December Report by Dick Counts

Our attendance for November held steady at 95 interested persons. We are getting settled in our new meeting facilities and learning how to make it comfortable for us. We worked out some of the issues with the new sound system and it worked well. Mr. Brantley’s 6:00 to 6:30 Question Corner is still going with lots of newbee’s coming in.

The BIG news is a report on the State convention, held in Killeen this year. Killeen is just outside Fort Hood where I was stationed back in 1953. I remember the early-50s Killeen as almost not being a town, maybe a gas station and a grocery store, nothing of interest to a young soldier. The Killeen of today is a bustling city of 130,000 people. Fort Hood itself is another 30,000. The hotel was very nice, the food was great, but the best part was the program on Friday and Saturday. About 165 people were in attendance. Blake Shook was in charge of the programs and did a fantastic job with the speakers he had lined up. On top of the list was Jerry Hayes, writer of the Classroom column in American Bee Journal, and Dr. Roger Hoopingardner. Both spoke twice. Eddie Collins of ETBA also made a couple of informative and well-delivered presentations. The Queens luncheon was well attended as was the banquet. And a good time was enjoyed by all.

One activity at the annual convention is the election of new officers. Blake Shook from the Collin County club was elected as the TBA President for 2013. Blake served as the TBA Vice-President for the past year. Our own Eddie Collins is the new 2013 Area Director. Congratulations to Blake and Eddie.

A lot will be happening at our December meeting. For those new members who have not attended a December meeting before, this is our month to celebrate the past year and share an informal Christmas meal. Our Beekeeper of the Year will be announced and the winner of the November honey tasting contest will be revealed. Our 2013 Honey Queen and Princess will be introduced. Bring your favorite dish to share at the dinner. I promise to help you eat it.

Our Beginner Beekeeping Class starts in January. If you are interested, see me at the meeting. Time is running out.
HONEY QUEEN REPORT  by Vi Bourns

Tis’ almost time for Santa to bring our little “bee-girls” some rest from their forging and making honey all year and to relax with the food and TLC we bring them. The nectar flow has dwindled and they are depending on the honey we left in the hive to survive the cold days of winter. Be sure to check on them when we get a pretty day and feed if their hive is light in weight.

Our ETBA Royal Court will be getting some much needed rest also from the hectic days of the year and concentrating on the holidays. However, as the saying goes “a woman’s work is never done.” They are busy with paper work, recipes and personal updates for their 2013 brochures. We are working on changes to the brochure for a more attractive format this next year at their request.

I am honored to be working with each of these young ladies and watch them grow in self-confidence and grace, and to watch them as they represent you, ETBA, all over East Texas and beyond. They are capable of interacting with different age groups and social classes to present easily understood information about the Honey Bee.

I would like to give credit to some people who work with me behind the scenes to make all this work smoothly. Gail Mekalip and Linda Pelham have shared their knowledge and have given great encouragement to the Royal Court. I also want to thank the families of our Royal Court for their dedication, driving the girls to all the activities, and helping with their recipes and projects. God bless you as you see the advantages in your child’s life by participating in their life and dreams.

I wish each of you a blessed and safe holiday and look forward to our meeting in Whitehouse Dec 6th.

This month has gone by fast and it certainly has been busy! On November 8th-10th Hayden and I were able to attend the annual Texas Beekeepers Association Convention in Killeen, Texas. On Thursday, we attended KLAB (Kid’s Learning About Bees) where we were able to be “tour guides” for individual groups of children as they learned all about God’s amazing insect, the honeybee. Friday and Saturday we attended many events, such as the Queen’s Luncheon, business meetings, very informative bee-keeping sessions (one of which I was able to help teach!), the Queen’s Quiz Bowl and finally the Coronation Banquet on Saturday night. In a nut shell, it was a great weekend full of wonderful activities and lots of fun! I am ever so grateful for being able to go. Thank you, ETBA, for sponsoring Hayden and me and allowing us to go as your representatives!

