

## SAMUEL B PECK

### Fruit Grower

Samuel Brooks Peck came to Muskegon in 1859 with his wife, Dency C. (Turner) and their youngest daughter, Millicent "Millie" Peck, from Gorham, New York. Samuel was born in Cheshire, Connecticut, in 1805, to Henry and Elizabeth (Brooks) Peck. When he was 18 years old, he started teaching school. In 1833, he married Dency C. Turner, daughter of Joseph and Deborah (Cook) Turner, in Rensselaerville, New York. The couple had three daughters, Ambrosia (born in 1834), Millie (born in 1835), and Cornelia (born in 1845 and died in 1852). Although he always had an interest in farming, after his marriage, Samuel decided owning his own store would provide a better future for his family. The family lived in a few different towns in New York, where Samuel operated general stores, before they settled in Gorham. While living in Gorham, his oldest daughter Ambrosia, married a widower with two small children named, Samuel R. Sanford. After her marriage in 1858, Ambrosia moved to Muskegon with her new family. She would write letters home to her parents about this little village called Muskegon. Desiring to be closer to his daughter, and considering the opportunities of this growing village, Samuel Peck sold his store in Gorham, and moved to Muskegon.

Samuel opened a large general store located on Western Ave., between Pine St. and Terrace Ave. He sent for his brother John, who moved his family to Muskegon, to help with the store.

Later, his friend, Joseph Murphy, came to Muskegon and partnered with him. They continued operating the store until it burned down in 1874. That was the year he retired from being a merchant.

While operating the store, Samuel and his brother, John, purchased a large track of land named Samuel B. Peck's Addition to the Village of Muskegon and another called, Samuel B. Peck's 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition to the Village of Muskegon. John had about 10 acres and Samuel had at least 30. Samuel's property took up most of the land from what is now, Peck St. to Hoyt St., and Irwin Ave. to Laketon Ave. and was known as Peck's Farm. His son-in-law, Samuel R. Sanford had also bought and platted a large area of land to the North of Mr. Peck's property. The men decided to try their hand at growing fruit. Samuel Peck was the one who suggested that his son-in-law, Samuel Sanford, name many of the streets in his "Sandford's Addition to the Village of Muskegon" after varieties of grapes (Concord, Myrtle, Hartford, Delaware, etc). Mr. Peck planted about 100 fruit trees (plums, peaches, cherries, etc.) and a large vineyard of grapes along with smaller fruits like strawberries. After some trial and error, Mr. Peck and Mr. Sanford were the first in the area to grow fruit on a large scale. They were instrumental in encouraging and giving advice to others so they could do the same. An article in the Chronicle from 1871 stated that both Mr. Sanford and Mr. Peck, each, grew at least 1,000 bushels of peaches, and by this time, they were not the only peach growers in the county. At least 9 other growers were mentioned who had at least 1000 or more bushels of peaches that they had grown.

After his retirement from the mercantile business, Samuel was able to devote his time to his "fruit farm". Samuel Peck found that grapes grew more successfully than the fruit trees so he started paying extra attention to them and became quite the expert on grapes. He was known to experiment with over 100 different varieties of grapes. He was one of the founding members, and at one time, President, of the Muskegon County Horticultural Society. He was also a much sought-after writer on fruit growing for a number of papers and magazines. In 1881, at a meeting of the American Pomological Society in Boston, Massachusetts, (the group consisted of representatives from all the northern states plus parts of Canada), Samuel exhibited ten varieties of his grapes that were said to be the best specimens of their kind at the exhibition. His farm was so beautiful that people would often take their Sunday afternoon carriage rides to look over his orchards and vineyards.

In 1879, Mr. Peck suffered injuries from a fall at a friend's house. After that fall, his health slowly started to deteriorate. He would work on his farm and give lectures until he no longer had the strength. He continued to write articles for horticultural journals and societies until he was unable to hold a pen, and after that, he would dictate them to others. He dictated his last article on the Niagara Grape, as requested by the editor of the Rural New Yorker, and died later that week on July 21, 1883. He and Dency had just celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary three months earlier.



Samuel had not only been a merchant and fruit grower, but very active in civic affairs. He had served as the President of the Village of Muskegon twice, and Township Supervisor during the Civil War period from 1864-1868. He also donated money to help bring the Railroad to Muskegon.

After his death, his family offered to sell his beautiful property to the City to be used as a park. The city officials refused the offer, which was lucky for his family. The platted land quickly sold for much more than what they had asked of the city and new homes sprang up within no time. Part of that land was the property where Hackley Hospital was later built.



The Peck's daughter, Millie Peck, became a teacher and was one of the first to teach at the old Union School. After eight years, she went into private teaching. Millie never married. She died July 28, 1922.

Samuel and Dency, along with their daughter Millie, are buried in Evergreen Cemetery and share a headstone and family plot with Samuel's married daughter Ambrosia and her husband Samuel R. Sanford.

Sources: Hackley Public Library Local History & Genealogy Dept., Ancestry.com, Genealogybank.com (Muskegon Chronicle), Findagrave.com, Lakeshore Museum Center, Portraits & Biographical Records of Muskegon & Ottawa Counties (Biographical Publishing Co 1893), American Biographical History of Eminent & Self-Made Men - Michigan Volume (Western Biographical Publishing Co), Know Muskegon, November 1947 (Charles Yates), History of the Settlement of Muskegon (Henry H. Holt), History of Muskegon Co. With Illustrations & Biographical Sketches of Some of It's Prominent Men & Pioneers 1882 (H. R. Page & Co), Muskegon & It's Resources (Muskegon Board of Trade), Muskegon County Register of Deeds Office