Hofmann Farm and Apiaries Historical Evaluation
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Hofmann Farm and Apiaries • **Chronology of Events**

1846, February 13  Valentine Hofmann was born in Moravia, a region of Central Europe in what is now the eastern Czech Republic.

1859, November 1  The land currently known as the Hofmann Farm near Janesville, Minnesota was granted to Joseph Crown by President James Buchanan, through a Bounty Land Patent, for Crown’s service in the war with Mexico.

Circa 1871  Valentine Hofmann emigrated to the United States.

1872, June 9  Valentine and Rosalia Frodl, his Moravian fiancée, were the first couple married at the newly built St. Jarleth Catholic Church in Waseca County, Minnesota.

1873, December 8  Valentine and Rosalia Hofmann purchased forty acres of land in a virgin forest parcel approximately one mile northwest of the church site.

1874  The couple moved into a small one-room log cabin on their land.

1875  The Hofmanns purchased an additional sixty acres for their farm.

1884  The Hofmanns built a simple wood-frame structure on the farm site to house their family, now including their four sons: Emil, Henry, Adolf, and Julius.

1880s-90s  The land was cleared for farming, and debt was paid down as income grew from their labors. By the end of the century all four boys had left the farm.

1900, April 29  Valentine died at age 54 of cancer.

1900  Emil, the only son interested in farming the family land, returned from California where he had been working, to continue the family business and support his widowed mother.

Circa 1901  Emil constructed a hog barn and began raising Chester White pigs.

1902-1903  Emil noticed that a swarm of honey bees had temporarily landed in a bush near the Farmhouse. He constructed a makeshift hive which the bees began to inhabit.

1903-07  Emil educated himself on beekeeping and began harvesting honey from a hive-yard adjacent to the pig barn (see figure 1).

Circa 1904  Emil began growing alsike clover, both for pasturing and as a source of nectar for the bees.

1906, January 22  Emil married Clara Sterling and they eventually had two children, Gretchen and Charles.

1906  Emil began marketing clover seed to local farmers.
Circa 1908  The hog barn was remodeled to provide space for a workshop, honey extraction facility, and storage space.

1916, August  An article in the American Bee Journal praises Emil Hofmann’s beekeeping “neatness with good practices and extensive production.”

Circa 1921  A concrete water reservoir was constructed to provide water to the Farmhouse and the Honey House (formerly the hog barn). The Farmhouse was expanded to include a bathroom, an enclosed porch, a small office, a wood and coal-burning furnace, and an expanded basement.

1923  Emil designed and constructed major additions to the Honey House including: a three-story wing that included a steam-heated warming room, an extracting room, a floor for storage, and a manual elevator that provided service to all three floors.

1925  The American Bee Journal published an extensive article about Emil and the Hofmann Apiaries with a focus on the creative design of the Honey House.

1928  The American Bee Journal published an article about unique design and innovative beekeeping practices at the Hofmann Apiaries.

A newspaper article advertised an upcoming beekeepers event to be held at the Hofmann Apiaries. Attendees included the editor of American Bee Journal, a former U.S. Department of Agriculture beekeeping specialist, University of Minnesota department heads, and the State of Minnesota apiary inspector.

1929, September  Emil shipped 50,000 pounds of honey to a Minneapolis warehouse.

1929, October  The Wall Street stock market plummeted.

1930, December 30  Emil mortgaged the farm and the stored honey to the Janesville State Bank.

1933  Emil, hoping to begin climbing out of debt, began farming again and turned the farm’s beekeeping responsibilities over to his son Charles.

1933, July 17  The bank issued a foreclosure notice with a planned sale of the farm property.

The bank took over official ownership of the farm after no bidders attended the sale.

1934, July 13  Emil died at the age of 59 after a bout with pneumonia.

1934  Charles, then 26, took on the role of supporting his aging mother, as well as the task of repaying his father’s debt, and continued the beekeeping business. Through a Federal Land Bank loan Charles took back ownership of the Hofmann Farm.

1940  Charles served as one of the founders of the American Beekeeping Federation.

1941  Charles married Ellen Hendricks of Fulda, Minnesota. Charles and Ellen would have four children: Laurence (Larry), Ann, Gregory, and Mary Lynn.
1951
Charles served as the Vice-President of the American Beekeeping Federation.

Mid-20th Century
Charles served as the three-term chairman of the Haydak Research Fund and as the State Apiary Inspector and provided photography of honey bees for bee journals and other publications.

Charles became an avid amateur photographer and began using lens extenders with his Leica IIIf and later his Nikon close-up lens to record the daily life of bees at the farm.

1963
Charles, at age 57, stopped using bee cellars and began to winter bees outdoors.

1964
Charles created a slide lecture titled “The World of Bees” and later spent the off seasons presenting his study at the University of Minnesota and schools throughout southern Minnesota, eastern South Dakota and northern Iowa.

1985
Charles, at age 77, retired from the beekeeping business. The business and equipment was sold to nearby beekeepers, assuring that there were bees around the farm site throughout the 1990s.

