

80 MILL STREET



**Marv and Kristi Prins – Homeowners**  
**Marv Prins - Presenter**

## **Front Porch Chats**

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The House was built in 1910 by Emmet and Mary Peck. Emmet was the Ottawa County Surveyor and the first Ottawa County Road Commission Superintendent. Some of Emmet's surveying equipment is on display in the Coopersville Historical Museum. Emmet Peck lived from 1858 - 1922 and is buried in the Coopersville cemetery. Emmet's father, Abraham Peck, was an early settler who came to the area around 1848 (about 3 years after Polkton Township was organized). Abraham started the first school in Coopersville at 'Peck's Corners' and was also instrumental in building the first church building.

The house was purchased in 1945 from the Pecks by Harold and Helene VanDoom. In 1989, Marvin and Kristi (VanDoom) Prins purchased the home, which means the house has been in the Van Doom family for about 76 years.

The house itself is believed to be a kit house from the 'Gordan-Van Tine' company out of Davenport Iowa. The porch talk will include a discussion on 'kit houses' and also some interesting history about the Peck family.

## History of 80 Mill Street, Coopersville MI

-The House was built in 1910 or shortly after (the land was bought in May 1910) by Emmet and Mary Peck. He was a surveyor (more on that later) and I am guessing he did not do the work of building the house himself. It was purchased in 1945 by Kristi's Grand Parents Harold and Helene Van Doorn and we purchased the house from him in 1989. So the house has had 3 different owners (Emmet passed away in 1922 and left the house to his wife) and has been in the Van Doorn family for about 76 years. Kristi's parents John and Alvina Van Doorn still live around the corner in a house that has been in the family for even longer. When John was a boy, he lived in this house and walked over to Grandpa and Grandma TerAvest's house (where John and Alvina live now). When Kristi was growing up she would walk over from that house to this house where her Grandma and Grandpa Van Doorn lived, and our kids walk back to the original TerAvest house to visit their grandparents.

-It was wired for electricity with primarily knob and tube wiring but some romex to the overhead lights. The knob and tube has all been replaced

-It has a cistern that I would guess is about 8 x 8 feet (from what I remember). It has concrete walls and a dividing partition made of the smooth copper brick. Water goes in one side and then filters thru the brick to the other side where there is a pipe that goes into our basement. We don't presently use it (it has an overflow) but have used in the past to water our garden. We still have this big steel tool that you use to take the cover off the cistern

-The house also had a seepage well in the basement which looks a lot like a sump pump hole but instead of a sump pump it had a wood cover with a hand pump on it. I capped it off because I was afraid the kids would get into it and it was in an area we now use as a family room

-From what I understand there was city water in Coopersville at the time the house was built. It could be it didn't run down Mill street yet, or they didn't like the water because it was very hard water

-The house has oak pocket doors between the dining and living room and mostly oak floors on the main level



-The house originally had cedar shake shingles

-The original phone number for the house was '255'

-The basement is not a 'Michigan basement' but is nice enough that we have finished it off

-The house plans were bought from a catalog and we still have the original ad and also the original blueprints. This is a Gordan-Van Tine house - Plan Number 23. A lot of people are familiar with Sears Kit Houses but in reality, there were several companies that sold kit houses. For example, Aladdin Kit Homes operated out of Bay City from 1906 all the way until 1981 and there are a lot of Aladdin homes in Michigan. According to the internet, Aladdin sold more kit homes than Sears did.

-Gordan-Van Tine was a company in Davenport Iowa that also sold kit houses (like Sears and Aladdin). Gordan Van-Tine also supplied all the kits for the 'Wardway Homes' sold by Montgomery Wards and if you add the estimated number of houses sold directly by Gordan Van-Tine and 'Wardway' together it is close the same number sold by Sears (about 75,000).

-There were 2 types of Kit homes sold, one was called a 'precut' home where they would ship you everything for the home, right down to the paint, nails, and doorknobs. All the wood was precut and numbered and all you had to do was put it together like a puzzle. Supposedly anyone that could swing a hammer could build this type of home. If you get a chance you might want to watch a 1920 comedy movie called 'One Week' made by Buster Keaton that shows him building a precut house - all wrong of course because his 'enemy' had switched up the numbers on the boards. You can identify houses built this way by finding numbers or codes stamped into each board

-The other kind of kit home was where they would ship you all the supplies and you had to follow the blueprints, cut the wood, and build it yourself, or more likely hire a carpenter to do the actual building of the house. I believe this house was one of those houses. The reason I think that is because 1) we have the magazine ad and plans 2) in 1910, Gordan Van-Tine had the service available to ship all the materials 3) Coopersville had the railroad (since around 1858) available to receive the shipment 4) If I look online at the old Gordan Van-Tine catalogs, you can find the millwork, doors, staircase, and other things like a large mirror in the front entry, the original

kitchen cabinets (which we still have) in the catalogs 5) on the edge of one of the upstairs bedroom closet doors they have written the name of the man who built the house, 'Emmet Peck' which means to me that the door was not bought off a lumber yard but was shipped. 6) The lumber in this area was mostly Pine and Hemlock, and Maple. They could have been bought from some other company but to me it makes the most sense that it all came from Gordan Van-Tine. Now they would not ship the brick (nor the concrete), which I am guessing came from right here in Coopersville. Everything else, including the wood shingles, probably came on the railroad from Gordon Van-Time in Iowa. There were 3 brick factories here in Coopersville, and one was directly behind this house across of Deer Creek.