On November the 20th, I did my very last presentation as 2012 ETBA Honey Queen. I couldn’t have asked for a better group with whom to share this last presentation! Mrs. Vi, Mr. Counts and I went to Mabank, Texas where I gave a 30 minute presentation to the Mabank Garden Club. What was so unique about this presentation was that they had specifically asked for me to come and talk to them! Needless to say, I was very flattered they had requested me. This was a wonderful group of about 20 ladies. They had a sort of tea party beforehand which I really enjoyed because I was able to sit and visit with them a little bit. They were very interested to hear about how I got into beekeeping and I took this as a good sign they would enjoy my presentation. I was able to give a talk about the bees first, and then I gave my 4-H presentation on the products of the hive. They loved both of these presentations and had many good questions, which I was thrilled about because I do love to answer questions!

I hate to sound like a broken record, because I do say this a lot, but I will say it again anyways: Thank You, ETBA for supporting Hayden, Martha and me as we go all over East Texas giving these talks. It is uplifting and encouraging to know that all of you are behind us in this endeavor and we appreciate it so very much. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as your Honey Queen. It is in my humble opinion that there is no better beekeeping club in the world, and certainly there is not any better group of people. Thank you for your love, encouragement, for your support and for the faith you had in me that I could actually be a part of this program. Thank you also for the adventures and wonderful memories that I will always have. What I think is so special about ETBA, is that we aren’t just a beekeeping club, we are a family. Thank you for allowing me to be a part! I can’t wait for our Christmas party; I do sincerely hope that all of you will attend! God Bless, and once again, THANK YOU!  ~Bekah
This months report is a continuation of my synopsis on the article written by Andrew Schneider about honey that’s been tampered with. This section is entitled: “What’s wrong with Chinese Honey?”

In 2001, the Federal Trade Commission implemented heavy import taxes to keep the Chinese from dumping tons of their “too good to be true” priced honey into the marketplace. Because the Chinese subsidize their honey, they are able to sell it at a cheap price, putting many U.S. beekeepers out of business. This, however, didn’t stop the Chinese, who started transshipping honey to other countries and laundering it by changing the color of the documents, labels, and shipping drums, which made it look like the honey was from a bogus but tariff-free country of origin.

What the Chinese were doing was obvious to most U.S. honey buyers because of the sudden availability of cheap honey. For whatever reason, the FDA wasn’t interested in inspecting imported honey. Once in a while, the agency was either tipped off or stumbled upon Chinese honey that was contaminated with chloramphenicol, or other illegal animal antibiotics. In one case, contaminated Chinese honey was sold to the jelly maker J.M. Smuckers and to the national baker Sara Lee. It wasn’t until Smuckers had sold 12,040 cases of individually packed honey to Ritz-Carlton Hotels and Sara Lee had used the honey in a half-million loaves of bread that the FDA found that it was tainted Chinese honey.

The Customs and Justice Department investigators told Food Safety News that “whenever U.S. food safety or criminal experts verify a method to identify potentially illegal honey the laundering operators find a way to thwart it, such as ultra-filtration.”

A few honey packers curious about the honey they were selling started using in-house or private labs to test for honey that was diluted with high fructose corn syrup or any number of other illegal sweeteners and illegal antibiotics. Even then, they could not pinpoint the real origin of the honey. Some of the more conscientious packers paid stiff fees to have the pollen from their honey analyzed to find out the country of origin. Pollen analysis, however, is done by less than five commercial laboratories in the world.

Between a period of 18 months in 2010-2011, sixty percent of the honey imported into the U.S. (208 million pounds) came from Asian countries known for laundering Chinese honey (including 45 million pounds from India alone). At the time this article was written (in 2011), some websites made it blatantly easy through dishonest brokers to illegally transship honey from China to the U.S.

