



# The Ballad of Jacob Peck

*Debra Komar*

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On a frigid February evening in 1805, Amos Babcock brutally murdered Mercy Hall. Believing that he was being instructed by God, Babcock stabbed and disembowelled his own sister, before dumping her lifeless body in a rural New Brunswick snowbank. The Ballad of Jacob Peck is the tragic and fascinating story of how isolation, duplicity, and religious mania turned impoverished, hard-working people violent, leading to a murder and an execution. Babcock was hanged for the murder of his sister, but in her meticulously researched book, Debra Komar shows that itinerant preacher Jacob Peck should have swung right beside him. The mystery lies not in the whodunit, but rather in a lingering question: should Jacob Peck, whose incendiary sermons directly contributed to the killing, have been charged with the murder of Mercy Hall? In this epic saga, media accounts of what happened in the aftermath of the murder have taken on a life all their own, one built of half-truths, conjecture, and narrative devices designed to titillate, if not inform. A forensic investigation of a crime from the Canadian frontier, the tale of Jacob Peck, Amos Babcock, and Mercy Hall remains as controversial and riveting today as it was more than two hundred years ago.

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