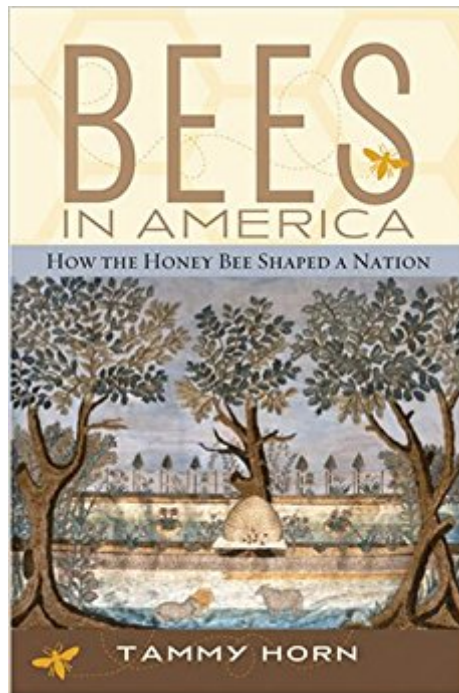




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# Bees In America: How The Honey Bee Shaped A Nation



## Synopsis

" Honey bees and the qualities associated with them have quietly influenced American values for four centuries. During every major period in the country's history, bees and beekeepers have represented order and stability in a country without a national religion, political party, or language. *Bees in America* is an enlightening cultural history of bees and beekeeping in the United States. Tammy Horn, herself a beekeeper, offers a varied social and technological history from the colonial period, when the British first introduced bees to the New World, to the present, when bees are being used by the American military to detect bombs. Early European colonists introduced bees to the New World as part of an agrarian philosophy borrowed from the Greeks and Romans. Their legacy was intended to provide sustenance and a livelihood for immigrants in search of new opportunities, and the honey bee became a sign of colonization, alerting Native Americans to settlers' westward advance. Colonists imagined their own endeavors in terms of bees' hallmark traits of industry and thrift and the image of the busy and growing hive soon shaped American ideals about work, family, community, and leisure. The image of the hive continued to be popular in the eighteenth century, symbolizing a society working together for the common good and reflecting Enlightenment principles of order and balance. Less than a half-century later, Mormons settling Utah (where the bee is the state symbol) adopted the hive as a metaphor for their protected and close-knit culture that revolved around industry, harmony, frugality, and cooperation. In the Great Depression, beehives provided food and bartering goods for many farm families, and during World War II, the War Food Administration urged beekeepers to conserve every ounce of beeswax their bees provided, as more than a million pounds a year were being used in the manufacture of war products ranging from waterproofing products to tape. The bee remains a bellwether in modern America. Like so many other insects and animals, the bee population was decimated by the growing use of chemical pesticides in the 1970s. Nevertheless, beekeeping has experienced a revival as natural products containing honey and beeswax have increased the visibility and desirability of the honey bee. Still a powerful representation of success, the industrious honey bee continues to serve both as a source of income and a metaphor for globalization as America emerges as a leader in the Information Age.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The honeybee isn't native to the U.S., but it's hard to imagine the country without it. Like cattle, another imported species, the honeybee helped transform what European settlers saw as a vast wilderness into a land of milk and honey. First-time author Horn, who learned beekeeping from her grandfather, provides a wealth of worthy material about bees in America, from the use of the hive metaphor to justify colonization in the 1500s and 1600s, to bees' role in pollinating the prairies and orchards that we now take for granted. She discusses the attitudes of native peoples toward the insects; the beekeeping practices of African Americans, women and new immigrants; advances in beekeeping technology; the role of honey and beeswax in the U.S. economy; and the use of bee imagery in the arts. While Horn's affection for her subject is always evident, her efforts to tie beekeeping to every aspect of American life are sometimes strained—as when she writes that "because major social rifts [in the 1950s] were threatening to tear apart the 'good life,' this country's arts environment used the honey bee to negotiate difficult power struggles between races, between spouses, between political parties, between generations, [and] between legal rulings." Horn's thesis is better served without such overreaching and unconvincing claims. B&w illus. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Historian and beekeeper Horn examines the arrival of the honey bee into North America and traces the influence of this valuable insect. When European colonists first settled on the East Coast, bee colonies in traditional straw skeps were considered to be essential equipment. Bees, through swarming, settled the country in advance of white settlers, and the Indians began to refer to them as the white man's fly. Beekeeping in America provided two essentials for colonists--wax for candles and honey for sweetening. Bee culture, beekeepers, and the moral values presented by the life of

