Participation Type
Paper

Sarah Watson, University of Kentucky

The Home & The Hive: Unpacking Domesticity For Historical and Contemporary Women Beekeepers

Presentation #1 Abstract or Summary
With the rise of modern beekeeping in the late 19th Century, there was an uptick in publications about beekeeping in books, journals, and magazines. Interestingly, the role of women beekeepers was regularly discussed within many of these publications, with many arguing that beekeeping was a natural occupation for women that would allow women to experience the benefits of nature, without abandoning the domestic sphere and their role as managers of the home. This positioning of beekeeping as a form of appropriate labor for women, fits within the larger characterization of beekeeping as one of the “lighter branches of agriculture” that included gardening, dairying, and raising chickens - all activities that have been deemed appropriate for women and all activities that are oftentimes positioned in relationship to the home.

Within this presentation, I pull from these historical publications and align them with contemporary interviews with women beekeepers in Kentucky to consider how beekeeping is a site of work, contemplation, and self-discovery for women as they forge connections with honey bees. Additionally, this presentation pulls from feminist scholarship to consider how the experiences of these women are intertwined with the fluid and evolving notions of domesticity, femininity, and scientific knowledge that have shaped beekeeping since the late 19th Century.

At-A-Glance Bio- Presenter #1
Sarah Watson is a PhD Candidate in the Geography Department at The University of Kentucky.
A woman once told me about a visit she made with her husband to an oncologist, to receive the results of his biopsy. She was perhaps in her late 60s, a grandmother, married for 40-odd years. They were kept waiting for a long time, a tense interlude in which she occupied herself with the question of how she would redesign the waiting room if it had to become their permanent home. She had created domestic spaces for so many years, she said, that such thoughts had become a sort of mental tic, a reflexive action she performed to soothe herself.