

Junius George Groves (1859-1925)

Junius George Groves, known as “The Potato King of the World,” built his legacy by outproducing all other potato farmers. Born into slavery, Groves arrived in Kansas in 1879 during the “Great Exodus” of formerly enslaved peoples. Groves was a self-educated man who started out sharecropping with only 90 cents to his name. Four years in he was able to buy land of his own, a milk cow, and other investments toward his next crop. Next came a sawmill and five adjoining farms. In 1895, he owned 400 acres of potatoes, 170 acres of apple trees, 160 acres of corn, and 50 acres of cherry trees as well as numerous cows, horses, and hogs. His method of potato farming led to the production of 721,000 bushels in a single year. By 1900, he was buying and shipping potatoes, fruits, and vegetables extensively throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada. His production was so successful that the Union Pacific Railway built a special line through Groves’ property so they could pick up the produce directly. Groves’ invention of a special potato sorter made this easier—it could sort an entire train car’s-worth of potatoes in one hour.



Groves’ story is about more than agricultural success. He was a leader in his Kansas community and founded a number of organizations including the Grove City Community Center, the Negro Business League, the Sunflower State Agricultural Association, and a golf course for Black citizens. He had investments in mining and banking and owned a general store and casket and embalming business. He worked to combat racism by hiring both Black and white laborers and selling small tracts of land to Black families.

ABOUT THE ARTIST | Bridie Wolejko

[Bridie Wolejko](#), originally from Boston, has called Northern Worcester County home for nearly a decade. She is a self-taught artist and utilizes many different mediums in varying types of visual art. You can see her work in all different forms including public art like painted utility boxes, murals, and small painted landscapes on canvas. She won the Fitchburg Art Museum’s 85th regional exhibition of art and craft and her subsequent solo show focused on large scale psychedelic mixed-media art. She teaches several community-based art programs in the area and manages Gallery Marquee in Fitchburg, MA.

Spanish translation coming soon.