1998
*The World of Bees* was converted into the VHS format and won a national Telly Award, recognized as an outstanding video production.

2002
Charles and Ellen choose to place fifteen acres of the farm into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program with one five-acre plot planted with deciduous trees, and the remaining ten acres planted with prairie grass and flowers.
The Hofmann Farm & Apiaries is located near Lake Elysian, approximately 80 miles south and west of the Twin Cities, and 5 miles north and east of Janesville, Minnesota, at 4661 420th Avenue.
Hofmann Farm and Apiaries • Site Map & Satellite View
Hofmann Farm is located approximately 5 miles north and east of Janesville Minnesota. The 5.26 acre, irregular parcel that remains of the once nearly 100 acre farm, has a 536 foot (east-west) frontage on 240th Avenue, and is approximately 528 feet deep (north-south). The grounds are primarily covered in grass with a variety of tree types planted around the periphery of the significant farm and apiary yards (see satellite view above). There is a circular drive that loops off of 240th Avenue and provides access to the farm’s garage and paths to the outbuildings. The site contains all the contributing farm and apiary related structures.

The primary resources from the beekeeping period of significance (1903-1934) are the:

**Farmhouse** – *(Figure 2, Photographs 1-2)*

The original Farmhouse stands facing south to 240th Avenue. Though the inside has been altered, the exterior maintains the same footprint as it did after the 1921 alterations. The vernacular Homestead farmhouse has an asphalt shingled roof, and is sheathed in aluminum siding. The fenestration displays a variety of original and later window openings. The southeast corner of the front, south-facing elevation displays a mid-century open porch with a limestone-faced base.

**Reservoir** – *(Photographs 3-5)*

Built in 1921, the water reservoir is framed by a short field stone wall with a concrete domed cover. A rectilinear opening at the top is coved with a metal sleeved wood frame cover.

**Pump House** – *(Photographs 3, 5)*

The Pump House is a small, wood frame gabled shed that sits adjacent to the Reservoir. The structure contained electrical circuitry for the operation of the farm’s water pumping system. The structure is sheathed in stucco and some lap siding in the end gables. The window openings support 2/2 wood frame, double-hung windows. Access is provided via a vertical wood plank door.

**Winter Bee Cellar** – *(Figure 8, Photographs 3, 6, 7-10)*

The Winter Bee Cellar is located to the west of the Honey House and adjacent to the Reservoir and Pump House, all of which are north and west of the Home Yard (main hive yard). The Bee Cellar is a wood frame structure clad in corrugated tin sheeting. The shed has a gabled roof and sits on a raised fieldstone foundation that is surrounded by an earth berm. Access to the upper level is provided via a single door under the east-facing gable. Access to the cellar is provided by a hurricane door in the east berm.

The upper level interior is basically open with a wire floor supporting a layer of straw. The lower area, where the bees were wintered-over displays the wire and hay ceiling, side walls of field stone, and a hay-covered floor.

**Smoking Equipment Shed** – *(Photograph 10)*

The early-mid 20th century, free-standing container sits between the Honey House and the Winter Bee Cellar. The small, circular tin cabinet was used to store the hive smoking equipment, including the bellows
(still extant inside) and smoking fuel such as burlap sheets. The storage unit sits on a concrete foundation and displays a single hinged door on the easterly side.

**Honey House – (Figures 9-12, Photographs 4, 11-20)**

This barn-like structure was the center of the apiary’s operation. The building has three major massings that include a one-and-a-half story gambrel-roofed west wing, a two-story with raised basement central block, and a one-and-a-half story gambrel-roofed east wing/garage. The building’s entire roof displays aged asphalt shingles. The west wing elevations are sheathed in lap siding, and the elevations of the center mass and east wing display cement-fibrous shingles.

**Honey House west wing**

The west wing originally housed the office, the workshop, and storage space for the business. The interiors have retained their original integrity and some, if not most, of their original furniture and built-ins.

The west-facing elevation of the west massing displays an end gambrel and lap siding. The fenestration includes an entry door at grade with a 2/2 wood-frame window to the south. On the upper level under the gambrel is a centered loft door flanked by 4/4 wood-frame windows.

The south elevation displays a series of paired 1by1 wood windows, a single 1by1 window and two access doors. In the roof there is a shed dormer with a pair of 2/2 double-hung wood windows.

The north elevation displays a series of paired four-paned wood windows and an access door with a six-paned window. On the north side the wing sits partially on an exposed field stone foundation.

There is a brick chimney projecting directly north of the roof ridge near the central mass.

**Honey House central block**

The central portion of the structure housed the hive warming room, the honey extracting room, the utility lift, and storage areas. The rooms retain their original finishes and relationships.

The axis of the main mass is north south with open gambrels at both ends.

The south-facing elevation shows two window openings in the upper story under the gambrel. The westerly opening displays what remains of an upper deteriorating 6/1 wood frame window (boarded over on the inside) and to the east a newer 1/1 aluminum-framed storm window.

