



April 2024

~Carol Schweizer

The program for the March 4th GPS meeting was presented by Dave Brooks. He told the story of DeWitt Clinton's role in New York politics and the building of the Erie Canal. Mr. Brooks presents history in an interesting way with a little humor thrown in now and then. DeWitt was involved in a duel with an unusual outcome. For April, we will hear from Sean Kelleher. His program will bring us the story of an early Jesuit Priest in Auriesville. See you on April 1st.

J. Irving Parent: Beekeeper of Harmony Corners

~Dave Waite

There was a time when the quiet crossroads of Harmony Corners in the town of Charlton was quite literally a beehive of activity. It was here for over forty years starting in the 1870s, that the hives kept by John Irving (known as J. I. or J. Irving) Parent brought forth honey by the ton marketed locally and throughout the region. J. I. likely learned the business of beekeeping from his uncle, as in 1870, 66-year-old Michael Parent produced 200 lbs. of honey, making him one of the largest producers of the thirty beekeeping operations in the town that year. In 1880 the production of honey in the town was 8400 lbs, with John Irving bringing in over 4000 pounds, nearly half of all that was collected.

John Irving Parent, born in 1853, was the firstborn son of Charlton native Joseph Sweetman Parent and his wife Ann Elizabeth Guernsey. The Parent line was one of the earliest in the town of Charlton, With J. Irving's third great-grandfather, Samuel Parent, Sr. having come into the area as part of a wave of settlers from Freehold, New Jersey at the end of the Revolutionary War. Once in Charlton, Parent purchased from Joseph La Rue lot number six in the westerly half of lot no. twelve, thirteenth allotment of the patent of Kayaderosses adjacent to what today is Harmony Corners. This property had been chosen by La Rue when he first came

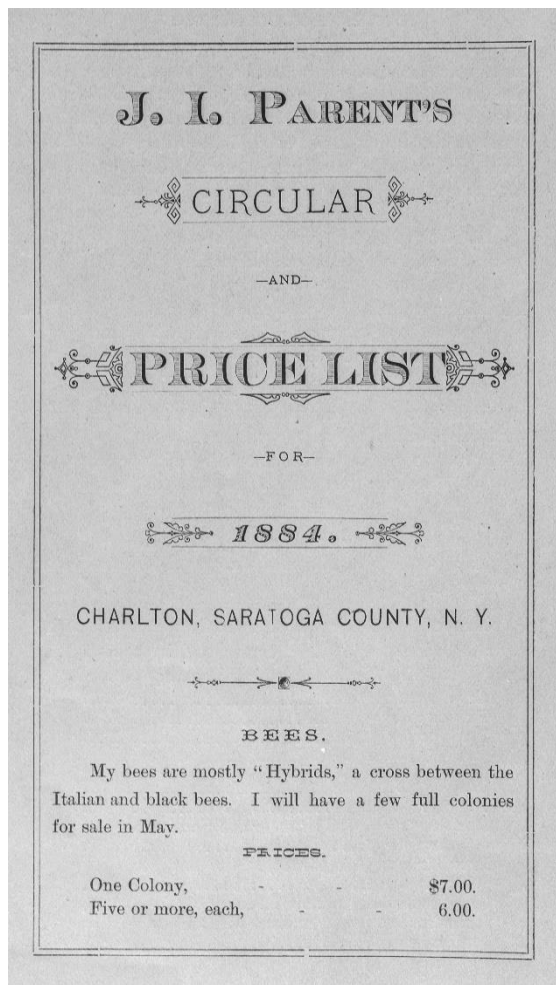
into Charlton, rejecting lands in the southern part of the town that abounded with pine, a tree that at that time was considered worthless. After he had settled at this site he realized that there was not sufficient waterpower for his tannery and he obtained the land that the La Rue family still owns today.

At the death of his father, Joseph Sweetman, Sr. in 1881, J. Irving received one-seventh of the thirty-seven-acre family farm at Harmony Corners. Over the next twenty years, he bought out his six siblings, becoming the sole owner of the property in 1903, a farm that would be his lifetime home.

