

History and Beekeeping

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Something that has long interested me is the history of beekeeping ... and especially how over time people rearrange history.

For example, have you heard of this famous design for beehives?

- It has a large brood box with double glazed (glass) sides. (The sides and top fit over a platform holding a number of moveable frames)
- Honey is collected in an upper box holding containers for small portions of comb and honey (sections). When full the small containers can be removed, capped and sold. (No need to extract honey ... the design predates the use of centrifugal spinners, and anyway liquid honey was notorious for being contaminated with sugar in those days.)
- The upper and lower boxes can be separated by a sliding divider to facilitate taking honey.
- The brood box can be split by a divider to facilitate splits and unions.
- The inventor is particularly proud of the wax moth traps at the entrance to the brood box (a newly arrived pest that was challenging beekeepers in those days).

So do you recognise this hive design? ... ever heard of a Langstroth Hive?

In 1852, the American clergyman and beekeeper Lorenzo Langstroth was allocated US Patent 9300. (You can get your own copy at <https://patents.google.com/patent/US9300A/en> .)



About the only aspect of his patent that you will find in a modern commercial “Langstroth” hive is the application of moveable frames, with full frames separated from the containing box by a space of $\frac{3}{8}$'s of an inch (~9-10 mm) .. often called a “bee-space” (though Langstroth himself never used this term).

Langstroth notes in his classic textbook “The Hive and the Honey Bee, A Bee-Keeper’s Manual”, L.L.Langstroth, 1853, <https://archive.org/details/langstrothonhiv00lang>) that moveable frames were invented by the famous Swiss scientist François Huber.

So to call modern commercial hives “Langstroth” hives is a misnomer. Lorenzo Langstroth patented and (with the contributions made by Dadant and Root) helped popularise the concept of moveable frames in the USA and into Europe. To claim (as many US books and websites do) that Langstroth invented modern beekeeping is simply untrue. (Incidentally in Europe you are more likely to see square boxes used rather than American style rectangular boxes.)

Does it matter? Not a lot ... but as an engineer I find the history of technology fascinating.

Try these questions on your children or grand-kids:

- Who invented the light bulb? (hint - not Edison)
- Who invented the AC electricity distribution network? (hint - again not Edison)
- Who invented the liquid-fuelled rocket and for what purpose? (hint - not NASA)
- Who invented the PC? (hint - not IBM)