The south-facing first floor displays three window openings covered with 1/1 aluminum storm windows. Originally the first floor had 6/6 wood frame, double-hung windows. Below on a raised basement, sheathed in stucco, are two openings that display their original 6/6 wood frame, double-hung windows, with aluminum storm windows over both.

The east and west facing elevations on the first floor both display two window openings with 1/1 aluminum storm windows over a stucco-covered, raised basement.

The fenestration on the north-facing elevation of the central mass consists of two 1/1 wood windows with aluminum storms on the upper story under the gambrel and two larger window
openings with 1/1 windows behind aluminum storm windows on the first floor. At the basement level there is a projecting entry vestibule sheathed in lap siding, displaying an original 6/6 double-hung, wood window adjacent to an access door.

There is a large brick chimney stack that projects out of the roof adjacent to the southerly roof ridge.

**Honey House east wing**
This wing houses the garage at grade and a storage area. Interior rooms have retained their original integrity.

The east wing is sheathed in cement fibrous shingles, and on the south-facing facade displays a hinged, windowless, vertical-board barn door. The east elevation displays a single 6/6 original wood, double-hung window in the gambrel, and two 6/6 original wood, double-hung windows on the first floor. On the north elevation there are two 6/6 original wood, double-hung windows above a stucco-sheathed raised basement.

**Wax House** – *(Photographs 2, 22-24)*
The 1926 Wax House is located to the north of the Farmhouse. The one-story rectilinear structure has a low-pitched, asphalt-shingled, gabled roof, and ship-lap wood siding. A large brick chimney stack projects from the southerly end of the roof ridge. A shorter gabled wing projects off the north east corner of the building. The building displays original 4/4 wood frame, double-hung windows with the south-facing facade composed of a small loft door under the gable with an entry door flanked by windows below. The interior remains open, although the walls have been insulated since the period of significance (1903-1934).

**Home and North Yards** – *(Home Yard: See Figures 1-4, 8, 12, Photograph 4, 11  North Yard: Photograph 21)*
The Home Yard was located along and just north of 420th Avenue. No structures have been built on the original open yard. The North Yard, located north of the Wax House, remains open and well-defined by the surrounding vegetation.

**Heavy Equipment Shed** – *(Photographs 2, 24)*
The wood shed with a gabled corrugated tin roof is one of the oldest structures on the site. The wood structure displays an irregular window pattern on its south-facing facade and large swinging barn doors on its west elevation. The structure housed the threshing and tractor equipment used in managing the surrounding bee-feeding clover fields.

**Non-contributing Outbuildings** – Several additional original outbuildings and resources still exist, including an original corn crib (the oldest remaining structure on the property, from the late 1800s) and a few other later farm structures, including a modern pole barn.

**Landscape resources** – although no hives still stand, the Home and North Yards are still evident. Most of the surrounding fields have been sold off, but fifteen acres of the farm have been placed in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, including some of the land farmed for alsike clover (now planted as indigenous prairie).
Hofmann Farm and Apiaries • Statement of Significance

Hofmann Farm (originally known as the Hofmann Apiaries), located at 4661-420th Avenue, near Janesville, Minnesota, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, with the Area of Significance being Agriculture. Its level of significance is both local and statewide, due to its prominence in the industry and high honey production levels. It relates to the state context of “Railroads and Agricultural Development: 1870-1950.” The period of significance is from 1900 when, after the death of his father, Emil Hofmann took over ownership of the Hofmann Farm, to 1963 when Emil’s son Charles, at age 57, stopped wintering the bees in cellars and began the process of reducing his apiary workload. The business continued operation under Charles Hofmann’s leadership until 1985 when he closed the Hofmann Apiary and sold off the majority of the farm’s hives and honey production equipment.

The importance of the Hofmann Farm is in its role as a large and innovative apiary. It was the largest beekeeping facility in Minnesota and likely in the Upper Midwest, and achieved significant national recognition for its beekeeping practices. The Hofmann Farm is also one of the few historic apiaries in the nation, with the only other bee-related listing on the Register being Langstroth Cottage, the home of noted American beekeeper L.L. Langstroth, listed to the Register in 1976.

Introduction

Hofmann Farm is significant both for its role in the American beekeeping industry, and how that stature was achieved. The farm started out like any other industrious, immigrant-owned Minnesota farmstead, and founded its beekeeping endeavors on a chance encounter Emil Hofmann had with a natural swarm of bees around the turn of the century. From that modest beginning, Hofmann Farm built a multi-generational apiary that was one of the honey-producing leaders in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest.

Emil Hofmann was especially known for his innovative techniques, which included early adoption of the Dadant hive\(^1\), and for unusual feeding and over-wintering techniques, all of which led to highly efficient production. They were also known for the cleanliness of the facility, especially the expansive Honey House. When Emil’s son Charles took over the business he became noteworthy for his public administrative contributions to the beekeeping field.

Most of the original bee-related buildings remain today, as well as a few of the production resources and some of the original hive yards and clover fields. This gives Hofmann Farm a highly evocative sense of place.

