

## An Alpine History Mystery – Solved!

### John Harbison's Gold - Mystery Solved!

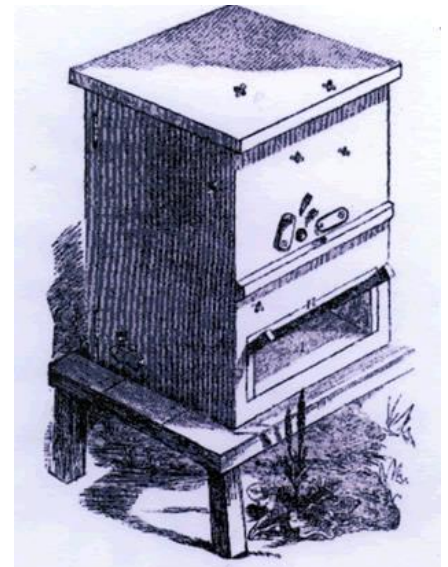
April 2014

Were you able to solve the mystery of John Harbison's gold? For John Harbison, the sweet taste of success was honey, and Harbison became the world's largest producer. Here's his story.

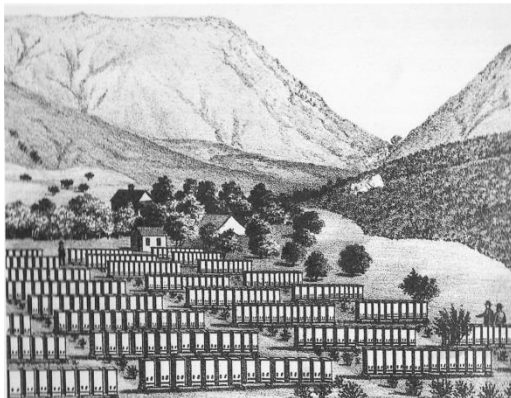
In 1854, John Harbison moved to Calaveras County, California, to search for gold. When that didn't pan out for Harbison he quit prospecting and started a nursery in Sutterville growing orchard stock from seedling trees that he imported from Pennsylvania. He also imported honey bees and established an apiary on the east bank of the Sacramento River. By the first of April 1858, he sold sixteen of his colonies for one hundred dollars gold each. So, in his own way, he discovered California Gold – but that's not the end of this story.

During the winter of 1857-1858, he developed his "California Hive", integrating elements of his earlier design for the "Section Honey Box". John was a leading figure in the California apicultural industry, establishing and selling bee colonies, and publishing many papers on beekeeping. He was one of the leaders in organizing The Pacific Apiarian Society in 1860.

In 1869, R. G. Clark convinced him to explore honey production in San Diego County. It was here that they discovered the very sweet and spicy flavor of honey that comes from the nectar of native sages and buckwheat. Then, in 1874, John Harbison established a homestead along the Sweetwater River in what is now known as Harbison Canyon. At that time had two thousand colonies of bees in San Diego County with hundreds of thousands of worker bees (the field workers) combing the backcountry landscape for nectar and pollen. California Hives were in such demand that two sawmills were kept busy most of the year producing lumber to construct the hive boxes.



Harbison's patented California Hive.



Harbison's success drew many more beekeepers to the area and in 1878 over two million pounds of honey were produced in San Diego County – the largest crop of any county in the state. Harbison's success with apiaries throughout the state made him the largest producer of the "Liquid Gold" in the world and earned him the title "King of the Beekeepers".

At the Alpine History Museum on Tavern Road, you can see a replica of Harbison's California Hive and learn more about beekeeping in the Alpine area. You can also learn more about

Bee hives in Harbison Canyon

John Harbison at our website: [www.alpinehistory.org](http://www.alpinehistory.org), or at the San Diego History Center website: [www.sandiegohistory.org](http://www.sandiegohistory.org).

We hope that you enjoyed this Alpine History Mystery. If you would like to become a member of the Alpine Historical Society to receive our newsletter and to help support our mission and programs, please send a note to: [membership@alpinehistory.org](mailto:membership@alpinehistory.org) or call 619-445-2544 and we'll send membership information to you right away.