

CHAPTER 8—HONEY (RESIDENTIAL)

Frank Quinby retires.



A man who likes bees.

Good farming takes brains.

When Frank Quinby retired at the age of 60 from his job as expert accountant after a rather strenuous life which included roaming over much of the United States, he did what so many of his generation wanted to do—headed for a little place in the country, his native country, Connecticut, where the hills are so green and the streams and woods so inviting. He had bought the place some years before. He and his wife Josephine spent vacations there with their two youngsters and the grandchildren, then just beginning to come along with satisfying regularity; and Jo often stayed alone at the farm, with a couple of good dogs for company, while Frank went away on trips.

About the time he retired Frank stocked the place with a small menagerie of cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, and honeybees. He had been brought up on a farm as a boy, liked it, and wanted just the kind of physical and mental exercise such a place would give him. Retirement, to him, was an opportunity not for loafing but for a challenging kind of work. The Quinbys also had a well-stocked vegetable garden, some dwarf apple trees, and a variety of other tree and bush fruits. In effect, this was a miniature general farm of the subsistence type that used to be very common, though on a larger scale, before commercialization and specialization dominated agriculture.

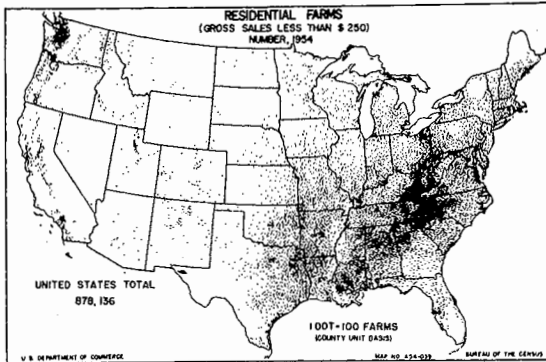
It was not a fancy place but a modest and practical one. Frank had enough small power equipment to mechanize most of the work of cultivating, weeding mowing, spraying, etc., plus a good carpenter shop. For the heavier jobs like plowing and getting in hay he hired a man with a tractor.

The bees were a special hobby, going back to his boyhood days on the farm. Being something of a nature student even then, he found their ways fascinating and thought that being out on a fine spring day among millions of bees so intent on honey gathering that the air shimmered with bright wings was one of the headiest of experiences. Now he kept a dozen colonies or so, which usually brought in about 100 pounds of honey apiece—not a large yield but good enough for that particular area. Frank had a small hand-operated extractor in the cellar and a storage tank for warming and bottling the honey, which he put up in attractive jars and sold. There was a sign, Honey for Sale, in the front yard. The sales amounted to some \$200 to \$250 a year, besides what he and Jo ate with pancakes and hot biscuits, and what he gave away to family and friends; a jar of honey makes a nice Christmas present. He made no serious effort to sell anything else from the farm, but he and Jo got a lot of pleasure out of a generous sharing of fruits and vegetables and what not with others. It was one of the dividends of this kind of life.

Besides the small amount from honey sales, Frank had his retirement income of almost \$4,000 a year and occasionally took on an accounting job in winter. He had no investment income, having put all his savings into this place, which he owned free and clear. He knew this kind of farming did not pay from the standpoint of giving an adequate return for the work he put in; but if he could break somewhere near even on expenses, not counting his own labor, he figured he got a remarkably good food supply, fresh, frozen, and

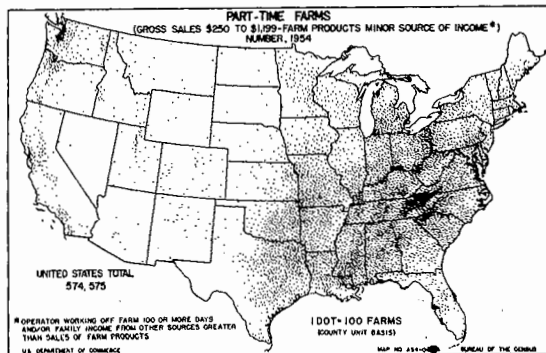
canned, for very little—with a sense of down-to-earth achievement and satisfaction thrown in. And let no one belittle the achievement. Running even a small farm really well and economically takes ability and brains.

Like the Petersons, the Quinbys are only one example of a kind of farming now widespread in the United States. There are various types, from the well-to-do executive or professional man who runs a sizable place as a particularly satisfying but quite often expensive hobby to the poverty-ridden family in the Appalachian area where subsistence farming is a holdover from the past and represents not opportunity but a desperate lack of it. The accompanying maps show that this area has the densest concentration of both residential and part-time farms anywhere in the country. They also show that most of the residential and part-time farms are in the southeast, as are most of the lowest income (Class VI) commercial farms, which leads to the conclusion that they may be born of necessity more often than of free choice. But no-hard-and-fast generalization can be made.



The rural tradition is still strong.

In this case too the Census definition draws a sharp line where in fact there is an area of shading. As we have noted, if a family with the necessary outside income makes anything over \$250 a year from the farm where they live, it is no longer a residential but a part-time farm. The industrialist or professional man who lives on a big farm outside the city and has large cattle sales is a commercial farmer even though he may invariably lose money. Frank Quinby's place might be classed as a residential farm one year, a part-time farm another, and a commercial farm still another, with no change in Frank's outside income or habits or attitudes, only a relatively small change in the farm earnings. This undoubtedly happens in some cases—how many no one knows. It may account for some of the marked reduction in the number of residential farms between 1950 and 1954 that we noted earlier. Perhaps some of these lost farms merely moved into another category.



Whatever else may be said about residential farms, it would seem that they do represent a continuation of the rural tradition in America in the face of a steady decline in the farm population. Most Americans are not too far away from a farm background. If their parents were not farmers, their grandparents likely were. We retain a high opinion of the virtues of farming not only as a way to live but as a way to build character. With fast transportation, shorter working hours, longer weekends, rural electrification, and farm equipment that saves time and lessens drudgery, a great many people can seek to recapture that experience even if they have not "retired" like the Quinbys.