Beekeeping in America

Beekeeping is one of the world’s earliest agricultural industries, with hives found in Israel dating back to the 9\(^{th}\) century BCE. (Beelogics website). The first colonies of honeybees in America were shipped from England  

\(^{1}\) The Dadant family, which emigrated from France to America in 1863, became the intellectual heirs to Langstroth’s work, eventually gaining the rights to The Hive and the Honeybee in 1885 and translating it into Italian, Russian, Spanish and Polish (Dadant website). The Dadant hive was very similar to Langstroth’s innovation, but somewhat larger — a ten-frame Dadant used the larger Quinby dimensions and so was roughly equivalent to a 12-frame Langstroth hive. Dadant enthusiasts claimed that the structures had higher production, were more efficient, swarmed less, and wintered better (Root 1917, 365).
to Virginia in 1622, and to other colonies soon after (Oertel 1980, 2). The first hives cultivated in America were based on the European straw skep, soon to be followed by wooden box hives (Oertel 1980, 2).

The problem with these early hives came from the ways bees construct the honeycombs inside. Bees extrude a waxy substance to create the combs, then create a substance called “bee glue” to attach the combs to the hive walls. At harvest time, the beekeeper needed to smoke out the bees and destroy the hive in order to remove the honey. This process generally decimated the bee colony, so that the beekeeper needed to start anew the next year. The process also wasted a great deal of product.

In 1851, American minister, educator, and amateur scientist Lorenzo Lorraine (L.L.) Langstroth revolutionized American honey production by inventing the movable frame hive. (Langstroth nomination 1976, 3). Langstroth, who had begun working with bees as a hobby in the 1840s, had become a self-taught expert on honey production. He noted that the hives held a “bee space” — an area of about 5/16ths of an inch that the bees naturally kept open. He applied this to the whole hive, creating a box filled with panels, each 5/16ths of an inch apart, all easily removed from the hive and replaced after harvest. Langstroth published his classic work *The Hive and the Honeybee* in 1853, and became known as the “Father of American Beekeeping.” (Langstroth nomination 1976, 3). “Langstroth Cottage,” the Oxford Ohio home in which he lived from 1858-1887, is the only bee-related resource currently on the National Register.

New methods of beekeeping followed very quickly after Langstroth’s discoveries, including wax-comb foundations and alternative structures (such as the Quinby and Dadant hives). Additional innovations included new extracting methods such as the centrifugal honey extractor, more consistent smoking techniques, and even an evolved beekeeper’s veil. Emil Hofmann became an early proponent of the Dadant hive, which the Hofmann Apiaries employed exclusively.

Another major innovation in American beekeeping was the introduction of Italian bee stock, beginning in 1860 (Oertel 1980, 4). The Italian bees were considered superior for a number of reasons, including better temperament and a resistance to disease, especially one known as the European foulbrood. An American-Italian hybrid strain soon became the dominant American domesticated honeybee. In the early 20th century, Hofmann Farm placed numerous advertisements in the *American Bee Journal* referencing their Italian stock.

Most American apiaries started small, often as elements of other agricultural endeavors, much as Hofmann Farm did. Due to transportation and storage issues, as well as the challenges inherent in managing larger enterprises with multiple colonies, most were exclusively local and served small areas.

Commercial beekeeping hit its peak just after World War I, due to a confluence of refined techniques, higher demand, and better distribution. Production then dropped as refined sugar and corn syrup products

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2 A *skep* is a man-made domed hive constructed of twisted straw that housed a swarm of bees.

3 The Quinby hive was developed by Moses Quinby. Author of *Mysteries of Beekeeping Explained* (1853). It was another kind of movable-frame hive, but with different dimensions (18.5 x 11.25 inches) Band 12 frames. The Langstroth hive was 18.25 x 14.625 inches and 10 frames, and the Dadant have was 18.5 x 11.25 inches with 10 frames.

4 A destructive disease of honeybee larvae caused by bacteria.
became more popular, though in 1957 there were still an estimated 1,200 professional beekeepers in the
country, managing 1,440,000 colonies (Oertel 1980, 5). Hofmann Farm was consistently cited by the American
Bee Journal as one of the leading apiaries in the country. Few production records remain for Hofmann Farm,
but in the 1930s Emil managed almost 1,000 colonies and produced between 150,000-200,000 pounds of
honey annually (ABJ 1932). American production today is about 2.62 million colonies, collectively producing
147 million pounds of honey annually (American Beekeeping website).

The Hofmann Family and the Farm
Unlike the Dadants, the Hofmanns did not start as beekeepers. Indeed, the family farm began in much the
same way as many small Minnesota farms did — with one recent immigrant following a new American
dream. Twenty-five year old Valentine Hofmann immigrated to the United States in 1871 from Moravia,
following friends who had settled in the area. (Charles Hofmann 2004, 85). Soon after, he sent for his fiancée,
Rosalia Frodl, and the couple became the first to be married at St. Jarleth Catholic Church in Iosco
Township, on June 9, 1872 (Charles Hofmann 2004, 87). On December 8, 1873, they purchased forty acres of land
in Janesville Township, a little over 1 mile northwest of the church site. Most of the land was still forested,
with five cleared acres and a one-room log cabin rumored to be so small that, when Valentine traded a load
of wood for a rocking chair, he had to tie it to the cabin rafters because there was otherwise no room for it
(Larry Hofmann 2012, 3).

