Title: Beeton's History Explored. Page 1/2

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BEETON'S HISTORY EXPLORED

by Helen Yieling

Honey, history and a hero came together when Bert Platt and George Forler spoke to the Tecumseth and W. Gwillimbury Historical Society at its February meeting. The delighted audience now has a new appreciation of the bee and the men who raise them.

Platt, a Beeton resident and the author of a book of local history, shared his research on the hero, D. A. Jones, the leading citizen of that hamlet from 1860 to 1910.

He recounted how Jones was a human dynamo from the day he arrived to help in his brother's store in what was then called Clarkesville. In short order "D.A." bought out his brother's interest in the prosperous business, ploughed the profits into land acquisition, was appointed post master and built a mill to exploit the timber stands to the north. Soon Jones' Mill employed 12 men to build door and window sashes to supply the growing community.

Financially secure, D.A. then leased his store and turned his attention to a family hobby--beekeeping. In 1870 he purchased 2 hives of bees from a neighbour and applied his expertise to overcoming the problems of handling bees and harvesting honey. He improved and patented the *Jones' Perfect Beehive*, a double-walled wooden frame lined with tin and glass and mass produced in his factory. He also developed a tin smoker. Within a dozen years he was producing 30 000 lbs. of high quality honey and exhibiting his product at the Colonial Exhibition in England.

As the fame of D.A. and of Beeton spread, he wrote articles, began the *Canadian Bee Journal* and became the first President of the *Canadian Beekeepers' Association.*

Then, disaster struck.

The terrible fire of 1892 wiped out much of the booming village, along with D.A.'s factory and beekeeping operation.

Jones focused his energy on a new passion, his village, now called Beeton (Beetown) in his honour. To-day's wide main street, with its attractive brick buildings, is the result of D.A.'s planning. He donated land for cemeteries, built the Agricultural Hall and planted the stately shade trees, some of which still survive. His donation of land for a rail yard guaranteed Beeton's viability.

The portrait of this driving force, this man of vision, hangs in the Beeton Library for all to honour. A cairn to his memory stands in the cemetery.

George Forler, a Barrie beekeeper, provided his audience with a science and history lesson on bees and their products.

He related how, throughout the ages, honey was prized for its sweetening taste, medicinal value and as an alcoholic beverage, while beeswax provided candles for home and church and a waterproofing agent for clothing.

During the Middle Ages a body of knowledge gradually accumulated that allowed beekeepers to exploit honey production. Artificial, 2-part hives were used for ease of collection and drumming and smoking practices pacified the bees.

In the 19th Century advances in many areas changed beekeeping significantly. Wooden boxes holding frames filled with patterned beeswax sheets and arranged with precision, allowed the bees to produce, and the keeper access to the honey. Other devices such as a queen excluder and a bee escape outwitted the natural tendencies of the insects. The mechanical extractor produced a marketable product, quickly and efficiently. As well, the wide-spread growing of sweet clover increased honey production significantly and the delicate flavour was captured in readily-available tin pails.

As Forler pointed out, Beeton's world renown came about because of the fortuitous combination of technological change and the initiative of shy, beekeeper, D.A. Jones, the right man at the right time.