

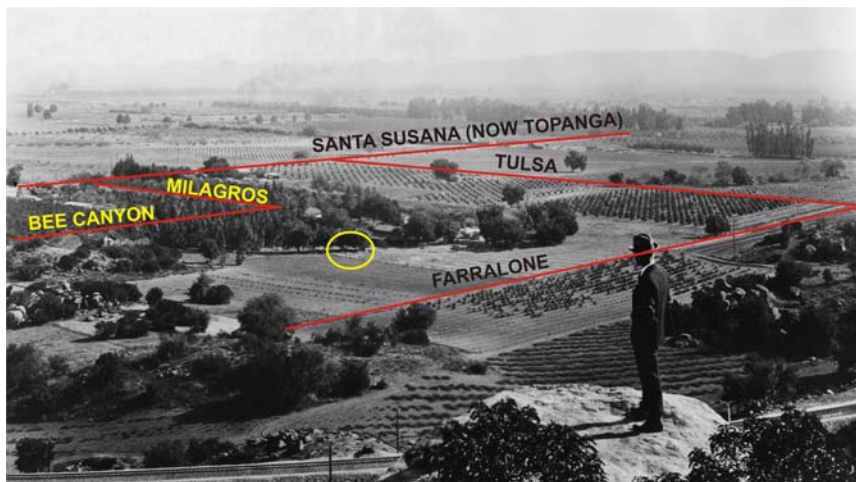
## The History of Bee Canyon

If you haven't noticed, the 15 new homes on the west side of Topanga between Tulsa and Old Santa Susana Pass Road (Stoney Point Estates) are almost complete. That development includes a road that runs west of and parallel to Old Santa Susana Pass Road, **Bee Canyon**. We give credit to whoever recorded that name at City Planning, because there is historical significance to it, dating back to one of the first families of Chatsworth, the Johnsons.

In 1899, Charles Johnson, son of pioneers Ann and Neils Johnson, bought an eight acre ranch on Santa Susana Pass Road for \$25 an acre. In 1907 he incorporated the California Honey Company which he subsequently sold to his sons Harold and Kelly (Keefer-1934). Charles was known as the Honey King, and produced as much as eighty tons of honey in one year. As the family grew, parcels were subdivided in 2 acre lots and sold to family members, and a dirt easement road was created extending the driveway of Charles' main house up the road (today's Bee Canyon Road). His sons Harold and Kelly Johnson continued to run the business through the depression, but at that time it was not as profitable. Katherine Johnson, wife of Kelly Johnson, lived officially on Santa Susana Pass Road, but to get to her house you took the family driveway west towards Charles' home from Santa Susana Pass and then turned north (Bee Canyon Rd) to get to her home to take piano lessons. (As a side-note, the Chatsworth Historical Society was founded at Katherine's house at her kitchen table in 1963).

Below is a story by Lila Schepler about her experiences working with Charles Johnson: *"In 1934 or 35 I worked as extra help for C.W. Johnson who owned the Bee Villa Ranch, in fact he had the largest Bee and Honey business in Los Angeles beginning in the 1880's. He let me drive his Model "T" truck, and I had to learn to drive all over again because it had no gear shift. Well, my job was to "smoke" the bees with a blower while he checked the frames for the amount of honey on them. I was prepared, I wore a bee hat with a wide brim from which wire screening hung—and from which, in turn, thin canvas hung. This canvas was tucked into the neck of my sweater and securely pinned. I wore a sweater over a long sleeved shirt because it made it harder to sting through. The sweater was tucked into slacks and secured with a belt, the cuffs were secured with heavy rubber bands. The slacks were tucked into hiking boots. Well, all that was left to sting were my hands. And they did! I seldom came home with fewer than 13-15 stings. Even so, my hands were not badly swollen. How did "Grandpa" Johnson dress? Very casually, usually a bee hat and if he was stung (which was seldom) he took his finger and carefully pushed the bee's stinger out so it wouldn't lose the stinger and die. That impressed me alright."*

In a letter written by Harold Johnson in October 1940, Harold was still running the bee business but it was not supporting them. The price of honey at the time had dropped and was only selling for 5 cents a pound. At that time they were producing 9 tons of honey per year. Kelly Johnson had taken a job with Vargas. Howard also worked doing paint and repair work to supplement his income. Howard was said to have fields of flowers for the bees to pollinate, that he cut and sold at the local stands for many years.



This iconic photo, taken from Garden of the Gods in the 1920s, shows the northwest corner of Chatsworth

The family and future owners continued to have bees on the property pollinating their orchards until about 1970.



Thanks to digital zoom...we can see the Bee Hive Boxes in the photo on the left.