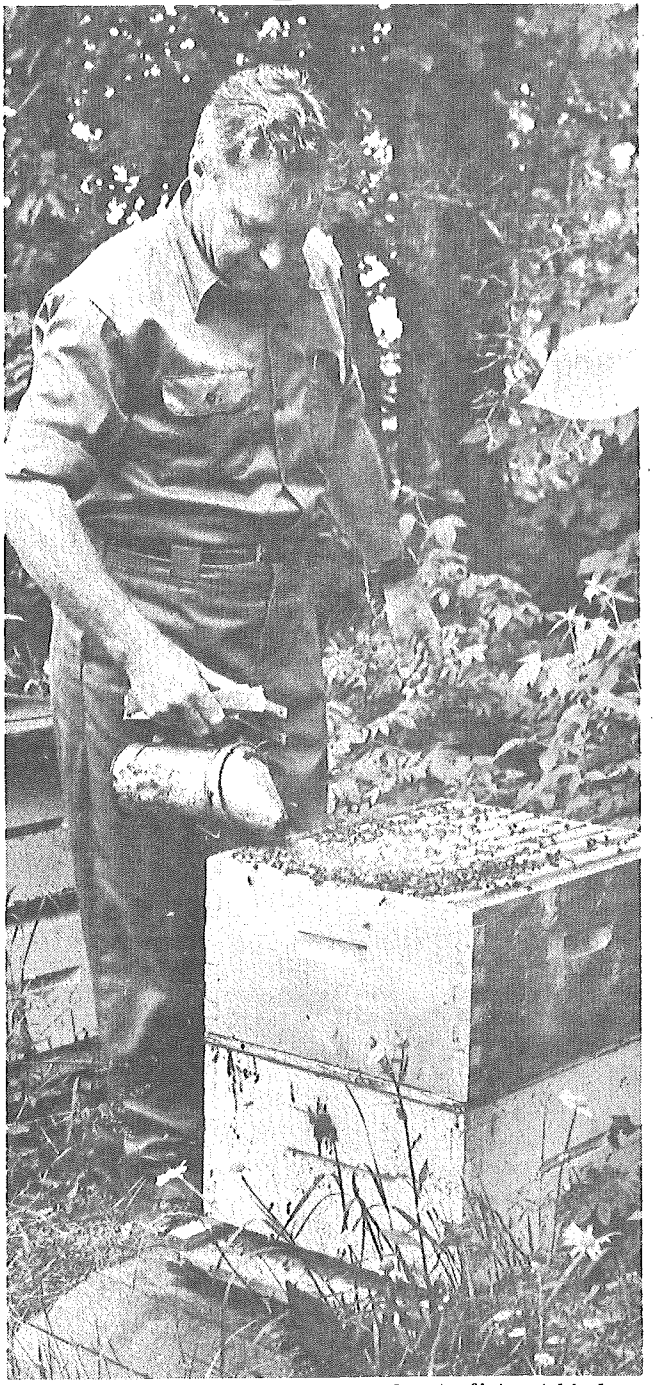


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you suspected that they had arrived  
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Beekeeper John Sproule uses a smoker to distract his bees



... so he can pull out frames from their hive ...



... and extract the honey. Times photos by Ron Pozzer.



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The rebirth of Britannia, a  
small village north of

FAST

Bethesda United Church  
11:45 a.m.

Upper Church School  
Meet Every Sunday  
9:30 a.m.

A Friendly Welcome

Church School 10:30 a.m.

# the A-B-C's of BEES

## BY SHERI CRAIG

John Sproule has one sweet job — sweet, that is, if you like honey and don't mind bees.

Sproule, of 4390 Mississauga Rd., raises bees for a living. At the present time he has about 420 hives in 19 different locations from Clarkson to Orangeville.

Each hive houses 60,000 to 70,000 bees and that can mean a lot of stings. "Aw," Sproule shrugs, "you get used to the stings. They don't bother me."

1943

He's been raising bees since 1943 when he was gardener and caretaker at Glenerin Hall, off Mississauga Road, where St. Hilda's Girls School, from England, all the students, teachers and nuns, waited out the war.

