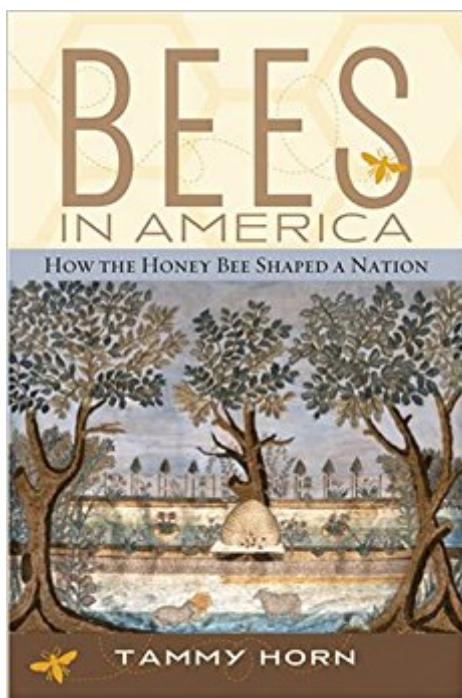


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# Bees In America: How The Honey Bee Shaped A Nation



## Synopsis

" Honey beesâ and the qualities associated with themâ 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.

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## Customer Reviews

America owes its liberty to the honeybee. That was the opinion of no other than George Washington. The story, recounted in *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation* (University Press of Kentucky) by Tammy Horn, is only one aspect of bee folklore, science, and history recounted in a delightful book full of anecdotes and facts which will spark admiration for this sometimes overlooked part of our nation's agriculture. The way the bees won the American Revolution is that a Quaker girl was given a message to deliver to Washington concerning an imminent attack by Cornwallis. The resourceful messenger realized she was being pursued by Redcoats, but as she galloped, she was able to overturn beehives in her path. The bees went after the Redcoats, Washington got his intelligence, and, well, the rest is history. Americans have always loved the honey bee not only for its delicious product (and the wax), but also because the hive is a symbol for a perfectly run society. Paradoxically, it is not a good symbol for our society. We are loosely organized, everyone joins in the pursuit of happiness in an idiosyncratic way, and we have no official religion, political party, or even family structure. Bees are little robots, and their regimented roles are fine for them, but not an example for our human ways. Their industry, however, we like; it is an admirable trait to be "as busy as a bee." We like that the bees make a home for themselves, and that they work hard to ensure that the home will be able to last the winter; they are thrifty, efficient animals. Americans are quite likely to think that if someone is poor, he ought to take a lesson from the bee. Bees were transported, with great difficulty and much bee mortality, to the earliest of American colonies. They took to the new land as readily as the human immigrants, going wild and providing sustenance and employment for bee hunters (as opposed to beekeepers). Many Indians learned to value bees and their products, but one settler wrote that the Osage Indians in 1836 had held a day of mourning because they had found a swarm of bees; it was a sign that the Osage ways were doomed. Railroad men were horrified at the initial idea of hauling

bees, and the man who convinced them to do so in 1907 had to ride along with his hives. The American Bee Journal editorialized in 1903 that automobiles had a distinct advantage compared to horse-drawn wagons for carrying bees, because autos "...will never get frightened, run away and break things by being attacked by cross bees." The benefits to agriculture from bee pollination are so great that in California, especially with its almond orchards, beekeepers make more money by renting out bees for pollination than they do selling honey or wax. Horn examines such topics as the rehabilitation of returning shell-shocked veterans by beekeeping, the tall tales that surround bees and bee hunters, the use of the bee example by sex educators (who used birds as well), the military use of bees to detect chemicals and explosives, bees in American literature and (disastrously) in movies like The Swarm, and the use of electronic tags on hives to deter bee rustlers. In an up-to-date discussion of current bee problems, ranging from bacteria to mites, beetles, El Niño, and cheap imported honey, Horn (a beekeeper herself) reflects that the American beekeeping community is decreasing and bees are dying in record numbers. There are scientists working on solutions, like breeding hives of bees that will take punctilious and timely care to keep infections low before they can spread; there may also be genetic studies that will lead to more resistant bees. Horn winds up with the classic reflection that by trying to control bees all these centuries, we have learned many valuable lessons, but none so important as that bees (and nature in general) will never be completely controlled.

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.

This is a very enjoyable book. The author has taken a relatively unknown topic (unless you're a beekeeper), and written a book that is simply very interesting. She's blended history, science, economics, and even religion into a book that is easy to read. How did that jar of honey get into your shop? Why are people as diverse as rocker Tom Petty, disco diva Gloria Gaynor, and actor Peter Fonda included in a book about bees? Not only did I learn why, but I liked the way the author took us on a journey thru bee-land.

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 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.

Beekeeping in the American historical context. Though the text is a bit academic, I picked up this book and couldn't put it down. I read it in about 3 days. The numerous ways that the honey bee and beekeeping has woven themselves into our history and culture is fascinating. Ms. Horn has done some tremendous research on the subject.

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