-Because the mail-order companies bought materials such as the hardware, windows, and millwork in bulk, they were able to pass the savings on to buyers. One home seller, Aladdin, advertised that their kit houses cost about one third the price of a traditionally constructed home. Also, most people hired contractors or carpenters to build these houses even though the catalogs advertised you could build them yourself.

-Mail order housing was really hurt by the depression and World War II and that was when most of the mail order housing companies went out of business. After the war the construction industry changed, and tract housing became the norm. However, Aladdin, which was really the first mail order housing company, also lasted the longest and did not close until 1982.

-They also sold garages and barns as kits. There is also a one stall garage that is out back that also appears to be a kit because I can find what looks like it's design in the old catalogs. We also have a small barn that you probably all noticed but I don't think this Barn is from a kit because of the way it was built but I don't know for sure. The barn has a basement with a cow stantion still in it

-Just a couple other things about kit houses: 1) they are generally well built because they were designed by engineers (rather than farmers) 2) the companies that sold them made a lot of their money off the mortgage they offered when selling the kit. So one way to find kit homes in an area is to look at the deeds and find those that have a kit company (like Sears) as an original lien holder 3) There were a ton of different kit designs to choose from. For example, the 1912 catalog for Gordan Van-Tine had over 100 different houses (not ready cut but where

they supplied everything) and their ready cut catalog had about another 100 homes 4) they sold everything from cottages to huge houses. The Sears 'Magnolia' (at first, they would just identify the houses by a number but later they gave names to the houses) was a 2-story kit house about 3000 sq ft in size. I wonder how many kit houses there are in Coopersville, especially since we had the railroad

-the house is built with brick on the outside and tile on the inside so there is no wood on the main floor walls. They put plaster over the tile to finish off the walls, so the walls end up being about a foot thick. With all the dead air in these tiles the main house is very well insulated, much better than the regular wood walls we have on the addition we added in the back.

-We have the original paperwork for the deed and the property was bought from Alta Jane Irish in 1910. We assume the house was built that same year or soon after.

-the house was built according to the plans with one exception, they added a room and small porch with a flat roof out the back. This room served as the office for the man who built the house, Emmet Peck. Emmet was the Ottawa County Surveyor and was the first road commission superintendent. Here is a quote from the history page on the Ottawa County Road Commission website:

"The initial focus of the Road Commission was to provide a system of roads connecting population centers within the county that extended to neighboring counties to facilitate commerce with cities such as Grand Rapids and Muskegon. County Surveyor Emmett Peck laid out the route for these early roads. Beginning in 1912, he also acted as the first Road Commission Superintendent."

There is a display case in the Coopersville Historical Society Museum with Emmet's surveying equipment that was donated to the museum by his family.

One thing that must have made it hard to be a surveyor in Coopersville is the railroad because if you notice on a Coopersville map the railroad does not run east - west but runs on an angle thru the town. So for example, our northern lot line is on an angle, parallel with the railroad tracks and our southern lot line runs directly east and west, parallel with Randall street.



The surveying office in the back originally had 2 large bookcases which I suppose was for his surveying books. We still have one of the bookcases in the dining room.

Emmet Peck lived from 1858 - 1922 and is buried in the Coopersville cemetery. His first wife was Mary Augusta Clark and after she died, he married Flora who died in 1944. His father was Abraham Peck who was an early settler in the area who came around 1848, about 3 years after Polkton Township was first organized.

Emmet was one of 9 children in addition to two that died as babies.

I don't know if all the brothers and sisters lived in the area, but his brothers George and Charles had a Flour Mill on Grove street. In 1891, the flour mill building they had built was moved from Grove street to Danforth and I'm sure some of you will remember it as 'Tom's feed Mill'. In fact, the brick for this house could have come from the 'Lillie & Mickam' brick and tile yard. An advertisement for them says it was located near 'Peck's Mill'. Also, in 1892 his brother George was Postmaster of Coopersville. His brother Lucius is mentioned as someone who was responsible for the Poor farm in Eastmanville. He also had a sibling named 'Thankful' which I thought was an interesting name, especially when all the other names in the family were common names like George, Frederick, Albert, Sarah, etc. 'Thankful' was the first child born to Emmet's parents Abraham and Julia after they came to Coopersville so I guess we could assume the Peck's were happy to be here.