One day he went to pick up mail and one of the girls had

received a letter from her mother back home describing the bees she was raising to supplement the sugar rations.

"Why don't you get some bees for a hobby," the girl suggested. "Honey taste so good."

It didn't seem like a bad idea so Sproule bought a beginner's outfit and set up some hives.

1945 came and the war was over. St. Hilda's packed its bags and sailed back home and Glenerin Hall was sold to the Robert Simpson Company as a convalescent home for employees.

## BUSINESS

Sproule stayed on as gardener, found he had more free time and so he bought more bees. By 1961 when Simpsons sold the property to the Basilian Fathers, Sproule had decided to go into the honey business.

He moved to the Streetsville area, traditionally a bee-keeping district with acres of orchids, and built a house with a barn out back and plenty of meadow land for his hives. As the number of hives expanded, he found he had to rent other locations on neighborhood farms.

Now it takes Sproule at least three days a week to check on his bees and collect their honey. Each hive will produce 100 to 150 pounds of honey during the summer.

The hives are specially built wooden boxes containing wire frames covered with a thin sheet of beeswax on which the bees build their honeycombs.

Sproule uses an automatic extractor that holds 50 frames at a time and removes the honey. And then the bees can start again.

## BUZZING

Down in the meadow there's a long row of hives. The sun is shining brightly and the bees are buzzing around.

It's relaxing just to sit there, in the tall grass, to let the sun beat down on you and to be soothed by the droning of the bees. Soothed, that is, if you don't mind bees.

But Sproule, who has been stung more times than he can remember, says there's nothing to be concerned about. "Just pull out the stinger."

He owns a protective helmet, complete with net and gloves, but rarely used them. His standard equipment is an old smoker that he fills with wood shavings then pumps the bellows to blow smoke on the bees.

Bees become distracted by the smoke. They tend to fall themselves with honey, to save the honey, and once they are full, they rarely sting.

## SMOKER

And so, Sproule, with his smoker, visits his hives. As an apiary inspector for Peel and Halton counties, he also visits about 100 other bee-raising locations, checking the conditions of bees there and looking for signs of disease.

"Foul brood disease is the worst enemy of the beekeeper," he says slowly shaking his head. "The disease spreads through bacteria in the honey from one hive to another, attacking the eggs and killing the larva.

"There's no cure and the hives just have to be burned." Sproule inspects each apiary about once a year. Most people

who raise bees do it on a small scale, usually producing just enough honey for themselves and their families.

Sproule knows of only two other full-time bee keepers in Southern Ontario. Sproule has the most hives in this area.

In addition to bee keeping, he also raises rabbits. He owns 45 does (females) and seven bucks and sells their offspring to markets as meat or sometimes for pets (\$2 each for a bunny). "But it's a losing business," he says. "There's not enough profit to make it pay.

"I'll get out of it eventually and just stick to the bees."

## CARETAKING

In addition to the bees and the rabbits, Sproule also takes care of St. Peter's Anglican Church and cemetery at Highway 5 and Mississauga Road and Erindale Community Hall.

"Keeps me busy and out of trouble," he grins.

He has a full caretaking schedule during the winter when the bees are hibernating and there's not so much to do.

In the late fall, Sproule feeds each hive with sugar syrup, 20 to 30 pounds of syrup fed through tins for each hive with slowly dripping spouts. Then the bees settle down to sleep. Sproule either packs the hives in specially constructed winter cases or wraps them in tar paper as insulation against the cold.

Then there is the final extracting of honey from the combs and preparing the equipment for the following year.

"Sometimes it's pretty near before Christmas before we're all through."

Sproule estimates that he collects about 35,000 pounds of honey during the summer season. He sells it mostly at local stores and markets or from his house. His honey is 50 cents per pound and often customers bring their own containers.

Aynell Sproule, his wife, handles that end of the business.

"It's not bad work," Sproule says thoughtfully. "You're out doors most of the time, can choose your own hours.

"Bees don't have too many personal problems and most of the time they're easy to deal with. Just watch out for cloudy days. They get cross then. They prefer sunny weather when they can keep busy.

"No it's not a bad business," he repeats. "Especially if you like honey."