

Locust Honey Conversation  
HL\_MSS17-03\_19\_53\_Parris\_Locust\_1984-08-10  
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English 659: Southern Literature

### **Introduction to the Series**

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 659: Southern Literature. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

- Demonstrate proficiency with research tools and relevant technology for this subject along with appropriate scholarly material
- Communicate scholarly information to a group of peers
- Develop an appreciation of the culture, history, and art of the region

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources. If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Mae Miller Claxton (mclaxton@wcu.edu).

## **Introduction to Document**

This transcript represents a recording of a conversation between John Parris and a beekeeper who is unidentified in the interview, in which Parris interviews the speaker about the locust honey he has harvested during that year (1984). Parris often interacted with the beekeeping community in North Carolina, as evidenced by the fact that numerous recordings of these conversations exist; in this interview in particular it is suggested that Parris and the speaker already know each other quite well, including other beekeepers the speaker mentions, and there is also reference to a recent interview between Parris and award-winning North Carolina beekeeper John Mundy. According to the website for the North Carolina State Beekeepers Association, the NCSBA has been in existence since 1917 and is the nation's largest beekeepers association, so it is understandable that Parris would want to include beekeeping in his reportage of life in Western North Carolina.

The interview focuses in particular on the production of locust honey, a type of honey produced by bees that have drawn nectar from Black Locust trees. Parris and the speaker discuss how, owing to a shortage of bloom on Sourwood trees, which produce the more popular sourwood honey, the speaker has only been able to produce locust honey during the year, as have most beekeepers in their area. They discuss the process of producing locust honey, namely the length of time between bloom cycles on Black Locust and Sourwood trees. They go on to discuss the differences in taste and complexion between locust honey and sourwood honey, then debate comments by John Mundy, who has also produced locust honey that year, about whether locust honey is able to keep as long as sourwood honey. They finish by discussing what times of the season the speaker harvested the honey from his hives, and lastly agreeing to meet up again the following Saturday.

The interview presents many aspects of the beekeeping community of North Carolina, namely the fact that there is a wide network of intercommunication, as Parris and the speaker discuss several beekeepers who are evidently well-known to them both. There is also an illustration of how beekeepers' produce was often affected by vegetation cycles, i.e. which trees are blooming and therefore what kinds of honey they can produce in a given season. Ultimately, the conversation presents an interesting insider look into the world of Western North Carolina beekeeping during the 1980s.

## Transcript

Speaker: Hello.

John Parris: Hello [inaudible],<sup>1</sup> how are you today?

Speaker: Oh, pretty good. How are you John?

John Parris: Fine. I need to ask you some questions about locust honey.<sup>2</sup>

Speaker: How's that?<sup>3</sup>

John Parris: Did you make any locust honey?

Speaker: Yeah, I've got some good locust honey. I kept it back. I took some over to Asheville and left it over there with a guy that sells it for me, and after I found out it's a short on sourwood, I told him not to sell no more away. So I'm going to get it back tomorrow, and I've got about five, four or five cases here.<sup>4</sup>

John Parris: You mean you told him not to sell any more?

Speaker: Yeah.

John Parris: Um, was this a good locust year?

Speaker: Oh, it was the best I've ever seen. I'd rather have it than sourwood. I'm keeping my honey out of it.<sup>5</sup>

John Parris: You'd rather have it than sourwood?

Speaker: I really would.

John Parris: What does, uh, what does the locust honey taste like?

Speaker: Well, it's similar to sourwood, only it's just the least bit, uh, a little more yellow case<sup>6</sup> than the sourwood, not quite as light, and it's not, it's a little thicker honey than, uh, than sourwood is.

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<sup>1</sup> The speaker is not identified in the recording, but upon close listening Parris seems to say something close to "John" when he is starting the interview.

<sup>2</sup> A type of honey produced by bees that have harvested nectar from Black Locust trees (not to be confused with Honey Locust trees).

<sup>3</sup> Speaker occasionally struggles to understand Parris's questions, just as Parris struggles to understand the speaker.

<sup>4</sup> Sourwood honey is a popular type of honey that is harvested from nectar of Sourwood trees. The speaker explains how he has decided to keep his locust honey with him rather than send it to be sold away in Asheville, owing to the shortage of sourwood.

<sup>5</sup> Exact wording unclear, but speaker seems to say that this year's yield of locust is better than any previous yield of sourwood he's seen.

<sup>6</sup> Likely referring to the darker complexion of locust honey.

John Parris: Uh-huh.

Speaker: You see, locust is something we don't have only maybe every ten years here. It gets killed every year. But this year we have a good locust bloom.<sup>7</sup>

John Parris: What?

Speaker: We had a good locust bloom this year, and it was dry during the time, you know, and that makes a lot of difference. And, uh, it's real good.

John Parris: Uh, how often do you have a good locust bloom for honey?

Speaker: How's that?

John Parris: How often, you said that you don't get a good year every year.

Speaker: Well, maybe sometimes every seven or eight years.

John Parris: Uh-huh. Well, they used to say, you know, that sourwood, you get a good sourwood year only every seven years.

Speaker: Now this, I didn't exactly understand you there.

John Parris: Uh, some of the old timers used to tell me they only had a real bumper crop<sup>8</sup> of sourwood every seven years. That it went in cycles, too.

Speaker: Well, I think it does to some extent. Last year was extra good, you know.

John Parris: Right.

Speaker: And I never have seen one follow right after another.

John Parris: 1977 was a good year, too.

Speaker: Yeah, that's right. And it, uh, it varies. I mean, I've never exactly kept up with just the amount of years between it, but, uh, I've never known one good crop to follow another one.