Emmet was president of a local bank for 8 years and was considered one of the most successful businessmen of this area.

When Emmet was 16 years old, he and 2 of his friends cut 100 cords of wood over 12 days. Emmet received a little over 10 dollars for this work and used it to buy a book about North American birds. He had meningitis when he was 21 and was hurt by a runaway horse when he was 23. During his recovery times he stuffed birds and mounted and displayed them in a case. At the time of his death the display was said to be one of the best private collections of birds in this part of Michigan.

Emmet was elected the county surveyor in 1889 and held that office for 34 years (until his death). He was both a registered engineer and surveyor. In his obituary it says that "There is not a man in Ottawa County who has gone over it more thoroughly than this veteran surveyor. He has surveyed most of Holland, Grand Haven, Spring Lake, in fact, almost every locality in the county. He has surveyed old corduroy roads in pioneer days and present-day cement drives, drains, street lines, lots, both public and private, railroads, interurbans, telegraph and telephone lines. In fact, there is scarcely a surveying job of any importance in which Emmet H. Peck was not the moving spirit"

Emmet's first wife was Mary. They had a daughter named Helen who was born in the year 1900. In 1910, the same year this house was built, Emmet's wife Mary became pregnant with another child. Perhaps it was because of the new baby that they decided to build it.

However, things did not all go as planned. The house was built but in 1911 the mother Mary along with an infant daughter died, presumably during childbirth. Imagine how tragic this must have been for their daughter Helen. She was about 11 years old and looking forward to living in a new house with a new baby and now she lost her mother and baby sibling at the same time.

Sometime between 1911 and Emmet's death in 1922 he remarried to Flora Isabel Burke of Wabash, Indiana. Since Helen married in 1926, we assume that Emmet's second wife Flora lived alone in the house from 1926 until her death in 1944.

Helen (the daughter) inherited the estate when Flora died in 1945 and her name in the deed is listed as Helen Peck Ten Have. Helen then sold the house to Kristi's grandparents Harold and Helene Van Doorn.

Now at this point in my research I learned everything I told you from the internet and our copy of the original deed to the house. I was trying to find out more about the Peck family and had found Emmet's father was Abraham III, his father Abraham II, and his father was Abraham but then I was stuck because there were tons of Peck's and lots of Peck's with the same name. So I googled Helen Peck Tenhave, the girl who grew up in this house and amazingly (to me anyway) found her obituary online. Helen lived to be 104 and here is her obituary from 2005:

Helen Peck Tenhave, age 104, a resident of Royal Oak, Oakland County, Michigan, since 1926 died January 23, 2005 at Evergreen Health and Living Center, Southfield, Michigan. She was born July 20, 1900 in Coopersville.

Mrs. Tenhave graduated from Coopersville High School in 1918 and from Michigan State in 1926. She was a long-time member of the First United Methodist Church, Royal Oak, and a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of Colonial Wars, American Association of University Women, and the Royal Oak Historical Society. She was a supporter of Cranbrook Institute and assisted in soliciting funds to build Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak.

Survivors were her cousins, Charles B. (Leona) Gates of Birmingham and Larry Peck of Tennessee.

Her husband, Hessel, whom she married August 3, 1926 in Coopersville died in 1982.

I found a lot of information from the obituary. I wrote emails to the Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of Colonial Wars organizations since I figured Helen would have to prove her lineage to become a member. Sure enough, they sent back information that traced the Pecks back to Joseph Peck who was a commissioner in the Indian wars in 1643. The Peck family originally came from England in 1638 on the ship called the 'Diligent' as Puritans leaving England because they were unhappy with the Church of England. The genealogy went like this: Emmet's father was Abraham Peck III, whose father was Abraham II, whose father was Abraham, whose father was Simon, whose father was John whose father was Joseph Peck who came to this country from England in 1638 on a ship called 'Diligent'. As a reference, the Mayflower arrived in 1620 only 18 years before and Jamestown was founded in 1607, only 21 years earlier. In 1868 one of the Peck family members, Ira B. Peck, wrote a book about the descendants of Joseph Peck. The book is small print and has 440 pages documenting all the Peck family names along with information such as their occupation's, who they married, copies of their wills, and other stories about them.

Joseph's brother was the one who initiated the move from England to America. He was a Puritan preacher who fled his church in England because he got in trouble with the Archbishop and his names was Rev. Robert Peck. Robert ended up returning to his church in England after Archbishop William Laud, the Archbishop



he was in trouble with, had been put in prison (later to be beheaded). Joseph Peck stayed in America.