In 1875, the family purchased sixty more acres, which included twenty acres of wetlands (Larry Hofmann 2012,
3). In 1884, the land had been mainly cleared and planted, and the Hofmanns were able to construct a wood
frame house for themselves and their four sons. That farmhouse with additions still stands on the property
today (see Site Map page 6).

By 1900, all four boys had left the farm. When Valentine died on April 29, 1900, at the age of 54, only
one son, Emil, had an interest in the farm. Emil, then working in a painting crew at San Diego’s Hotel del
Coronado, returned to Minnesota to take over the family business (Charles Hofmann 2004, 95-96). He ran the
farm much as his father had, growing corn and grain, and maintaining a small dairy herd. He soon decided
to add purebred Chester White hogs to the farm, and borrowed money to construct a dedicated hog barn.
(Charles Hofmann 2004, 96).

The exact date that Emil Hofmann began working with bees is uncertain. Charles Hofmann discusses in his
autobiography a story about Emil noticing a swarm of wild honeybees make a temporary landing on a small
bush close to the house (Charles Hofmann 2004, 97). Fascinated by this, he crafted a makeshift hive, and when
the bees began to nest in it, the Hofmann Apiaries were born.5

The earliest known photographs for the farm as a beekeeping operation were taken in 1907. A shot of the
farmstead shows the barn still in operation as a hog house (Figure 1), but other photos from that same year
5 Hofmann’s book places this event within the first 3 years of the 20th Century (Charles Hofmann 2004, 85), but the
letterhead for Hofmann Apiaries claims it was founded in 1899, a date when Emil was believed to be still working
in California. Larry Hofmann firmly believes that his father’s “1902 or 1903” date is accurate and surely by 1903 the
apiary business was beginning.
show Emil tending bees in the Home Yard with nine hives evident (Figure 2), and a wider shot of Emil, his wife Clara and daughter Gretchen in the Home Yard with almost twenty hives (Figure 3).

Though a niche crop such as honey might have seemed like a risky investment, it was relatively inexpensive to establish and soon paid off. Between 1906-1908 the markets for grains and especially for livestock began to decline, and Emil made the decision to discontinue hog farming and focus on beekeeping, while maintaining a small farmyard. He converted the barn into a Honey House, as it still stands today, purchased larger-scale field equipment, and established four out-yards as well as the Home Yard. (Larry Hofmann 2012, 6).

Emil Hofmann’s beekeeping also led to a major change for both his farm and the surrounding area. American tastes of the time tended to lean toward lighter-colored, sweeter honey. The honey produced was stronger in flavor in the southern states, and lighter in the north. A dark, strong-tasting honey came from buckwheat, while goldenrod led to a bright gold color. The lightest honey came from alfalfa and light clover (Facts About Honey 1916, 1).

While researching nectar that would lead to this kind of flavor, Emil learned that alsike clover was not only a preferred flower for the bees, but also that Eastern US farmers were growing the perennial clover crop for hay and pasture. Alsike was not then grown in Minnesota, but Emil tried a pilot crop to great success; he then purchased a clover huller and steam engine and began to offer his services as a contract huller to neighboring farms (Charles Hofmann 2004, 99). Within a few years, Janesville became one of the leading alsike clover centers in the United States (ABJ, March 1925). Charles Hofmann’s autobiography proudly states that “for quite a period of time in the fall, more freight cars left Janesville than from the city of Mankato because of the many carloads of alsike clover seed being shipped.” (Charles Hofmann 2004, 100). As the American Bee Journal also asserted, “The improvement of a locality really goes hand in hand with large scale honey production management.” (ABJ, March 1925).

Emil was known for keeping a clean, neat facility. From the American Bee Journal: “Hofmann belongs to that rare class combining neatness with good practice and extensive production. His hives are nicely painted, stands are level, grass is cut, all equipment is in place, and everything is slick as the parlor of a Dutch housewife” (ABJ, August 1916). Indeed, he reportedly paid attention to even the smallest detail, such as placing each hive on a concrete base, or for fully gravelling his roads long before anything else in the county was much more than dirt (ABJ, March 1925). Emil’s inventiveness was legendary, and so were his investments into the farm, enough so that he never turned a substantial profit from the business.

However, many of these investments did dramatically increase capacity. A reservoir built in 1921 allowed for running water to the main house and the Honey House, speeding extraction. This also allowed for a highly innovative feeding technique, for which he constructed a sugar syrup tank. The sugar was poured into the tank, water poured in from the pipes, and then the mixture was steam-heated to a quick boil. This mixture was then poured into large pans for feeding to the Home Yard and the out-yards, so that the bees could be efficiently fed in just a few hours (ABJ, March 1925).