John Parris: Right. What, uh, how does, uh, locust honey compare in price with the sourwood?

Speaker: How's that, then?

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<sup>7</sup> Referring to the bloom of flowers on the Black Locust trees, from which the bees gather nectar. It is evidently rare to have a successful locust bloom.

<sup>8</sup> A high yield.

John Parris: How does locust, the price of locust honey, compare with the price of sourwood honey?

Speaker: You mean in quality?

John Parris: Alright, no, the price.

Speaker: Oh, the price.

John Parris: The price. What is the price of locust and the price of sourwood?

Speaker: Well, what I sold in the Spring for locust honey, I got the same price I did for sourwood.

John Parris: Uh-huh, and what was that?

Speaker: I got forty-five dollars a case.

John Parris: A case, and that's how many quarts?

Speaker: That's twelve quarts.

John Parris: Twelve quarts.

Speaker: That's less than four dollars.<sup>9</sup>

John Parris: Right. Uh, how much do you think that you were, you got this year, how many pounds?

Speaker: Of the locust honey?

John Parris: Uh-huh.

Speaker: Let's see, I put up about twenty-five cases of it, uh, given around fifty pounds to the case.

John Parris: Uh-huh.

Speaker: Forty-five to fifty. Supers,<sup>10</sup> uh, if they're good and full, they'll run about forty-five, fifty pounds.

John Parris: A super will?

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<sup>9</sup> Less than four dollars per quart.

<sup>10</sup> Upper hive boxes for collecting surplus honey, stored on top of what is referred to as the brood chamber, which houses the queen.

Speaker: Yeah, a good, full super will fill about sixteen or eighteen pint jars.

John Parris: Mm-hmm. And, uh, when you're in a real good bloom year, like you did this year, they'll fill the supers.

Speaker: No, I don't sell supers.

John Parris: I know, I'm saying they will fill the supers.

Speaker: Oh, yeah, yeah.

John Parris: If you've got a good year of bloom, like this year.

Speaker: Yeah, they fill the supers, and some of them fill two.

John Parris: Right.

Speaker: It was, uh, they fill just as well on that locust this year, as they would on a good sourwood bloom.

John Parris: Uh-huh. Okay, well, I just, I had been talking to, uh, Mundy<sup>11</sup> over at Black Mountain, and he won sweepstakes<sup>12</sup> this year with locust honey, because he didn't have any sourwood.

Speaker: Well, I don't think anybody had it.

John Parris: And he was saying it was, he said that, uh, people are going out to look for locust instead of sourwood this year.

Speaker: What did he say, uh, in comparison to what I've told you about the quality?

John Parris: Oh, he says a lot of people like it better than sourwood.

Speaker: I do, I really do.

John Parris: And he says, I mean, he says the same thing you did, that it's thicker, and not as thin and watery.

Speaker: That's right.

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<sup>11</sup> In his column, Parris refers to John Mundy as North Carolina's "king of the beekeepers."

<sup>12</sup> Parris writes of how Mundy won the Golding Farms Honey Sweepstakes Award that year by placing first in the most categories: he won in the categories of bottled or extracted honey for light honey, honey in the comb, and dark honey in the comb, the last of which he won with a "blackgum-locust blend."

John Parris: But he said also that it, uh, you can't keep it more than a year, it'll granulate on you.<sup>13</sup>

Speaker: Well, it might do it. Now, I wouldn't say just that. I don't know that I've ever had any, I mean, tried to keep any pure locust for any length of time, but, uh, I'd busy be slow about it[?].<sup>14</sup>

John Parris: But he said, you know, sourwood keeps longer.

Speaker: Yeah.

John Parris: Without turning to granulate. But he said, he said that locust does start to granulate about, after you've kept it a year. So it, uh, loses something.

Speaker: Well, I guess he's possibly right on that.

John Parris: Well, I just wanted to, uh – was anybody else up your way having locust this year?

Speaker: Yeah.

John Parris: Did you hear of any other beekeepers having locust?

Speaker: Yeah, most everybody here had some. Tom Madden,<sup>15</sup> he's had quite a bit.

John Parris: Uh-huh.

Speaker: The Rices down here, they've got a lot of bees down next to Heady Mountain, you know.<sup>16</sup> They've had some good locust honey.

John Parris: When did the locust flow come in? In May?

Speaker: Uh, last of May.

John Parris: Uh-huh.

Speaker: Well, it comes in really on about the first, but I mean you pull your supers about the last of May.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Also known as crystallizing or sugaring, granulating refers to when pure honey solidifies after a length of time.

<sup>14</sup> Exact wording unclear, but speaker seems to say that he has never kept locust honey long enough to confirm Mundy's comments about granulating.

<sup>15</sup> Presumably a neighbor and fellow beekeeper.

<sup>16</sup> Presumably a beekeeping family who either lives near Heady Mountain in Jackson County, NC or keeps their hives there.

<sup>17</sup> Speaker seems to explain that his bees began harvesting nectar from the Black Locusts during the beginning of May, and that he collected honey from their hives at the end of May.

John Parris: Pull your supers the last of May. Right. Okay, then, I'll see you Saturday, then.

Speaker: Okay, John.

John Parris: I'll be there.

Speaker: Okay.

## Works Cited

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- Parris, John. "It's Been a Sorry Year for Sourwood Honey." *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 9 Aug. 1984, [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com).  
In his column, John Parris describes the honey competition discussed during the interview, mentioning the shortage of sourwood honey and how John Mundy won at the competition in several categories.
- "What Is Honey Granulation (Crystallization or Sugaring)?" *Sioux Honey Association Co-op*, <https://siouxhoney.com/faq/honey-granulation/>.  
This article contextualized the process of honey granulation.