The best way to be sure that what you have is really honey (and not from China) is by using your own honey, or buying it from a beekeeper that you know! Next month I’ll be continuing this report by writing on the next section entitled “The FDA’s Lack of Action” I hope you all have a great rest of the month. Don’t forget to come out the next meeting for our Christmas Party! God Bless! ~Hayden
The Father of Apitherapy

Hello, everyone! This month I’m continuing my series on famous beekeepers with another notable beekeeper of the past. Some of you may be familiar with his name, so I’ll give you three clues about his identity if you’d like to guess. Clue #1: In the past he wrote a column for the Bee Culture magazine called "Siftings". Clue #2: He founded a major apiary in Vermont. Clue #3 In 1992, he was recognized as one of the five most distinguished beekeepers in the nation by the American Beekeeping Federation. If you still have no clue who this person might be, then let me introduce you to Charles Mraz.

Charles Mraz was born July 26, 1905 in Woodside, New York. He began keeping bees as a nine year old living in Queens, New York. After working for several beekeepers in New York and the surrounding area, he moved to Middlebury, Vermont in 1928 and bought a bee business from a former employer, Phil Crane. He renamed the business Champlain Valley Apiaries in 1931. While operating it, Charles Mraz bred strains of bees particularly adapted to the frigid New England winters and resistant to certain diseases. He also raised and sold several thousand queens. As his operations expanded, the number of hives he maintained did as well. At one point, his over 1,000 hives made him the largest-scale beekeeper in New England! Mr. Mraz also pioneered the use of carbolic acid as a means of forcing bees to leave honey supers. Although using carbolic acid for this purpose is now outlawed, the fume-board, a tool now popular with large-scale beekeepers, resulted from it.

In addition to his regular work, Charles Mraz traveled around the world, consulting about beekeeping methods and technology in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and South and Central America. He wrote a regular column in the Gleanings in Bee Culture magazine (now known as simply Bee Culture), entitled "Siftings" and also contributed to the American Bee Journal.

Although these activities may seem like more than enough to keep one man busy, Charles Mraz devoted much of his time to another interesting facet of beekeeping - apitherapy. Apitherapy, the use of bee products for medicinal purposes, has probably been used since ancient Egyptian times but it was Charles Mraz who brought the subject into the scope of modern science. He began experimenting with the strategic application of bee stings in the 30's and soon after opened a small clinic to treat people suffering from forms of arthritis and multiple sclerosis. Sometimes he saw more than twenty people a day, all free of charge. Pursuing this bent, he pursued research opportunities with scientists from the Sloan-Kettering Institute and the Walter Reed Army Institute and created U. S. Food and Drug Administration purity standards for dried bee venom. In 1989, he served as a founding member of the American Apitherapy Society, which, according to its website, functions to "educate the public and health care community, about both the traditional and scientifically valid uses of apitherapy."

In 1992 the American Beekeeping Federation recognized him as one of the five most distinguished beekeepers in the country for his advances in commercial beekeeping. Two years later, Honeybee Health Products published his book, "Health and the Honey Bee", which described his experiences with bee sting therapy. On September 13, 1999, Charles Mraz passed away. He left behind a thriving business, a wealth of knowledge, and a reputation as the father of apitherapy. If you’d like to learn more about either the American Apitherapy Society or Champlain Valley Apiaries with which he was involved, you can visit their websites at www.apitherapy.org/ and www.champlainvalleyhoney.com/.

Congratulations to Eddie Collins for winning the TBA Convention Short Essay Contest sponsored by Stanford Brantly. Each contestant had to explain in 15 words or less how they became a beekeeper.

Eddie’s award winning essay:

So my father would not have to pollinate his squash with a Q-Tip.
Practical Experiences in the Beeyard  by Stan Brantley

I had the opportunity to attend the recent TBA Convention. I thought this was one of the better conventions that we have had. A lot of good practical information was shared. One of the foremost discussions again centered around supplemental feeding for your hives. The message was, “Start feeding in September to ensure strong hives coming out of winter in good shape”. If you have not been feeding your bees, you may wish to consider doing so. There will be essentially no food available for foragers to find and the bees will be flying less as the weather continues to cool. Take advantage of warmer days to add syrup and let the bees feed on their stores when the weather is not conducive to opening the hives. Later this month, after a few more really cold nights slow down the beetles, you may want to add a pollen substitute, either a patty or powder.

