



Berkley History & Museum Happenings

March 2024



Upcoming Events

- **Berkley Days**
May 9 - 12
- **Berkley Art Bash**
June 8

Historical Photos will be on Display and gifts from the Museum Gift Shop available for sale at these events

Sam Peter

The Man Who Would Not Be Robbed

by Don Callihan

Sam Peter and his daughter, Loretta, operated a store at 3784 12 Mile Road in Berkley, on the west side of what is now Edible Arrangements, from the late 1920s until the store was sold in December 1958. I delivered The Daily Tribune to the store in the mid-50s and am unaware of it ever having a name. A lone neon sign in the window read "Beer." I don't believe it sold wine, chips, or pretzels. However, there were enough beer drinkers on the city's west end to keep it in business. The next closest beer store, The Berkley Beer Store, was on 12 Mile, just west of the present-day Yellow Door.

As no surviving family members live locally, I researched Sam's history using online newspapers and Ancestry.com. I soon learned that three first and second-generation Syrian families, all connected, played an essential role in Berkley's retail grocery store history. The other two are briefly mentioned below.

Sam's Early History

Sam Peter was born in Syria in 1894 and emigrated to the United States in 1909. Before 1920, he worked as a timberman in a copper mine in Calumet, Michigan (a copper mining town in Michigan's upper peninsula). A timberman sets the timbers used for supporting the roof of a mine so that it will not collapse. Oddly enough, Paul Faris Nicholas, the brother of Camille Faris Nicholas, another of Berkley's early grocery store owners, was born in Calumet in 1914, suggesting that Sam Peter and Camille's father, Faris Nicholas, were both in Calumet at the same time. Also, both (Sam & Faris) were born in Syria. While researching Sam's family, I learned that his mother was Annie Nicholas, who may have been Paul and Camille's aunt.

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12-Mile & Bacon Ave. looking north about 1950. (A) The Beer Store (B) Sam Josof family home in 1926. (C) Sam Josof Family Home in 1923. (D) Original Sam Josof store in 1923. (C & D) Sam Josof Store after 1926. (E) Sam Peter home after 1940. (F) Berkley Water Tower, 1927—1964.

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Sam's Finds His Vocation

Sam's retail career began about 1920 in Flint, Michigan, where he operated a confectionery store with his mother, Annie and sister, Lillian. In 1922, Lillian married Sam Josof, another Syrian in Detroit. Shortly after that, Sam J. began operating a Berkley grocery store on the northwest corner of Bacon & 12-Mile Rd., the current location of Edible Arrangements. Sam J. is probably responsible for Sam P. coming to Berkley because the 1928 city directory shows Sam P. as the proprietor of a confectionery and ice cream store at 3784 Oakwood, the original name for 12-Mile Road (just west of Edible Arrangements). His daughter, Loretta, and mother, Annie, lived with him at the back of the store.

Sometime in the 1930s, Sam converted the store from a confectionary to a grocery store and meat market. Realizing the potential for increased sales and profits, he applied for and was granted a beer license in April of 1937. Those increased sales and profits must have materialized because, in 1940, the family moved their quarters from the back of the store to a custom-built two-story brick house at 3358 Bacon, about 200 feet south of the store. (The house and its property eventually became a part of the Berkley DPW yard. The house was torn down in 2023).

As his business continued to flourish, he noted that more and more crimes were being committed in Berkley. On November 28, 1945, he attended a city council meeting with one of his neighbors. They "... requested enlargement of the police department to cope with the increasing number of crimes in Berkley. " Sam had no idea then that he would be involved in future Berkley crimes.

Sam's Wants to Build a Hospital

His next appearance at city hall was for a Berkley Zoning Board of Appeals meeting in July of 1947. Sam had observed that Berkleyites requiring hospitalization must go to Detroit or Pontiac. Royal Oak had Royal Oak General Hospital, which occupied two floors in the Washington Square Building but treated relatively minor, short-hospital-stay cases. He believed Berkley could support a 25-bed osteopathic hospital and proposed to build such a facility on the southwest corner of Oxford and Bacon. Before construction could begin, the land had to be rezoned, and he presented his rezoning request to the Berkley Zoning Board of Appeals. Sam's proposal was accepted for consideration and then denied at their next meeting because ambulances leaving and entering the

