Honey Bees Taken to Cuba
From Florida in 1764

by EVERETT OERTEL*

A SHORT time ago a friend of mine, Prof. J. Preston Moore, Department of History, Louisiana State University, retired, now in Lexington, Virginia, sent me the translation given below. The author of the book from which the translation was taken is Antonio de Ullóa. He was the Spanish Governor of Louisiana from 1766-1768 and had lived in Cuba in 1764-1765. Ullóa was a naturalist, geographer, astronomer, engineer, naval officer and colonial administrator. He was a member of the Royal Society of London and the French Academy of Science. Prof. Moore wrote a book about Ullóa. It is entitled, "Revolta en Louisiana: the Spanish Occupation, 1766-1770," 1976, L.S.U. Press.

"It would be inappropriate to omit something that has spread throughout the island of Cuba from the neighborhood of Havana, namely the swarm of domesticated bees which has occurred in the short period from the year ‘64 [1764] after peace was made with England. Before this time they were not there, although there was no lack of others called wild bees; these are a distinct species [meliponinae?] and when families that had lived in St. Augustine in Florida moved to Havana after it was evacuated [Florida to Great Britain by the Treaty of Paris, 1763], they carried with them some hives which they set up in Guanavaca (?) and in some ranches as objects of curiosity; the latter multiplied so swiftly that they spread throughout the hills and it was learned that they were beginning to damage the plantations of sugar-cane on which they lived; their fecundity was such that even without shelves [hives] that they were accustomed to in Europe, each bee swarmed once a month, sometimes twice: the one regular size, the other smaller, the honey-combs being taken from the hives every month; and in the wax and honey taken out they were no less abundant than is the case here [Spain], where this phenomenon occurs only once or twice a year. The wax is white and the honey clear and of good taste as the best. With these precautions, without taking too much care in their propagation, nor disregarding the cultivation of cane as the foremost objective, this business of wax and honey could become most advantageous for the national trade."'

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