

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE WILLIAM PENN BROOKS

Kingo Miyabe

Dr. Brooks arrived at Sapporo in January, 1876, to join Dr. Clark to establish the Sapporo Agricultural School. Immediately after arrival, he began to offer lectures on agricultural science and also took charge of the directorship of the experimental fields and thenceforth for twelve long years until his return to America in October, 1887(sic), upon expiration of his contract, he devoted himself to education of early students at Sapporo and also made, at the same time, a great number of contributions in exploring Hokkaido Island as an agricultural advisor for the Sapporo Provincial government. On his leaving Japan, the Japanese government bestowed on him the Fourth Order of Merit and the codon of the Rising Sun. Later, on July 15, 1920, the Minister of Education conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Agriculture upon recommendation of the Society of Doctors of Agriculture.

Dr. William Penn Brooks was born in November, 1851, at Scituate, Massachusetts. His father was Nathaniel Brooks and his mother Rebecca Partridge (Cushing). He entered Massachusetts State College of Agriculture in 1871 and graduated in 1875 with the highest honor in the fifth class to graduate. In his undergraduate years, he was allowed to join in Dr. Clark's famous experiments on plant physiology and engaged the studies on fluid excretion of about forty different kinds of trees. His studies on this topic were described by Dr. Clark in his "Observations on the Phenomenon of Plant Life" and from this description we find that Dr. Brooks was unusually talented in observation and experiment already in his student days. He, also, possessed a conspicuous power to control a social group as we see in his contribution to the establishment of the Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity.

He remained in the school as a graduate student to study mainly chemistry and botany, but soon accepted an invitation of the Japanese government and came to Sapporo.

As an instructor at Sapporo, he took charge of the most important subjects. Teaching was divided into theories and practice and he endeavored to make the lectures on the theories as easy and precise as possible. For practice he gave field work for six hours a week and, upon his insistence, each student was paid five cents per hour. The reason of his insistence was to make every student understand that a reward should be made only for a corresponding amount of labor. Apparently, he intended to teach the correct value of money.

Upon his advice, the first trial agricultural exposition was held on the 15th and 16th of October, 1878, at the W.3rd and Main St. in Sapporo, and it was a great success.

The greatest part of the experimental field of the school (the area extending from W.8th St. to N.15th St. and from W.1st to W. 6th St.) was a marshy lowland and required drainage. So Dr. Brooks imported from America in 1879 a machine to produce drainage pipes and improved the land in a few years.

At about the same time he obtained Minnesota early amber sugar cane seeds, and after trial cultivations he found that they grew very well in Sapporo and its vicinity. A success in raising sugar cane led Dr. Brooks to import the necessary machines to manufacture sugar and syrup in a large scale. He succeeded in getting qualitatively very good products, but soon he had to abandon the whole plant, for receipts and expenditures did not balance.

As the result of the trial cultivations of varied vegetables, Dr. Brooks found that the onion was best fitted to the climate and soil around Sapporo, and hence encouraged farmers to raise it on as large a scale as possible. Today Sapporo is known for producing the best onion in the country, and it owes its name to Dr. Brooks.

After Prof. D.P. Penhallow's return to his country in August, 1880, Dr. Brooks became the head instructor and added the lectures on botany to his schedule.

In about 1884, he began lectures on plant pathology as a part of the agricultural sciences.

In 1882, he returned to America on his private vacation and married Miss Eva Bancroft Hall, and soon came back to Sapporo with Mrs. Brooks. Then, for seven years, they stayed in Sapporo, and two children were born. The daughter was called Rachel Bancroft, and she married Mr. George Drew in 1907. The son was named Sumner Cushing. He received the Ph.D. in plant physiology under Professor Osterhout at Harvard; then served as an engineer in the Bureau of Sanitation in Washington, D.C. For about seven years, and finally became a professor of Zoology at the University of California in 1927. While he was at Harvard, he married Miss Matilda Moldenhaur, who was in the same department. Since their marriage both Dr. and Mrs. Brooks have been interested in physiology of the cell and have published numerous papers on various subjects of the field.

Dr. W.P. Brooks returned to America in October, 1888, when his contract with the Japanese government expired. In January of the next year (1889) he was appointed professor of agriculture at Massachusetts State College and at the same time he began to serve as an engineer of the Massachusetts Agricultural Experimental Station. In August, 1896(sic), while he was in these positions, he went to Germany with the family and studied at Halle for one year and received a doctor's degree. After his return from Germany, Dr. Brooks became more interested in an experimental enterprise than the education at the college. In 1906 he became the director of the station and remained connected with the college only as a lecturer. In 1918 he suffered from a severe nervous debility and retired from all the positions. He soon recovered completely. Until 1921 when he became seventy years of age he was an advisor of the station.

In 1924 Mrs. Brooks passed away and it was a great shock to Dr. Brooks. Mrs. Brooks was a talented and graceful lady and while she was in Sapporo she was paid respect by every person who knew her. Throughout her life after she left Japan, she always loved Japan and the Japanese.

After a few lonely years, in 1927, Dr. Brooks married Mrs. Grace L. Holden. He was then seventy-six.

After he retired from all positions, he had become solely engaged in the horticulture at his own home in Amherst. In the letter dated on September 23, 1930, he wrote as follows:

“I was born in November, 1881, and to my pleasure I am still living in good health. I can still drive the automobile myself and do all the work in my garden. Nothing gives me more pleasure than cultivating vegetables, fruit-trees, and flowering plants and it is this work that is keeping me in such sound health. Now I have twenty odd kinds of hybrid tea roses and they have been in blossom since the middle of June.”

At the sixty-second commencement of his Alma Mater in 1832, Dr. Brooks received the honorary degree of Doctor of Agriculture for the many brilliant contributions he had made in his long past.

At the age of eighty-four, Dr. Brooks took a trip by plane to California to visit his son. This shows how strong he was still at that old age.

Though the details are not learned yet, it was heard that the cause of his death was a bruise he had gotten when he fell accidentally. He passed on March 8, last year, at the age of eighty-seven. His passing is deeply lamented by all his students and others who knew him personally and otherwise.

His contributions to agriculture have been published mainly as the reports of the schools, the experimental stations, the state agricultural department, and the societies to which he had been connected. The amount of publications is voluminous. Beside the papers, he also published in 1901 a textbook in three volumes entitled "Agriculture."

Dr. William Penn Brooks was a very earnest and kind gentleman. Dr. and Mrs. Brooks always received warmly the old graduates of Sapporo when they visited their home at Amherst. All through his life he wished for our welfare and the prosperity of the Sapporo School.