That same year the house was expanded, allowing for office space and room to board 2-3 hired hands. Around that time, bee cellars were also expanded (Larry Hofmann interview 2013). Most apiaries had the bees
winter in the hives, which could lead to substantial bee loss, though many used telescopic hive covers that Emil also employed at the early and late ends of the season. However, due to Minnesota’s harsh winters Hofmann took this one step farther by transferring the bees to over-wintering cellars, which were dug into embankments and then constructed of cement tile with air space between. The space above the ceiling rafters was packed with clover chaff or hay. This led to a constant overwinter temperature of 50-55 degrees, which allowed the bees to semi-hibernate, and dramatically reduced bee loss, allowing Emil to retain and expand mature colonies (ABJ, March 1925). The wintering system, plus the above-mentioned feeding techniques, dramatically increased the length of the production year and allowed Hofmann Apiaries to compete with southern beekeepers on a more even footing.

The largest expansion, however, was the sizable addition made to the Honey House in 1923. The former hog barn was at full capacity, so Emil added second-floor storage in the main section as well as a large, three-story addition that included a steam-heated warming room (thinning the honey for extraction), a newly-outfitted extracting room with six honey tanks allowing for total storage of 2,100 gallons (25,200 pounds), and a hand-operated elevator. (Larry Hofmann, 2012, 11). The distinctive, gambrel-roofed structure was noted in places such as the American Bee Journal, and bore almost no resemblance to its original livestock roots.

A few years later, in 1926, a 20x40 foot Wax House was added for rendering wax and for storing the wax for the hives, separating that endeavor from the honey operations to allow for greater efficiency in each. The Wax House still stands northwest of the Farmhouse, at the outside edge of the hive Home Yard.

Hofmann’s investment in the property appeared to pay off, both in production and in national attention. The American Bee Journal was especially effusive in its praise, claiming the Hofmann enterprise was “one of the most extensive and perfectly arranged that I have ever seen among the hundreds of such plants visited” (ABJ, November 1928). A local newspaper claimed, “E.L Hofmann is one of the best, most successful and extensive beekeepers in the United States.” (Larry Hofmann interview 2013).

The Depression and succeeding Dust Bowl years would however cost the Hofmann farm dearly. Hofmann Apiaries continued production, storing over 50,000 pounds of honey in a Minneapolis warehouse; however, it was all mortgaged to the Janesville State Bank, and in July 1933 the bank foreclosed (Larry Hofmann interview 2013). Worn down by the strain, Emil died of pneumonia on Friday July 13, 1934 (ABJ, August 1934); at aged 59, he was only a few years older than his father had been when he passed on.

The Hofmann Farm passed on to Charles Hofmann, who secured a federal land bank loan and other financing. The total indebtedness was over $15,000 — a significant amount at that time, but one that secured the future of the farm (Larry Hofmann interview 2013). Charles was able to begin paying down that debt within a few years.

Though Charles Hofmann dedicated much of the first years of farm management to debt reduction, he was also known for his research. He belonged to many beekeeping organizations, including the American Beekeeper’s Federation, for which he was co-founder (1940) and a vice-president (1951). He served three terms as chairman of the Haydak Research Fund, was the State Apiary Inspector, and judged the Bee and Honey Exhibit at the Minnesota State Fair.
Charles in 1963, at age 57, decided to stop the labor-intensive practice of wintering the bees in the bee cellars scattered around the farm. This decision, he later recalled, not only made his work easier but also efficiency (Charles Hofmann 2004, 155).

The following year, in 1964 Charles created a slide lecture titled *The World of Bees* and later spent his off seasons (1966-67, 1969-70) presenting his study of bees to audiences at the University of Minnesota, and other state institutions, and schools throughout southern Minnesota, eastern South Dakota and northern Iowa (Charles Hofmann 2004, 173-189). *The World of Bees*, still exists in video/DVD format. While Emil had been an innovator with the farm and its mechanisms, Charles’ focus was on the apiary industry and the study of bees as he continued his family’s beekeeping legacy.

Charles remained a beekeeper until 1985, when at aged 77, he retired as he could no longer hire consistent and reliable help. By the end, though Hofmann Farm was at approximately half the level of production that it had been in the 1920s, it was still a significant force in American honey production.

**Importance of Hofmann Farm in the Industry**

Because beekeeping was rather a niche business, as compared to livestock or even other crops such as alsike clover, the importance of Hofmann Farm within the nationwide industry is somewhat difficult to ascertain. However, from sources such as the *American Bee Journal*, it appears that Hofmann Farm was the most significant apiary of its time in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest, and was likely one of the national leaders. As early as 1916, the *American Bee Journal* cited the Hofmann Farm as the “largest honey producer in Minnesota,” with a total at the time of 940 colonies (*ABJ*, August 1916).

In a 1932 article entitled “The Bees Pay Best,” Hofmann stated that the bees had been the most profitable branch of his farming for “all but three years of the past twenty.” (*ABJ*, April 1932). The scale of this is indicated by the number of bee colonies held (generally around 1,000), the capacity of the Honey House (2,100 gallons, or just over 25,000 pounds), and the farm’s annual production — ranging from 90,000 pounds in one of his poorest years (1924) to 150,000-200,000 pounds. Honey had the advantage of being less perishable than field crops or livestock, so could be warehoused on-site or in Minneapolis.

