

**Louis P Haight**  
**By Frances Harrington**

In 1896, Louis P. Haight came to work as the superintendent of the underwear department of the new Amazon Hosiery Company. He had previous experience working in the knitting mills out east. His father, who was a merchant, helped him gain employment in the mills after his dream of going to Yale University was derailed, at the age of 20, by some kind of an illness that impeded his ability to read and write. Even though he was gainfully employed, his education was still very important to him. He found a tutor and after working 11 hours a day, he would study text books to improve his education. His hard work & intelligence didn't go unnoticed and at the age of 29, he was recruited by the Amazon Company in Muskegon, Michigan.

He was born in 1867, in New York to Abner S. and Harriet (Everest) Haight. He was educated there and had trained to enter Yale when he became ill. He married Grace Carpenter in 1893. They had a total of 6 children: Louis Jr., born in 1894, died at 4 months; Rolf, born in 1896; Constance, who was stillborn in 1897; Frederick born in 1899 and died at age 10; Eric, born in 1901; and Gordon born in 1905.



After working for Amazon for 2 years, Louis started his own business in a small red barn in Muskegon Heights in 1898, employing one woman. He started making one of his patented inventions – “Haight’s Infant Wrapper”. These he advertised by going door to door to new mothers. He found the new mothers by scanning the birth announcements in the local newspapers and then making personal visits to show his products. These items became so popular that he needed a larger building and more employees. While seeking funding for this new building, he met and became lifelong friends with Charles H. Hackley who advanced him the money he needed and also, became the President of Haight’s mill called the “Muskegon Knitting Mill” (see photo). He also started “making made to measure” vegetable silk underwear and hosiery. Louis also started producing one of his earlier patented ideas – left and right socks! That’s right, a patent for making socks form fitted for the left foot and the right foot, just like shoes are made specifically for the left or right foot. He not only thought they would be more comfortable but also more attractive. He was right and they became a huge seller, especially among the women of that day. He later issued replacement insurance on his socks guaranteeing them not to wear out and promising to supply any adult with perfect hose for a year...no need for darning socks ever again. Soon, his hosiery and underwear were being sold all over the country and Louis became a very wealthy man. With his wealth he was able to

send his boys to college, the college he had once dreamed of attending...Yale University. In fact, his son Gordon became an English professor at Yale. He also tried to give back to the community that helped him gain that wealth; something he learned from his old friend Charles.

After the lumber era, much of the land in Michigan was waste. The soil was sandy, full of stumps and thought to only be good for growing more trees. Anyone trying to farm this land either gave up or barely made a living. The state of Michigan even discouraged settlers from purchasing this unproductive land for farming. Louis saw this "waste of land" and his curious mind started going. He thought there must be a way to make this sandy, abandoned land, good for something other than trees. He always liked a challenge and loved being a problem solver and this was a problem he very much wanted to solve. He knew nothing about farming so he spent many hours at Hackley Library reading books on agriculture, soil, plant life and farming. Some of the land he owned was an old abandoned farm that had been cleared and fertilized with manure by a dairy farmer who had tried but failed to grow corn for his cows. Louis used this land as his "experimental farm". Most of the people of Muskegon thought he was nuts and nick-named him the "sand farmer". He tried growing three different crops and each time failed. He then contacted the Secretary of Agriculture who sent a couple assistance to aid Louis in his experiments. Aside from this, and some material assistance from the Federal government, Louis worked on this without encouragement or outside help. After 11 years experimenting and studying and working the land, he finally made a break through. By his efforts and persistence, he was able to grow rye, wheat, alfalfa, clover, corn and potatoes and anything else that will grow in the Michigan climate and in abundance! After that, he became quite famous for his techniques and was a much sought-after speaker all over the country.

In 1916, Louis owned a large amount of unproductive land east of what became Quarterline Road, between Cedar Springs Road (now Apple Avenue) and Laketon Avenue. He had this land platted as a subdivision called City of Farms (later renamed Home Gardens). His plan was to build small homes for people who wanted to live close to the city, and possibly even work in the city, and still have a small farm or garden. He would sell the property on a rent to own basis. He would help them get started by planting a 50 ft. x 50 ft. garden and teaching them how to fertilize and care for the land. (While writing this article, I realized I actually live in this subdivision.)

He also had a plan to help students get money for college by raising sheep on their parent's farms. He wanted each student to keep 10 sheep. He would then buy the wool from these sheep to use in his knitting mill. The parents must agree that the money received from the wool was to be deposited to the student's credit in a bank of their choosing and could not be withdrawn under any circumstance, except for tuition and even then, it was to be paid to the treasurer of the college they would attend.

In 1926, Louis no longer owns the knitting mill and actually has to file personal bankruptcy due to some legal battles and poor decisions. He moved back to New York. His wife Grace dies the same year.

Louis was a vegetarian and apposed the use of animal products as food. He advised against the use of white processed flour and recommended whole wheat instead, for its nutritional value. He was also one of the first to suggest soy beans to make products such as, soybean bread, candy, butter, and milk. Throughout his adult life, along with running a company and being the sand land farmer, Louis studied medicine. He started to practice kinesiatrics (the treatment of disease by appropriate muscle movement). He started the School of Kinesio-therapeutics in Boston. He also used the food products grown on his land in Muskegon at the school. At one point he became known as a "foot expert" and give lectures on good foot health.

In 1928, he married Alna Bagley and returned to Muskegon after oil was discovered adjacent to property he owned in North Muskegon on the river. Expecting to be a very rich man once again, he leased the land to the oil company. He started making plans for a large history themed park, a bird sanctuary, a museum dedicated to Hackley, and other things that would help children gain interest in education. Sadly, the oil was never found on the land he owned.

Throughout his life, Louis P. Haight had many plans. Some came to realization, some didn't. Not all of his plans and accomplishments are listed here, otherwise I would have to write a book instead of just an article. One of his plans was to write the biography of his friend and mentor, Charles H. Hackley. In her will, Julia Hackley left him money to be used toward this book. The book, "The Life of Charles Henry Hackley", was 50 years in the making and published in 1949.

Louis was a student, a laborer, an inventor, a businessman, a husband, a father, a friend, a planner, an experimenter, a giver, a lecturer, an author, and almost an oil man. He was a deacon and trustee at his church. He was one of the directors of the Muskegon Rescue Mission. He was elected Chairman of the Agricultural Department of the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations in an effort to serve his community. Louis P. Haight died at the age of 84 at his home at 618 Adams Avenue in Muskegon, Michigan on March 4, 1952.

Sources: Genealogy & Local History Dept. of Hackley Library, Lakeshore Museum Center, Ancestry.com, Genealogybank.com (Muskegon Chronicle, Boston Evening Transcript, Detroit Free Press)



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