



1919

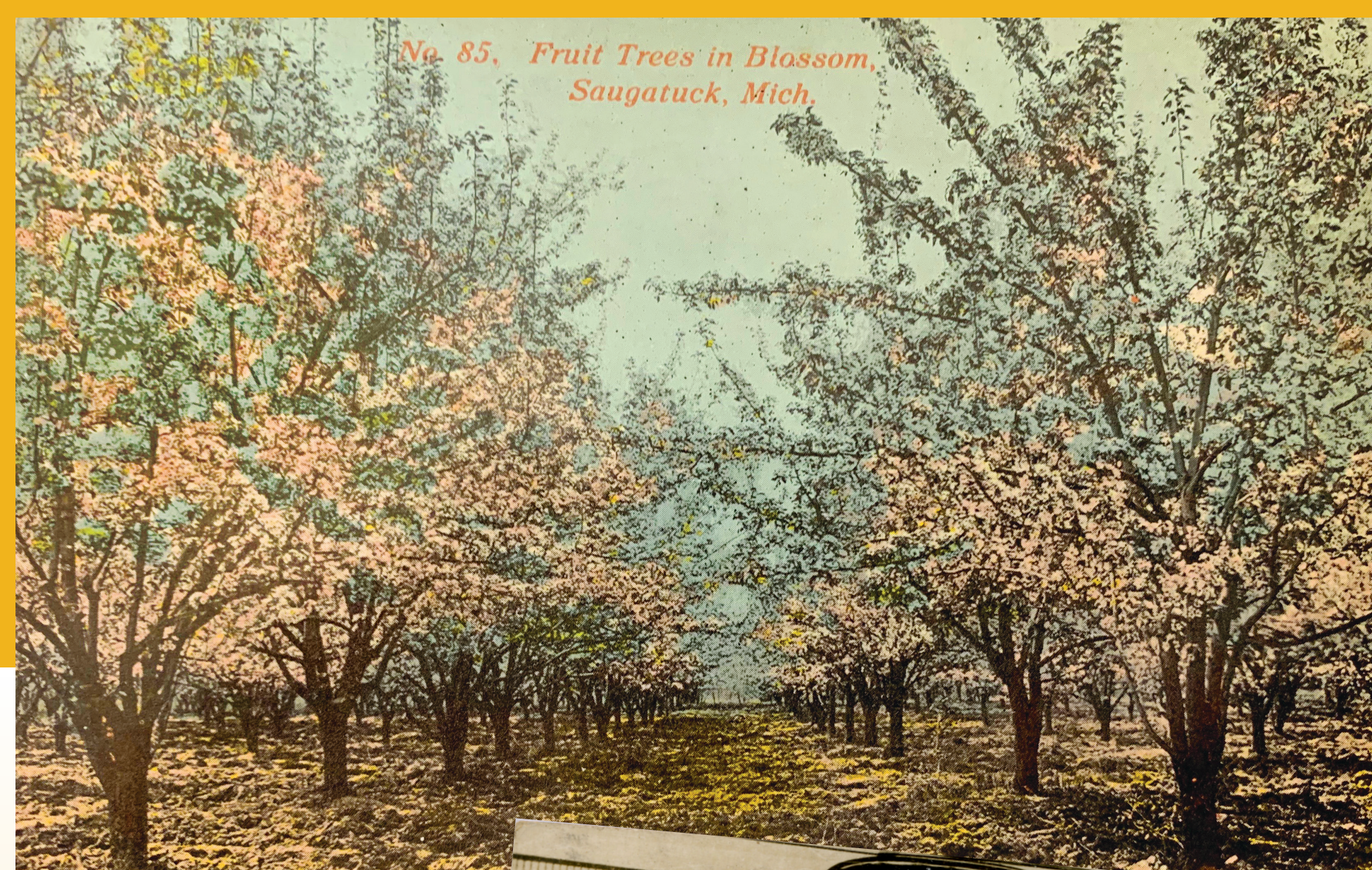
Apples going from branch to barrel in the orchard where they grew.

OUR LOCAL FRUIT INDUSTRY

Visitors to Saugatuck in the late 1800s passed through miles of fruit orchards while traveling the countryside. Imagine the remarkable sight of hundreds of fruit trees in springtime bloom, or months later their branches weighed down with the summer crop ready for harvest. Prevailing winds from Lake Michigan provided ideal growing conditions and spurred the development of "Michigan's Fruit Belt."

Indigenous people and fur traders cultivated the first fruit crops. Migrants from New England followed, planting their own orchards for local consumption as early as the 1830s. By the 1860s, commercial orchards thrived. By 1894, Saugatuck shipped over 7,755 tons of fruit to Chicago. That's more than 325,000 bushels, or enough to fill 100 modern train cars!

Peaches were one of the first commercial crops. More than half a million peach trees were planted in Allegan County by the 1880s. With so many fruit trees growing so close together, disease soon began to affect yields. A devastating freeze destroyed nearly all the peach trees in October 1906. Many farmers chose to replant their fields with hardier crops like apples.



No. 85, Fruit Trees in Blossom, Saugatuck, Mich.

Postcards celebrating spring's display of fruit blossoms and a comical image of Saugatuck's bountiful peach crop



Fruit remains an important part of this community's economy and culture. Michigan ranks third in the nation for apple production, with more than 11.3 million apple trees covering 35,500 acres of the state. Fruit orchards produce everything from pies to cider, all available at local farm stands and markets. Apple picking is now a fun fall pastime enjoyed by both visitors and locals.

Peach harvest at the William H. Wark farm south of Douglas



1902



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