Another indication of the nationwide importance of Hofmann Farm is a 1916 publication entitled *Facts About Honey*. This slim journal was copyrighted in 1916 by C.P. Dadant, the innovator of the Dadant Hive, and emblazoned with the frontispiece of “THE HOFMANN APIARIES – Largest Producers in the Northwest of Pure Fancy Extracted Clover and Basswood Honey.” Though clearly a trade publication, and not including any specific information on or pictures of Hofmann Farm, the publication does not appear to have been released for any other apiary in the country (*Dadant, 1916*).

Hofmann was also known for his innovation, which allowed him to “care for twice as many colonies as most men, without extra labor” (*ABJ*, August 1916). Chief among these factors were elements such as the well-designed Honey House, machinery like the elevator, equipment (outdoor feeders), and even small details such as the often-remarked-upon concrete hive stands.
For these reasons, Hofmann Farm was primarily a family-owned business, with relatively little outside employment. Emil Hofmann was known to have others come to study with him, such as Matt Miklovich, an Austrian beekeeper who spent the summer of 1916 studying Emil’s methods (ABJ, August 1916). However, it appears he generally only employed 2-3 hired hands annually to care for all the bees as well as the 100-acre farm, which still maintained a small herd of cows, chickens, and the clover crop.

After inheriting the farm in 1934, Charles maintained its operations in the same manner as his father, though the changing market eventually reduced the scale of production. However, there were some peak periods; for instance, honey became extremely desirable during WWII rationing, and the Hofmanns began to sell direct to the public as well as wholesaling (Charles Hofmann 2004, 148). Charles, however, was especially known for his contributions to the field, including his lifelong work with the Minnesota State Beekeepers Federation and the American Beekeeping Federation.

**Hofmann Farm Today**

Although Hofmann Farm no longer exists as a working apiary, very little has actually changed on the property, and its sense of place remains exceedingly strong. It is easy to interpret the beekeeping resources, and indeed should the related equipment be re-purchased, it could easily return to its original use. The primary resources from the beekeeping period of significance are:

**Farmhouse** – *(Figure 2, Photographs 1-2)*

Currently used as a retreat center, the original farmhouse still stands (although the early log cabin is long-lost). Though the inside has been altered, the exterior maintains the same footprint as it did after the 1921 alterations. The house is indicative of an early 20th century vernacular residential farmhouse, and is another strong resource.

**Reservoir** – *(Photographs 3-5)*

The 1921 Reservoir is significant in that it not only provided gravity-fed water to the house, but also to the Honey House, enabling much stronger production. Water could be heated to hasten the extraction process, and also to clean the facilities. Running water also enabled Emil to undertake large-scale sugar-water feedings for the bees, lengthening the season before flowers were in bloom.

**Pump House** – *(Photographs 3, 5)*

This small, early 20th-century building housed the electrical equipment for the water circulation system to the Farmhouse and the Honey House.

**Winter Bee Cellar** – *(Figure 8, Photographs 3, 6, 7-10)*

The one remaining Winter Bee Cellar demonstrates the bee storage system, another of Hofmann's innovations. In 1924 there were four cellars, one in each out-yard, but only the Home Yard cellar remains. This interior of this building remains completely intact (save the hives).
Smoking Equipment Shed – (Photograph 10)
The early-mid 20th century, free-standing container was used to store the hive smoking equipment, including the bellows (still extant inside) and smoking fuel such and burlap sheets.

Honey House – (Figures 9-12, Photographs 4, 11-20)
This distinctive building is the true heart of the property and contains most of the original resources, including the warming room, the extraction room and tanks, and the hand-cranked elevator. The 1923 expansion of the barn, in which all vestiges of the early pig barn were removed and specific rooms added for honey warming and extraction, is extremely evident. The Honey House is also demonstrative of both Emil and Charles Hofmann’s early innovation and contributions to the beekeeping industry.

Wax House – (Photographs 2, 22-24)
The construction of the Wax House in 1926 allowed Hofmann Farm to process and store the wax for the hives separate from the honey extraction. Beeswax sales played an extremely secondary role to the honey operation, but the shed was instrumental for the clean and controlled storage of the hive wax.

Heavy Equipment Shed – (Photographs 2, 24)
This structure predates the apiary functions on the farm, but was subsequently used to house the heavy equipment used in planting and harvesting the clover field.

Home and North Yards – (Home Yard: See Figures 1-4, 8, 12, Photograph 4, 11 North Yard: Photograph 21)
Although no hives still stand, the Home Yard and the North Yard are still evident and uninterrupted by later building projects.

Non-contributing Outbuildings – Several additional original outbuildings and resources still exist, including an original corn crib (the oldest remaining structure on the property, from the late 1800s) and a few other later farm structures, including a silo and modern pole barn.

