

He was also made a Life member, but late. Made a Hell of a fuss because he was not, and after a year or two of difficulty for Norman Tuck they

Mr. Murray Reid,  
Apiary Instructor,  
Department of Agriculture,  
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Dear Murray,

To write a commentary about Ernie Sage is a somewhat difficult task, because he was such a very rugged individualist and from the time I came into contact with him there was more that I had to do with that was not the kind of thing that one would want commemorated. However I will tell you just what my contacts with him were, and if you then communicate with Albert Pearson, who was more in touch with him over his early years than I was, you will be able to make some kind of interesting report for your purpose.

Now when I was about twenty, fifty-two years ago, Ruakura had an apiary run by a man called Trythall, and I bought a nucleus from them, the apiary was really run for tuition, and for spreading of good stock. This nucleus was very good indeed, but just after the Government abandoned this effort. Ernie Sage took over the hives, and I then bought a queen from him. The Eureka swamp was covered in Manuka, and I believe made it possible for him to run a large queen breeding operation at his home. He told me he had 800 nuclei there at one time. He also told me he had to decide between his interest in horticulture and beekeeping, and that he went into beekeeping and had not regretted it. He had considerable ability at both, hence his development of the MacVerna plum which was developed by him and produced and marketed by Mason's nurseries. During earlier years he packed considerable quantities of honey. He was also involved in the collapse of the New Zealand Honey Company, and had vivid memories of the reclamation demands.

*and*  
*Apiary*  
I came to Piopio in 1941, and was secretary and then president of the South Auckland Branch of the National Beekeepers' Assn. for thirteen years during the war years. About that time Ernie was one of the first to realise the potential of the new pumice blocks for honey production, and established a considerable number of hives at Galatea. There was a struggle against B.L., foul brood as it was then called. Ernie developed, and maintained its effectiveness, of a formalin type of product for sterilisation of infected combs, but was unable to get his claims for the product accepted by the Department of Agriculture, at that time headed by A.E. Earp. Nevertheless he sold quantities of it, and right till the end maintained it was effective. Government tried to secure supplies of honey, then a black market product. The Industry was under strict price controls, that were unfairly based, stabilisation policy demanded no more than an average payout over the preceding three years, but they based this on Honey Co. payments, which were a selling source of last resort. So Ernie wrote to the I.M.D. utterly refusing to supply. He was prosecuted twice, the first time he got off on a technicality, the second time he was fined 30/- and costs. He maintained his crop was only seventeen tons, and that at the 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb. he could not continue in beekeeping, without the help of his two sons, both of whom had joined the air force. I was called as his witness to give evidence on the cost of production, I had done a case for the Govt. on this based on Dept. of Agriculture figures of both production and costs for a one man outfit with casual help from a youth. However the magistrate refused to hear anything about costs, because he said the boys were away in the war on 7/- a day.

Unfortunately both boys were killed in the same raid over Berlin, and Ernie never forgot it, and also brought it up regularly at Branch and National meetings, thereby losing the sympathy many had for him. He had a magnificent speaking voice, and was well heard all over any conference hall he spoke in. He was somewhat unfortunate in almost always being

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a lone voice, with no general support.

I called on him later to find out about the early pioneers of the Industry, when I had a lectern made from the kauri in Isaac Hopkins early ripening tanks, that are illustrated in his early books on beekeeping, and he told me he was at the original meeting forming the National Beekeepers' Association and was the first president in the Waikato, I am not sure, but I believe he said that that meeting was the foundation one of the National Association. Tom Pearson was also there, Albert, his brother, would know of this most likely.

He used to say he was the largest beekeeper of his time in New Zealand, he had 1250 hives, and most of us were running then not more than three or four hundred. He had some progressive ideas, for instance he reared the queens at Ohaupo, and his boys had access to this constant supply while they did the routine work at out apiaries and at Galatea. He was a keen deer stalker and would return from there with venison which he distributed to his neighbours around Ohaupo. The other project which he was starting, and which was spoilt because his boys were lost was in Wanaka, which was a very good honey producing area, and his idea was that they could leave for there with queens by air, from the adjacent airport. This outfit was later sold to a son-in-law, it should have been good, a problem was that a quantity of wild turnip was gathered which was fast granulating, and much stayed granulated in the combs and inextractable, because the chap lost interest and sold out, going into large business ventures at Mount Maunganui. He left the extracting too late.

At the Auckland conference he was well over eighty and told us he had never missed an extracting, must have been over sixty years of production. In his late years he was troubled with asthma, had declined to eight stone in weight, and told me he had been sixteen stone. His wife was a few years older. He asked a neighbour of mine to ask me if I would call when I could and I did several times. He told me to the others he was just an old man.

