



Nathan Hiram Peck, Sr.

February 21, 1923 – August 24, 2017

The section of Horticulture in the School of Integrative Plant Science lost a valued friend and colleague with the passing of Dr. Nathan Hiram Peck, Sr., in Geneva, New York on August 24, 2017 at the age of 94. Dr. Peck retired from what at the time was the Department of Horticultural Sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in 1989, following a career that spanned thirty years.

Dr. Peck was born February 21, 1923 on the Peck's fourth-generation family farm in Phelps, New York. The farm was a source of great pride for the Peck family. It had been purchased in 1825 by Dr. Peck's great grandfather and served as a gathering place for many generations of the family. Dr. Peck loved gardening and was known for his green thumb. His large gardens included flowers and vegetables and his irises and roses were particularly beautiful.

Dr. Peck was the son of the late C. Sealey and Ina Howell Peck. He was the 11th of 14 children and the last surviving sibling. As a child, he had a reputation for never sitting still and his father gave him the nickname "Beezy", a name that he was called for the rest of his life. A 1941 graduate of Phelps Central School, he would often boast that he finished second in his class, and quickly adding it was a class of two. Soon after graduation, Dr. Peck joined the army, where he specialized in Morse Code interception and interpretation during World War II. Following the war, he returned home and began his studies at Cornell. He earned a bachelor's degree in plant physiology in 1951 and earned his doctorate from Cornell in 1956 in soil physics–edaphology.

It was at Cornell where he met his college sweetheart and future wife Florence B. Conover (Cornell '50), who was originally from Queens, New York. They married in 1952 and were together for 65 years. Following his graduation, he continued his career first at the USDA-ARS as a soil scientist and later at Birds Eye in foods research. He returned to Cornell as a research professor at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva. Arriving as an assistant professor in 1959 in the Department of Horticultural Sciences, Dr. Peck specialized in the production and quality of vegetables, especially those grown for processing.

His research focused on soil fertility, soil productivity, seedling establishment, and the effects of solar radiation and evapotranspiration in agricultural fields. He also led the climate station at Geneva. While an active professor and researcher, he enjoyed the hands-on aspect of working in the fields and drove a farm tractor on his agricultural plots to set up his research. It gave him time to think, said his family.

At Cornell, Peck provided New York's vegetable growers with the best plant nutrition information available. He wrote nearly 120 publications addressing soil fertility and plant nutrition to improve yields and quality and presented his results at meetings all throughout the state. His research and recommendations on the use of fertilizer boron in cabbage and a custom-made fertilizer for snap beans are still used by growers today. In 1989, he was honored with a tribute from the New York State Vegetable Growers Association for his scientific contributions. He was also a member of the scientific research honor society Sigma Xi.

A longtime colleague, George Abawi, Professor Emeritus in Plant Pathology and Plant Microbe Biology reminisced about his friend. "He was a gentleman with a kind heart and a hard-working and accomplished scientist. I have fond memories of the many grower meetings that we travelled to and attended together. We had many animated, but good-natured discussions on best practices to recommend to growers and other practitioners. Dr. Peck always had the interest of the growers and industry in mind and significantly contributed to the improvement of vegetable production practices, especially fertility needs and the best methods for their application. He had a good and productive career and he will be missed by the people he served, colleagues and many friends."

Upon his retirement from Cornell in 1989, he was appointed Professor Emeritus. He and his wife Florence enjoyed traveling the country and visiting children and grandchildren, and they recently celebrated sixty-five years of marriage. Dr. Peck was a charter member and past president of the Phelps Historical Society as well as a member (since 1941) and former trustee of the United Church of Phelps. He loved to work the land and his gardens, having spent most of his adulthood back on the family farm where he was born.

Dr. Peck was a proud Cornellian. He took great pride in knowing that all of his children were graduates of Cornell University. Unfortunately for him, he missed the pomp and circumstance associated with Cornell's spring graduation as he finished his degree in December. It was with great pride that he finally did get to march, with his daughter Alice, when she graduated from the school.

Dr. Peck was always a very goal-oriented man. One of those goals was to live to see his 100th birthday. Unfortunately, his health was failing, and it became obvious to him that he would not reach that final goal. In true Peck fashion, however, he decided that the very next day would be his 100th birthday. He and his family celebrated with cake and candles as he was determined to meet his final goal.

Dr. Peck is survived by his widow, Florence B. (Conover) Peck '50; his children Nathan H. Peck Jr. '76, MBA '78; Nancy E. Peck '77; Henry R. Peck '79; Walter G. Peck '81, MBA '84; Virginia A. Peck '89; and Alice P. Hoover '90; 12 grandchildren and several great-

grandchildren; and many, many nieces and nephews.

Written by Stephen Reiners (chair) and George S. Abawi