It was during the time that J. Irving began beekeeping that many important innovations in hive construction and management became available. The most important was the introduction of the moveable frame hive by the "Father of American Beekeeping," Rev. L. L. Langstroth. Though his invention was first introduced in the 1850s, it was not until 1876 when A. J. Cook published his *Manual of Apiary* that details of this new method became widely known. J. Irving was likely influenced by this publication, for he promoted it and offered it for sale through his beekeeping business.

As the honeybee is not native to this continent, maintaining colonies of bees and the collection of honey was unknown in North America before settlement by Europeans. The earliest history of this country tells that honey bees arrived here around 1622 when hives were shipped from England to the Colony of Virginia. It was through the natural reproduction of a colony by swarming and the transportation of hives as settlers moved further inland that honeybees spread across the northeast. Managed hives of bees were first kept in upturned straw baskets called skeps, but with the abundance of lumber in America beekeepers soon turned to wooden boxes. Before the development of removable frames, to collect honey, bees had to be destroyed each fall by burning sulfur at the hive entrance and swarms captured the following spring to repopulate the hive. The world of beekeeping that J. Irving Parent grew up in was a time of transition, and change that he took advantage of, becoming an expert in these new ways by attending regional beekeeping conventions and participating in other local beekeeping groups.

At the 1882 Saratoga County Fair held in Ballston Spa, J. Irving offered an exhibit on beekeeping that was noted in the September 21, 1882, *Saratogian* newspaper



J. I. Parent 1884 Beekeeping Circular, page 1

as "One of the most interesting exhibits of the whole fair." The centerpiece of this presentation was an observation hive that allowed the fair-goers a close-up of the activities in the hive and a rare view of a queen bee. Also on display were the wax foundations used in a hive's removal frames and the machine used to make them. While this exhibit drew many spectators and offered a chance to view bees closeup, it also highlighted the products that Parent was selling as part of his growing beekeeping business.

In 1884, J. Irving Parent, then going by the initials J. I., published a circular and price list for his beekeeping business. The four-by-eight-inch, 4-page pamphlet highlighted the products and services he offered that year. On the front page, he described the bees he had for sale as "mostly Hybrids," a cross between Italian and black bees.

The next three pages gave prices and descriptions of everything that a beekeeper would need to produce honey in those early days: beeswax foundation for several styles of removable frames; hives: complete for two dollars, or one dollar for self-assembly; Honey Extractors; Smokers: to calm the bees when removing the frames, as well as foot-powered circular and scroll saws for the do-it-yourselfer.

On the back page of this pamphlet, he gives this description of his honey operation:

I have produced in the last two seasons 19,000 pounds of comb and extracted honey. I try to keep a supply on hand at all times but always have a full supply from July until February. Anyone wishing honey in a wholesale or retail way will receive prompt attention by ordering from me.

Galway Preservation Society, P.O. Box 276, Galway NY 12074

Shipping kegs of extracted honey, 5/8th inch wire nails for nailing sections, and all articles of practical use in the apiary I can furnish at market prices. I do not keep queens for sale. For hives, sections, &c., please order early if you wish to be sure of getting your supply, as after the honey season commences we cannot stop to manufacture hives &c., at the prices given. All goods will be delivered free on board the cars at Ballston Spa, N. Y. Send cash with all orders. Make all post office money orders payable to me at Ballston Spa.

J. I. Parent
Charlton, Saratoga Co., N. Y.

For the next thirty-six years J. I. Parent continued as both a commercial beekeeper and a well-regarded speaker at regional beekeeping events. One example of this was an essay he read before the 1888 convention of the Eastern New York Bee-Keepers Association held in Albany, New York. Titled "Ought Beekeepers to Make Exhibits at Fairs?", during his talk he encouraged his audience to show hives and other aspects of their business at county fairs and other gatherings, encouraging them to invest every effort into offering displays of the highest quality. In 1890 he again spoke at the convention, his subject being "Bee-keeping in connection with Farming." This paper was received with much interest and afterward led to a thorough discussion by the attendees. As the title of this talk indicates, while J. Irving was managing his successful beekeeping business, at the same time he also operated a working farm. As proof of this, at the 1889 Saratoga County Fair he garnered predictable awards for Best Exhibit of Bees, Best Specimen of both Comb and Extracted Honey, as well as Best Exhibit of Apiary Equipment. In the Farm and

HONEY EXTRACTORS.