He was among the first to import the 'Lifetime' extractors, I was the North Island agent and had imported the first one. He bought three, and typically got them through Ecroyd, and so deprived the Industry of having three or four a year, because we were limited to the number previously imported, by import controls.

One item that might especially be able to help with your project is that when he built the honeyhouse it was known throughout New Zealand as the thousand pound honeyhouse, that was a colossal sum to spend at that time.

He also told me that he had produced in one season during the war eighty tons of honey with the help of one boy, and that it nearly killed him. He then took a trip to Britain. Actually he black marketed all his crops, a delicatessen proprietor in Te Kuiti told me he used to go regularly to pick up supplies for his customers. Brewers and ice-cream manufacturers were willing to pick up crops, pay in cash, 1/3 per lb. So you can see why it is difficult for me to make laudatory statements about him, as he was so very much a controversial figure right through. I also once met a man in a National Park timber mill who had worked for him, was satisfied enough but told me he used to have to open gates for him, but then had to close them and run after Ernie to catch up with the truck. He was a colossal worker, starting early, seven o'clock and working right through till after dark.

Well that is about all I know. I will leave it to you to pick out the few pieces you might be able to use, but you can fill it out if you have time to chat with Albert Pearson.

Best wishes,

*Jim*



Mrs Curry FROM Mr PEARSON

ERNIE SAGE.

The first time I heard of the above was from my brother Tom who used to help my father with the bees. There was a Mr. & Mrs Wood who kept bees on an orchard on the Paterangi Road just south of Ohaupo. They were a fine couple and my father used to visit them quite often, the common topic being bee keeping and orchard work. My brother Tom used to go with Dad sometimes and there met a young man named Ernie Sage whom I believe the couple adopted.

Mr Wood died early in the 1900s and some time later Mrs. Wood married a local resident Joe Karl a well known Ohaupo family. My mother's also had a farm in Ohaupo.

The late Ernie Sage was a strong young man and a good worker and he and Tom became close friends all their lives. I believe Ernie and Mr. Karl did not get on too well, and later Mrs. Karl, who called herself Mrs. Wood-Karl, became unable to work the bees, and at this stage Ernie took over the bees and moved over to a 10 acre block on the south east corner of the Paterangi road. There he built a large house and honey shed. He kept a large apiary and also developed a delicious red plum which he named after his two sons, both killed at the war, and sold many trees round the country. The plum was called Macverna.

He married Miss Ranby the daughter of a local resident, and had two boys and two girls. The deaths of their two sons was a sad blow to this popular couple.

Ernie was a strong willed and forceful character and not afraid to speak of his convictions. Many a heated debate took place at the meetings of the beekeepers association, of which he was an executive member.

As his bees increased, he was one of the first to use motor transport and at one time had a large holding on the Galatea Plains where he produced some good crops. He believed in rearing bees the natural way and had some good producing bees.

His home apiaries were located mostly in the Waipa County where a lot of Barberry hedges, blackberry and Manuka covered swamps and lots of buttercup and other weeds, and on some years produced some big crops of a darker coloured honey, which was harder to sell.

Disease was a problem in those days, also prices, and with the changed in farming and the extensive spraying and clearing programmes which destroyed many honey yielding plants, though the honey was better quality the yield was not so good, and more sugar feeding was necessary to get the bees up to strength.



FROM MR LORIMER.

When I first met Ernie Sage which was in the period prior to the 1939-45 war he was operating some 2000 hives of bees ~~on~~ averaging some 80 tons of honey yearly.

He was a member of the executive of the Honey Producers Assoc and the National Beekeepers Assoc.

The H.P.A. was formed with the hope that a more effective form of co-operative marketing would evolve but the organisation failed for want of sufficient capital.

It must be recognised that New Zealand was in the throes of a slump and only the toughest survived.

Ernie was greatly ~~assisted~~ assisted by his wife and family who were involved in packing, honey labelling, making foundation, and <sup>hive</sup> assembly work. He was a pioneer in so many respects. The punice lands of Murapora were being developed and bees played a vital role in pollination of clover.

Ernie established a branch of his business in the Galatea area and produced some high quality honey and excellent yields.

He was intervened resulting in the death of his two sons and this combined with the stringent regulations governing the sale of honey, the problem of obtaining trained staff etc saw the inevitable run down of what was an efficiently managed enterprise.

It is also sad to relate Ernie lost that drive which was so much



a feature in his hey day.

He was indeed a rugged individualist possessing a tremendous capacity for work and in recognition of his involvement in Honey Industry affairs the National Beekeepers Assoc. ~~conferred~~ made him a ~~life~~ member.

To possess his first hive of bees at the age of 9 years to increase his hive holding to 2000 hives and operate a successful business is no mean achievement especially when one remembers that New Zealand was for some 15 years in the throes of a severe depression.

John Loumer