Now I thought I would only find the Peck family name in the revolutionary war information from Helen. However, the names given were all from her mother's side (including New England names like 'Torrey'). So Helen had descendants in Colonial America from both her mother and father's side.

The Polkton Township history site has a list of 6 early township settlements. Eastmanville, Newburg, Hardscrabble, Coopersville, Denison and it also lists Peck's Corners as one of the 6. Here is what it says about "Peck's Corners":

5) **Peck's Corners** - was what the area at the corner of 56th (East Street) and Cleveland was first called. The name dates back to when the Abraham Peck family came from Carbondale, Pennsylvania and settled on 160 acres of forest land at this corner in 1848. At that time there were few settlers in what later became Coopersville.

Mr. and Mrs. Peck and their four children traveled to Michigan in a covered wagon. Their real estate dealer told them their property in Michigan was cleared land. They were disappointed to find their land was a forest.

Amazingly enough this is not the only 'Corner' in the United States named after the Peck family. The Pecks were some of the early settlers of the town of Rehoboth Massachusetts, buying their land from the Indians, and they also have a 'Peck's Corner' in Rehoboth commemorating the Peck's.

In 1850 Abraham Peck was elected school inspector for Polkton township. At that time the school and most of the township activity was near Eastmanville. In 1853, a school was built at Peck's Corners, now the corner of 56th Avenue (East street) and Cleveland St. It was the first Coopersville school. A brown frame building, it became the Brown School. During the school's sixteen-year existence, twenty teachers served there. Emmet also went to this school. The school was located on Peck's Corners but on land owned by Benjamin Cooper, kitty-corner to the land owned by Abraham Peck.

From the 'Polkton Township Early History': Miss Eliza B. Torrey taught ten pupils, in a windowless log house, which did service until 1871. Miss Torrey became Mrs. Daniel W. Scott, of Coopersville.

Abraham Peck also was a part of founding the first church in Coopersville. He and some other men built the church building on Church street which is now The Central Family Worship Center but for years was used by the Methodist church.

In 1930 the Coopersville Observer interviewed Emmet's daughter Helen Peck Ten Have. The following is from the book 'The Chronicles of Coopersville' written by Jim and Lillian Budzynski.

"The article tells of the family being disappointed to discover that their farm was not cleared but a thick woods. However, Julia Peck felt that the first view of the virgin forest on the land was the most beautiful sight."

"She told how they made their own bricks for the chimney and fireplace of their log home which was located about 1 mile north of present-day Coopersville."

"Miss Julia Peck was said to be an expert 'tailloress'. Each year her husband Abraham took wool into Grand Rapids where it was woven into cloth. She then made two sets of clothing for Abraham and each of their six sons. Mrs. Peck missed the spinning wheel she had in Pennsylvania but was able to borrow one for use. Later her husband bought a spinning wheel which a man in nearby Berlin (Marne) had made. It was in good condition and still remained with the family in 1930."

Also, from Jim and Lillian's book:

"The presidential election of 1860 was the first one held in Coopersville. Mr. Nourse, who was the telegraph operator, said that the enthusiastic ones consisted of such men as Albert Lawton, Joel A. Walter, Henry Durphy, the Averills, Pecks, Stiles, Jacksons, Platts and others whom he couldn't remember stayed up until 2 a.m. to hear the returns by telegraph, when the news from New York showed that Lincoln had carried the state and was elected. This was the first-time election returns had been received by telegraph in Coopersville."

In 1945 Kristi's grandfather and John's parents Harold and Helene VanDoorn bought the house. From what we understand one of the reasons Harold and Helene wanted the house (they were about the same age as Helen) was because they liked the woodwork so Helen sold it to them on the condition they would not paint it - and they didn't, and we haven't either. The VanDoorn's had 5 children so they converted the surveyor's office into a kitchen,

the small porch into a main floor bathroom and entryway (there previously was only an upstairs bathroom) and changed the original kitchen into a main floor bedroom. They also added a small dinette off the back. John's dad did all the work himself and was a very good carpenter. He worked and retired from Leigh products and his job was to build and maintain the machinery there. He was quite talented and when Kristi and I first got the house the basement was a tool shop where he not only worked but all the tools were homemade by him including a band saw, a planner, a drill press, a table saw, 2 lathes, and a welder. As our family grew the tool room became half the basement, then just the boiler room, and now all these tools are in the barn. We still have and use them. Grandma Van Doorn used to take the Inter-Urban into Grand Rapids to go shopping.

When Kristi and I got the house, we updated the kitchen and, in place of the small Dinette, extended the whole kitchen so we now have a larger eating area. We also added the new entry and the garage, moving the old one-story garage out back. Kristi and I have 9 children with 6 still living at home. We all slept and still sleep upstairs, we have a boy's room, girls' room, and our room. The downstairs bedroom is used as a library.