If you have not yet reduced the hive entrances, you may be too late. With these roller-coaster temperatures, robbing continues to abound. Not only are the bees robbing each other, they have been joined by lots of yellow jackets. If you suspect the hive is being robbed, close it up until very late in the day. In the afternoon, open the entrance and let the robber bees and yellow jackets out, then close the entrance to “one-bee size”, about 3/8 to ½ inch. The hive bees should then be able to much better defend the small opening against robbers.

With activity in the bee yard slowing to a winter pace, beekeepers start preparing for the coming spring. It is time to assess the status of your equipment, determining what needs to be repaired or replaced, and thinking about what new equipment needs to be ordered. December is a good time to place orders for new equipment. Bee supply companies see a slowdown in their business during December so it is a good time to place your order. By ordering before the big rush after the first of the year, you run less risk of having items delayed due to stocking and delivery issues. You do not want to get caught with needed items on backorder and find that we have an early spring! Pooling orders with other club members can sometimes help get discounted prices. Combining orders and sharing the cost of driving to Paris for pickup can certainly reduce the cost of paying shipping on individual orders.

If you are thinking about purchasing new boxes and frames, here is some food for thought. Currently, the standard configuration of a non-commercial hive consists of two 10-frame Deeps for brood boxes and one or more 10-frame Mediums for honey supers. When I first began working with bees, a big Texas apiary operated by the Stroops family did a lot of pollination services, moved hives by hand, and used 8-frame equipment. Hive weight was a big consideration and the 8-frame hives were much easier to handle. Because of the weight consideration, we are seeing a revived interest in 8-frame equipment. Along the way, some of the journal writers began to talk about using all the same size equipment so you could move frames and boxes and everything would be interchangeable. Using brood boxes and supers of the same size simplifies the logistics of ordering and storing the equipment needed throughout the year. One size box can be used for either purpose and only one size frame is needed. If weight is a concern, particularly when the beekeeper is a youngster, a lady, or just worn out like me, two Medium 10-frame boxes for a brood chamber and Medium boxes for honey supers would be easier to handle. One of my fellow ArkLaTex club members is considering moving his operation to all Medium boxes for just these reasons.

Another piece of equipment to consider purchasing is a Hive Carrier. A Hive Carrier allows two people to lift and carry an entire hive or a single box. They are not cheap, running about $70 from the supply houses, and do require two people to work. However, you and your partner can not only move supers full of honey without strain but also safely move hives that could probably not be moved without separating boxes. The one pictured is from the Dadant catalog.

I want to thank our newsletter editor for his insistence that I write this column. At first, I was hesitant but he would just not let it rest. I do not claim to have all the answers but also do not mind telling you what might work in your situation. Perhaps you can learn from all of the things that I have messed up over the years and become a better beekeeper without making the same mistakes!!

To all my ETBA Family, Thank You for the friendship and support you have extended to me through this past year without Mary Jo. I wish you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year.
When — Dec. 6.

Where — United Methodist Church,
Whitehouse, Friendship Hall

What time — Arrive early and have your food setup by 6:30. That is 15 minutes earlier than our regular start time. The room is open by 6:00.

After the meeting — Help with the cleanup!

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Finger Food Potluck

Bring finger foods — (deli tray, sandwiches, Lil’smokies, queso dip/chips, etc.) fruit, veggies, cheese balls, crackers, chips/dip, etc.

ALSO — everyone please bring your favorite Christmas dessert goodies!

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ETBA Christmas Dinner

Dick Counts, Auctioneer at the Coronation Banquet