"Novice" Extractor No. 5, for Langstroth frame with a space below the revolving frame containing 75 to 100 pounds honey.

Price each \$8.00.
"Novice" No. 5, each 70.0.

Other sizes at A. I. Root's catalogue rates.

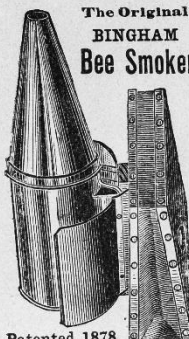
STANLEY'S NEW AUTOMATIC EXTRACTOR.

Four frames, 10x20 \$18.00.
Two frames, 10x20 14.00.

Other sizes and prices given on application.
Stanley's "Dollar" smokers, price each ... \$1.25.


The Original BINGHAM Bee Smoker

BINGHAM SMOKERS.

	Doctor smoker (wide shield) 3½ inch,	\$2 00.
	Conqueror " " " 3 " "	1.75.
	Large " " " 2½ " "	1.50.
	Extra " " " 2 " "	1.25.
	Plain " " " 2 " "	1.00.
	Little Wonder Smoker, 1¾ " "	65.

HONEY KNIFE.

Bingham & Hetherington Uncapping Knife.


Patented May 20, 1879.

J. I. Parent 1884 Beekeeping Circular, page 3

Garden Products categories, he collected second place for the Best Bushel White Winter Wheat and first place for Best Bushel Red Winter Wheat. His expertise in farming even extended to cattle, again an area where he was willing to share his knowledge. At the eighth annual meeting of the Charlton Agricultural Association held at the Charlton Academy in January of 1894, Parent spoke on the subject of the "Present Outlook for the Charlton Farmer. The *Amsterdam Democrat* of February 1, 1894, reported that he while could not give words of cheer as in former years, he did hope that with effective decisions by the federal government, "the outlook would brighten for the farmers as well as the laboring men in our cities."

In 1897 J. Irving produced two tons of honey from the 120 hives in his apiaries. This amount of honey production continued for the next twenty years, with reports in 1919 of his selling one ton of honey during that season. On his farm, the raising of cattle was taking the forefront by the 1920s, with awards at the Saratoga County Fair and a breeding program that produced an award-winning bull named King Nestor.

A lifelong bachelor, throughout his life, John Irving Parent also gave time to serve his community. Twice elected Town Supervisor, he also served as Charlton Justice of the Peace. As a Charter member of the Harmony Farmers Club, established on May 11, 1903, he helped support local farms and agriculture. Mr. Parent had also served as an officer of the Charlton Fire Insurance Company for over twenty years, having first been elected as vice president in the 1890s. This organization was established in 1859 to insure farm buildings and contents, livestock, and poultry for residents of the Town of Charlton.

September of 1922, J. Irving Parent was stricken with appendicitis, passing away five days later at his home on September 15 at the age of sixty-nine. In his obituary, published in the *Amsterdam Evening Recorder* on the day of his passing, his many contributions to the community were noted. As a lifelong member of the Presbyterian Church of Charlton, his life was influenced by his faith, as expressed in these words from his obituary: "In the neighborhood and church, his was a life of usefulness and helpfulness to others. He looked upon life as a stewardship in God's world. His was the Christian view of this life—a preparatory step to another and better. Mr. Parent frequently referred to it in this way."

He was laid to rest in Sweetman Cemetery in Charlton surrounded by many generations of his family.

In his will, J. Irving gave his personal and real estate to his brother Frank, one thousand dollars each to his siblings Charles, Joseph, Samuel & Mary, as well as \$200 to the Freehold Presbyterian Church in Charlton.

Illustrations:

J. I. Parent 1884 Beekeeping Circular, page 3, from the author's collection

J. I. Parent 1884 Beekeeping Circular, page 4

Sources for this article include the book: *Stories and Pictures of Charlton, New York*; Deed and Will records at the Saratoga County Clerk's Office; *History of Beekeeping in the United States* by Everett Oertel, at ars.usda.gov; genealogy resources at ancestry.com, and the online newspaper archives at fultonhistory.com and nyshistoricnewspapers.org.