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Josof's Market
 Sam Josof, Proprietor
 FANCY AND STAPLE GROCERIES
 CONFECTIONS, and MEATS
 Twelve Mile Road at Bacon Avenue Berkley

**1931 Ad for
Sam Josof's Market**

Sam Josof—Another Berkley Entrepreneur

Sometime after his marriage to DeLila Peter, Sam began operating a grocery store, Josof Market, on the northwest corner of Bacon & 12-Mile Rd., the current location of Edible Arrangements. The store occupied the right half of the building, 3766 W. 12-Mile, and his residence occupied the left half, 3772 W. 12-Mile. By 1926, Sam had expanded the store into the family's former living space, and the family was living next door at 3778 W. 12-Mile. The store continued to prosper, even during the depression years, and by 1935, Sam had moved the family to one of Berkley's larger homes on Catalpa Drive. The family lived on the first floor of their home, and the upstairs was rented out.

Always the entrepreneur, Sam began 1938 putting the finishing touches on his second Berkley location at 2437 (27827 is today's 5-digit address) Woodward. Camille Nicholas lived at the Catalpa address, probably in the upstairs flat, and worked at the new market. Sam named the new store the S & C Market. Perhaps Camille was his partner, and the S & C stood for Sam and Camille.

By mid-1940, Camille was running the Josof Market on 12-Mile Rd. Although Sam maintained ownership of the building, the business had been renamed Camille's Market.

Sam's wife DeLila passed away in December 1942, and in September 1943, he sold the market on Woodward. In February 1944, Sam Josof married again in Birmingham, Alabama. He returned to Berkley with his new bride, Nabeha "Nellie" Bostany, and her two daughters, Louise and Mary Domit, from a previous marriage.

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Sam Josof

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Camille's Market moved to a new location in August 1944, and Sam began running his old store in October of that year. Three years later, in August 1947, Sam sold the business to Archie and Helen Ward but kept the building and property.

Sam and Nellie moved to Birmingham, Alabama, before 1950 but maintained their home in Berkley.

Sam passed away on November 27, 1976, in Birmingham, Alabama.

The Nicholas Brothers, Paul & Camille

Paul Faris Nicholas owned a market in the 1940s known as Paul's Market. In later years, the market at 2294 Catalpa became the Sugar Bowl, the confectionery store that catered primarily to Berkley High School students.

Paul went on to own the Doo-It Store on Woodward, one of the first DYI stores in the 1950s & 60s.

Camille's history is intertwined with Sam Josof's. Camille opened his first store where he owned the business and the building at 3933 W. 12-Mile (The current location of Teachable Moments) in August of 1944. Success came quickly, and he opened his second, much larger store at 3160 Coolidge (The current location of Beaumont Physical Therapy) in early 1946. He operated both stores until the early 1950s, when he closed the 12-Mile Store. Then in 1954, he closed the Coolidge store and reopened the 12-Mile store. He considered turning the Coolidge building into a roller rink, but the idea never reached the planning stage. Camille passed away in 1963.

Sam Peter *continued from page 2*

hospital could endanger children playing at a nearby playground.

Sam's Fights Back

With the hospital proposal dead, Sam settled down to run the beer store. His routine was interrupted on the evening of Friday, April 22, 1949. He closed his store for the day and walked with his daughter, Loretta, and his neighbor, John Gagnon, to his house on Bacon. When he opened the front door, he was met by a man wearing a stocking cap over his head with slits cut for his eyes. The man pointed two pistols at Sam, which Sam recognized as belonging to him, and said, "This is a stickup." Rather than surrendering, Sam dove for the man's legs. As he did so, the man discharged one of the pistols, and the bullet grazed Sam's head. Nonetheless, he grabbed the man's legs and managed to hang on.

The neighbor, Gagnon, was still outside the house and slammed the door before running for his home across the street to call the police. A second man, standing behind the first and wearing a similar stocking cap, fired two shots through the door as it closed in an attempt to shoot Gagnon. Then, a third man in a parked car fired two more shots at him as he ran for his house. The first man managed to free himself from Sam's grasp, and the three escaped with two guns, a watch, and cash.

While investigating the robbery, Berkley police found a car parked nearby that did not belong to anyone in the area. The vehicle was traced to Earnest M. of Highland Park. When police questioned him, he confessed to the robbery and identified George P. as an accomplice. A third suspect, Allen A., was picked up a few days later. The three (real names not used) were released on bond a week or so later.