Conclusion
Hofmann Farm is eligible for the National Register due to its importance in the American beekeeping industry — an agricultural history currently under-represented through historic sites. As the largest beekeeping facility in Minnesota (and likely in the Upper Midwest), the multi-generational Hofmann beekeepers were highly influential in the field. The farms resources — including the Honey House, Wax House, Farmhouse, and related outbuildings and sheds — are all in nearly original configuration and are indicative of the beekeeping process, and allow for clear interpretation of the topic.
Hofmann Farm and Apiaries • Major Sources


Athew, KD. Oral interview conducted May 2013 by Bethany Gladhill.


Author Unknown. Economic Entomology: Pamphlets, Volume 131. 1919


Hofmann Apiaries. Facts About Honey. Published by Hofmann Farms, 1916


Hofmann family archives
Accessed multiple times from May-September, 2013.


Hofmann, Larry. Oral interviews conducted May, June, and July 2013 by Thomas Zahn and Bethany Gladhill.


Figure 1. August 24, 1907 looking west. This is the earliest known photograph of the Hofmann farm. The original hog barn is in the foreground with visible hives in the distance on the left. The hog barn was converted into a Honey House with a workshop, honey extraction, and storage space approximately one year after this photograph was taken.

Figure 2. 1907 looking west. This photograph shows Emil working in the “Home Yard” with Rosalia harvesting berries in the background. The family Farmhouse is seen beyond the yard.
Figure 3. 1907 looking west and north. The Home Yard with Emil, Clara and baby Gretchen.

Figure 4. Circa 1914 looking west. This photograph was used for promoting the bee business showing the Home Yard with many hives, some of which were empty hive covers intended by Emil to inflate the actual size of the business. The family’s first car is parked next to the early Honey House.
Figure 5. The honey extracting room in the southeast corner of the old hog barn.

Figure 6. This promotional photograph shows the "No 2" truck loaded with extracting equipment headed for the out-yards. Before the use of the motorized truck, equipment was carted on a hay wagon pulled by a team of horses. There was no "No. 1" truck and it is believed that "No. 2" was so named in an effort to imply a larger operation.
Figure 7. Clover hulling equipment at the Hofmann farm.

Figure 8. Between 1915 and 1920 looking west and north. This image shows the south Home Yard to the left of the newly constructed gabled Bee Cellar which was used to winter-over the bees. The business at one point had four bee cellars with two near the home and two in out-yards.
Figure 9. 1924 looking east and south. The new Honey House which incorporated and expanded the old hog barn structure (foreground).

Figure 10. Circa 1924 looking north and west. This photograph of the Honey House appeared in the 1925 March and April issues of the American Bee Journal. The two-part article featured the farm’s modern facilities and efficient business practices. Emil appears at the structure’s open garage door.
Figure 11. 1925 looking south and east. This photograph of the extracting room on the main floor of the new Honey House also appeared in the *American Bee Journal* 1925 article. Emil Hofmann is seen in the foreground right.

Figure 12. 1925 looking to the east and north across the Home Yard to the Honey House.
Hofmann Farm and Apiaries • Current Photographs

Photo 1. Farmhouse looking north from front yard.

Photo 2. Farmhouse looking northwest from side drive. White clapboard Wax House partially seen at far right.
Photo 3. Reservoir, looking to the east and north from the drive next to the Farmhouse. The metal Bee Cellar structure can be partially seen behind the Reservoir.

Photo 4. Reservoir on the left, looking to the east. The Honey House can be seen in the distance near the easterly edge of the current property.
Photo 5. *Pump House adjacent to the Reservoir, looking to the northeast.*

Photo 6. *Corn crib to the left and the bermed Bee Cellar to the right, looking to the east.*
Photo 7. Bermed Bee Cellar with upper level metal door and the cellar entry, looking to the west.

Photo 8. Interior of the upper level of the Bee Cellar, looking west.
Photo 9. Interior of the lower level of the Bee Cellar where the bees wintered over, looking west and southwest.

Photo 10. Tin smoking equipment storage cabinet in the main yard with the Bee Cellar and the Farmhouse behind, looking to the west.
Photo 11. The Honey House, looking to the northeast from the Home Yard. The wing to the left was built upon the footprint of the original hog barn.

Photo 12. The Honey House, looking to the north and west.
Photo 13. The Honey House, looking to the west.

Photo 14. The Honey House, looking to the south.
Photo 15. Workroom on the first floor in the old hog barn portion of the Honey House, looking to the east.

Photo 16. The Honey House workshop looking to the east.
Photo 17. *The Honey House workshop looking to the west*

Photo 18. *Upper-story storage room over workshop areas in Honey House, looking east.*
Photo 19. *The Honey House second floor extracting room looking to the southwest (see historic photograph, figure 11)*

Photo 20. *The Honey House third floor storage and central lift looking to the south*
Photo 21. *North Yard looking to the north and west.*

Photo 22. *Wax House, looking to the northwest.*
Photo 23. Wax house interior, looking to the north. Wall insulation added to the exterior walls after the period of significance.

Photo 24. Thresher/Heavy Equipment Shed and the Wax House, looking to the north.