the bees in the hive all had major influence on how societies viewed themselves. The parallel story of the development of modern beekeeping and the effects of war, pesticides, and urbanization on the keeping of bees serves as a metaphor for the changes in human society. This excellent example of the effects agriculture has on history will be a welcome addition to the farming collection. Nancy Bent Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It is not technical but very readable and entertaining. It filled in a number of blanks concerning bees and bee history. The bibliography alone might be worth the book. There are lots of bee related historical vignettes that a beekeeper can share with others. One thing I did not like were the sexual references. Bees were important in culture, but I think this part could have been left out and no one would have noticed. The passages on bees, sex and music and literature seemed forced and out of place. Overall it is a great addition to a beekeepers library.

Very detailed history of the honey bee here in North America and Europe. It was a lot of information on the honey bee as well as on people and events that surrounded the honey bee. At times toward the end chapters of the book I think Ms. Horne went off on tangents toward her Social and Philosophical veiws more than "bee history" but it was a wealth of information that I will read again.

This book is wonderfully written. It is very interesting and informative. My son is a beekeeper and did a project for Cub Scouts on the HISTORY OF bees. It was very helpful to him. I would recommend this to all beekeepers and anyone interested in finding out about the role bees played in shaping America.

Excellent review of history of bees-beekeeping in America from a historical, cultural and global perspective. It is not a technically laden text. This would be a great book for extra credit reading - discussion for an American History college/university course. It is highly recommended for both general and scholarly readers.

I am a fan of writers like H.W. Brands and David McCullough. I was hoping this book would be presented in a similar way (i.e. a narrow topic that is thoroughly covered yet enjoyable to read). I barely made it through the intro and first two chapters before throwing in the towel. This book is written for an academic audience who enjoys the abstract.

good

wonderful

By its title alone, "Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation," one gets the sense that this book, authored by Tammy Horn, explores and explains the intersection between the honey bee and the historical development of the United States. My conclusion after having read the book is that Horn explains how the honey bee was shaped by the development of the United States, especially in a sociological sense. Suppose that X="honey bees" and Y="historical development of the USA," it seems that Horn's thesis is that X, in part, led to Y. I disagree. Considering the many examples in Horn's book, it appears instead that Y led to many of the historical developments related to X. Given my personal experience as a beekeeper, I was very interested in reading this book. Many reviewers state that Horn's book is a tour de force among publications concerning honey bees. There is no doubt that the book is well written, overall, but it seems to be excessively concerned about the relationship between honey bees and social constructs (e.g., women's movement, racial divides) rather than any other sort of history associated with honey bees (e.g., industrial/market history, scientific understanding, natural history). Hence, I found that the scope of the book clearly focused on social history, much of which I interpreted as being coincidental rather than cause-and-effect. For instance, Horn's seems rather at awe in her numerous discussions regarding the involvement of women in beekeeping; namely, who would have ever thought that women would be keep honey bees?! Put into proper context, however, women have always been involved in agricultural occupations, chores, pursuits, etc. Women were milking cows when America was settled, so why should it be either odd or particularly fascinating that they would be involved in keeping honey bees? Putting food on the table is important - regardless if you are a man or woman. Personally, I felt that too much effort was expended in describing the social impact of honey bees - when most of these impacts were coincidental rather than cause-and-effect related. Hence, I find the the title of the book is a bit deceiving. Regardless, the book does have many redeeming qualities that I appreciate. The book is written in a time sequential format - honey bees in Europe, brought to America, and then a decade-by-decade history. Numerous vignettes are provided throughout the book that are both interesting and educational. I **\*\*very much appreciated\*\*** Horn's use of endnotes, many of which I investigated in more detail. If you are interested in honey bees or beekeeping, then I would recommend that you read and keep this book; the endnotes in themselves provide a "go to"

source for additional information. I would recommend some editorial changes if the book were to be reissued. First, the images included in the book are of very poor quality, most likely due to the printing process and quality of paper used in publishing the book. They are of so poor quality that they somewhat distract from what Horn has written. Second, there is considerable repetition of facts throughout the book. Facts need only be stated once and then built upon. Third, it appears as if Horn's editor stopped making corrections two-thirds of the way into the book. While the first two-thirds are well written and constructed, from an editorial point of view, the last one-third is very disjointed and does not flow well at all; one has to slog through the last one-third. This made for awkward reading. In the last one-third of the book, scientific issues related to honey bees are directly positioned adjacent to social issues concerning honey bees, as if they went hand-in-hand together (they don't). There is certainly room for improvement with regard to the editorial quality of this book.

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