Then, on May 21, Earnest M's bullet-ridden and crushed body was found in a ditch at John R. and Hamlin Roads. George P. and Allen A. were picked up on suspicion of murder, but only Allen A. was indicted. On January 11, 1950, George P. and Allen A. were found guilty of assaulting Sam Peter and were sentenced to 15 – 30 years in prison. In a later trial, Allen A. was acquitted of murder.

Sam Sleeps with One Eye Open

On September 19, 1949, 5 months after the robbery, Sam awoke at 3 a.m. to the sound of breaking glass; Sam's house was less than 200 feet from his beer store. He jumped out of bed, dressed, grabbed his pistol, and told his daughter to call police if she heard shots. He found broken glass by the front door at Ward's Market, formerly run by his brother-in-law, Sam Josof. Sam encountered a suspect in the market and instructed him to raise his hands. The suspect initially did as he was told but then wrestled Sam off his feet and escaped, running north on Bacon. Sam yelled for the suspect to stop, or he would shoot, but he continued running. Sam fired two warning shots in the air, but the suspect still did not stop. Sam aimed and hit the suspect twice, one shot in the right thigh and the other in the left shoulder. Police arrested the suspect when they arrived.

After the 1949 incidents, Sam installed burglar alarms at the store and his house. The one at the house sounded at 7:32 p.m. on October 10, 1950, while Sam was at the store. Berkley police were summoned and arrested the intruder.

By this time, the word was on the streets, "You don't mess with Sam Peter."

Sam Retires

Sam sold the store to Mr. & Mrs. Allen Guernsey in December 1958. They named the store Blue Star Beer & Wine, and after 30 years, it finally had a name. Loretta married a few years before the sale, and shortly after that, Sam had two grandchildren to entertain in retirement.

Sam passed away in May of 1968. His former store was either torn down or extensively remodeled in 1969.

The Museum Gift Shop

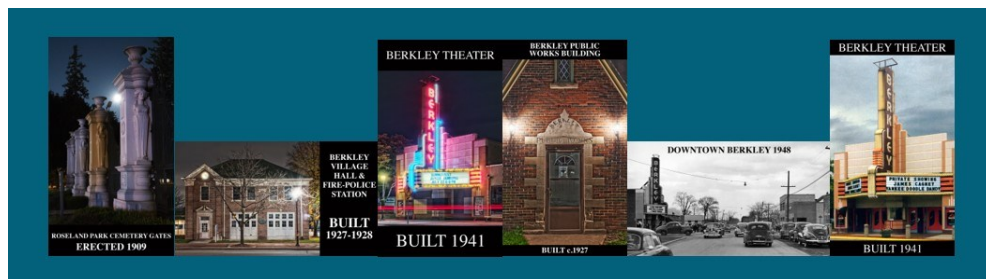
The museum gift shop has the perfect gift for that person with a Berkley connection. Selections include books about Berkley history, posters, banners, post cards and our Berkley Map prints

Coffee Mugs

Don't forget our coffee mug featuring the bygone restaurants of Berkley, including Dominico's. Restaurant mugs are available at the Museum, the City Hall and the Library for \$15 each.

Business Card-Sized Magnets

Our refrigerator magnets are \$1 each, or get all 6 for \$5. Available at the Museum, the City Hall and the Library



Visit Us

Berkley Historical Museum
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Berkley, MI 48072
248-658-3335
museum@berkleymich.net

Hours: Wed: 10 AM till 1 PM
Sun: 2 PM till 4 PM

Group tours by appointment.

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Donate Items of Historical Interest

If you have artifacts or historical photos that you wish to donate, stop by the museum or email: museum@berkleymich.net. Items should be clean and in restorable condition.

Become a Member

Do you enjoy history and/or the preservation of historical artifacts? If so, we have a place for you on the Berkley Historical Committee. We are an official committee of the City of Berkley dedicated to preserving and promoting its history. We educate and engage the public in our efforts through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum. If you wish to become an active member of this committee, send an email to museum@berkleymich.net indicating your interest, or call 248-658-3335 and leave a message.

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The mission of the Berkley Historical Committee is to preserve and promote the history of the City of Berkley, Michigan, and to engage the public through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum.