



Meet Kitty Kokx - A Notable Pentwater Artist

By Ed Bigelow



ABOVE: Kitty's charming watercolor of the Pentwater Visitor's Information Booth that was located on the Village Green.

RIGHT: Kitty showing the above painting with her son Bill.



Did you know that within our quaint village resides an artist of considerable note? It is true, and you may be hard pressed to find anyone who lives in, or frequently visits the Village of Pentwater, who doesn't know or hasn't heard about her. It is quite possible that you may be a proud owner of one of her Michigan scenery paintings (perhaps of buildings, flowers, trees, lakes, sand dunes, forests, band concerts on the village green, Mears Red Barn), a portrait, or a delightful box of note cards printed with her drawings. Curious to know more about this fine lady of Pentwater? It is my pleasure to share some insight about the creative life of our talented "Miss Kitty", the Pentwater artist. I have had the privilege of knowing Kitty Kokx since I was a youngster growing up in Pentwater. I value Kitty and her boys Bill, Doug and Gordy as close family friends.

Edith Mae Proctor (later known as Kitty Kokx) originally lived in the Chicago area (or more precisely Beverly Hills, Illinois). At the age of eight, Kitty began to create drawings and found that she possessed a real talent. Her mother managed to save fifty cents a week from the grocery money, which she used to hire an art teacher for Kitty. In the eighth grade, she won a scholarship to the Chicago Institute of Art, which was the starting point of her life long career as an artist. As a small girl, vacations brought her to Pentwater. In 1940 Kitty and her mother came to live here. Kitty attended Pentwater High School for the first two years and then Hart High School for two years, graduating in 1944.

Kitty's formal Art training began in the late 1940's for both mediums of oil and

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Five Generations of Women Who Lived in Pentwater The Family of Lois Birchard by Gay Birchard

Great-great Grandmother, Eliza Alan Grover (1825 – 1903)

Eliza lived in Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada and married James Grover in 1849. They had four children. The youngest was Caroline Matilda Grover (1854-1944).

In 1872, mother and daughter joined James Grover in Pentwater, Michigan. It took a week to come on the train, first to Montreal, then Detroit and on to Pentwater. James had come the year before. In Woodstock he had been the local postmaster as well as the President of the Woodstock Railroad Company and apparently got into financial trouble. A November 14, 1872 article from a Woodstock newspaper states: "It is reported that James Grover, postmaster at Woodstock, has absconded. He is a heavy defaulter to the government and deeply in debt to several private parties." Regardless of his previous business failures, James soon set himself in the grocery and dry goods business in Pentwater and traded with the local Indians. James also served on the village council. Eliza was a member of

**Announcement of the opening of
E. Grover's grocery store in the
Pentwater Newspaper. Sept. 26, 1873.**

NEW STORE

The subscriber has opened a New Grocery, adjoining Mrs. Baker's Millinery Store, west side Hancock street, and has on hand a general Assortment of Groceries, which were purchased with cash, and will be sold very low, Parties wishing to buy such articles are respectfully Invited to call and examine them, when I think they will find it to their advantage to select at my store such goods as they require. E. GROVER.

the Episcopal Church. The family first lived in the Canfield house (Candlewick B & B) and then moved to Catholic Hill 388 Sixth St. During the thirty years she lived in Pentwater, it was a very busy town, with the coming of the train, shipping, fishing, lumbering and a furniture factory. Her daughter, Caroline moved back to Pentwater with her six children in 1893, after becoming a widow and lived with her mother until Eliza died in 1903. Eliza is buried in the Pentwater cemetery with her husband James who died in 1895.



Great Grandmother,
Caroline Matilda Grover (1853-1944)
(4th child. of Eliza Alan and James Grover)

Caroline Matilda Grover Stanchfield was born in Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada to Eliza and James Grover. Caroline was a well educated woman for her time. She was sent to Madame Carritte's Seminary in St. Johns, New Brunswick at the age of 13 and graduated in 1870. She became a music teacher. Caroline came to Pentwater in 1872 with her mother to join her father. She met Oliver Otis Stanchfield, a widower, at a "sociable". They married in September of 1873. He was a lumberman, attorney and Michigan State Legislator for two terms. They lived in Ludington until 1883 when the world wide economic slowdown caused them to lose the lumber company. They went to the Dakota Territory. They had eight children, four born in Ludington and four in Mitchell South Dakota. One of those was my grandmother Caroline (Cass) Matilda III Stanchfield Brightman, born 1887. Oliver Otis Stanchfield was a sheriff and attorney in the Dakota Territory until he died in 1893. Caroline Stanchfield returned to Pentwater and lived next door to her parents, the Grovers, with her children. According to the 1900 census Caroline was living

with her widowed Mother (Eliza Grover) and her four youngest children. In 1906 she moved to Ann Arbor, so that two of her children could attend the University of Michigan. One was my grandmother Caroline (Cass) Stanchfield Brightman. Grandma Stanchfield lived in Ann Arbor and made her living teaching piano lessons. Her son, Alan owned the RAE movie theater in Ann Arbor. She came back to Pentwater in her late 80's because her daughter and son were living there. She was active in the Episcopal Church in Pentwater. During the 1930's her son Alan Stanchfield ran the 5 and dime store in Pentwater and they were active in the Masonic Lodge. She died in Pentwater 1944 and is buried in the Pentwater cemetery.



Grandmother, Caroline Matilda Stanchfield
(5th child of Caroline Matilda and O.O. Stanchfield)

Caroline (Cass) Matilda Stanchfield Brightman at six years old came to Pentwater from Mitchell, South Dakota with her widowed mother. Her Grandparents were still living in Pentwater. She had many fond memories of growing up in the 1890's and early 1900's. She talked about the large hotel called the "White Elephant" that was built and then burned, also about working in the fruit-canning factory that was located where the Pentwater Yacht Club is now located. She moved to Ann Arbor with her family because her oldest brother

wanted to attend the University of Michigan. Cass graduated from the University High School and also graduated from the University of Michigan in 1909. This was the period of the Gibson Girl, with long skirts, small waist and hair all up in a bun on top of the head. She taught school in Walla Walla, Washington, but in 1911 she came back to Michigan to marry Harry Brightman, whom she had met at U of M. They lived in Lansing where he worked for the State of Michigan Highway Department. He surveyed many of the roads we drive on today. Lois Brightman, my mother, was born 1913 in Ann Arbor in the home of her Grandmother (Grandma Stanchfield). There were two sons born later, Alan and Rex. Cass is a family hero because when her son Rex died of leukemia leaving three children under five years of age, she took the widow and children into her home. This was during World War II, and they stayed until aunt Julie could provide for her family. When Harry Brightman retired from the State of Michigan, he bought a house in Pentwater. The house is on "Catholic Hill", where the Kelly's now live. Grandma Cass was very active in the Episcopal Church in Pentwater and the Garden Club. She was a good friend with Florence Schrump. She made the most wonderful sugar cookies. In 1940 the big event was a November storm on Lake Michigan. Three ships sank off Pentwater; the crews of two were lost but the brave fisherman of Pentwater saved seventeen of the crew of the Novadoc. My grandmother often talked of the many bodies that washed up on the beach that winter. Harry died in 1949 leaving Cass a widow. Two of her brothers, Alan and Rex, also lived in Pentwater. All are buried in the Pentwater cemetery.

The Next Issue of the Pentwater Historical Society's Newsletter will feature the history and role of the Native American people in Oceana County.

We need your photographs.

You may be one of the many people who have older, historical photos of Pentwater that you would like to share. The Historical Society would like to take a look at them and possibly preserve them by scanning/copying and then returning them to you.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT:
pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org

Mother, Lois Brightman Birchard (1913)

(1st child of Caroline Matilda and Harry Brightman)

Lois Brightman Birchard came to Pentwater as a child to stay at her Uncle Rex Stanchfield's cottage on the North Beach. She remembered all the steps that needed to be climbed from the beach. When her parents retired to Pentwater, Lois brought her children to Pentwater every summer. Lois grew up in Lansing and graduated from MSU in 1931. She worked for a photographer for five years and married William W. Birchard in 1937. They had three children: Gay in 1940, Lyn in 1941 and Larry in 1949. They lived in Flint and Birmingham while raising their children. She

acquired the house in 1963 after her mother died. She and her husband spent summers in Pentwater and winters in Florida. Lois loves cards and over the years has sent cards to her many friends. Lois and Bill were active members in the Pentwater Yacht Club and in her seventies she was the treasurer of the Yacht Club. Lois was active in the Pentwater Methodist church and the Pentwater Women's Club. Lois loves to play bridge and made many dear friends in Pentwater. Bill died in 1997. During the last few years Lois has lived here full time.



ABOVE: Lois as a young woman.

RIGHT: A recent photo of Lois.

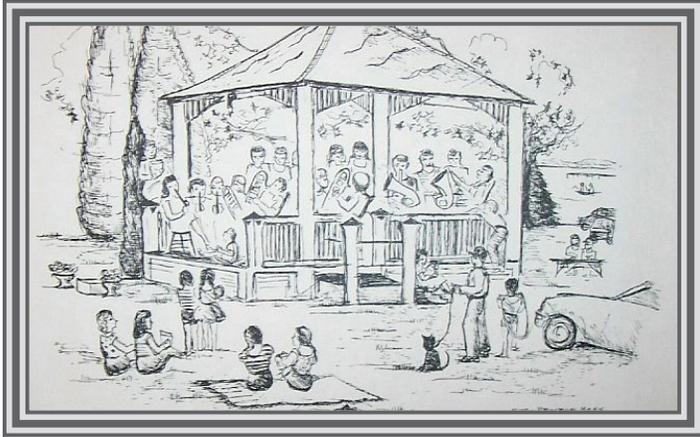
Daughter, Gay Birchard b 1940

(1st child of Lois Brightman and William W. Birchard)

Every summer of my childhood I spent in Pentwater says Gay Birchard. It was a magical place in the 40's and 50's. My brother and I were free to run barefoot, to swim in Pentwater Lake and visit the beach at the state park. There was a dairy bar, a bakery and drug store in the village. My grandma Cass had a cottage next to the house where we children stayed. I remember the wind in the pine trees and we could see the lightning during storms because we were on the second floor. On rainy days we would play Monopoly all day long and not disturb the adults. When I was a teenager, we listened to Elvis Presley on 45 rpm records. I was married in Pentwater in 1966. I have often been to Pentwater since then. It is a special place.

(Kitty Kokx Continued)

watercolor paints. Her formal education began with one year of training at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. She then studied for three and one-half years at the Ringling School of Art, and over one year at the Leech School of Art, both of which were located in Sarasota, Florida. Not only has Kitty created an untold number of paintings over the years, she has also passed on both skill and technique to many others through her teaching. Her paintings belong to people of all walks of life in many parts of the world.



Kitty's drawing of the Thursday Band Concert.

From 1971 through 1981, Kitty was a Teacher's Aid and art teacher at the Crystal Lake Trainable School for special needs children and young adults. Just prior to this, Kitty taught at the Wilson school (which is no longer in existence) in Silver Lake for one year. Income for her efforts at the time was earned through the creation and sale of many ceramic items such as cups, plates, christmas trees with lights as well as creating and selling rugs handmade on looms.

Kitty is fondly remembered for transporting special needs young adults from the Hart School to Silver Lake and back to the Hart bus area at the end of the school day. Other memories included the art classes she held at the Progressions Center. Kitty has also devoted her time to the seniors at the Hart Medical Center where she taught painting to the wheel chair bound elderly. This gave them the reward of learning new skills while applying their efforts in creating watercolor paintings. Many more people have been tutored by Kitty in her home on Dover Street.

While reminiscing with Kitty about coming to Pentwater and her many years as a local artist, she told me about a few of her memories. What really amazed her on those first visits to the Pentwater area were the tremendous number of beautiful large pine and fir trees to be found throughout the sand dunes, hills, valleys and plains of the Pentwater area. For an artist, the changing seasons from summer to the winter snow clad trees made for a variety of landscapes just waiting to be painted.

Kitty recounted her fond remembrance of the Information

Booth located on the Village Green and Ester Dempsey providing assistance to one and all while working on her write ups for the Pentwater News. Like many of us who grew up in Pentwater, she recalled the many fun rides in Bill Ringwald's old car full of kids as they explored the two tracks and dunes that surrounded the town. When I asked how she got the name of "Kitty" she laughed and said that when she was a teenager on the beach, a young fellow came up, introduced himself and asked for her name. Like many of us, she was a fan of the TV program Gun Smoke with Miss Kitty, and decided that would be a good nickname for her. So, Kitty was the name she told the young fellow and the name of Kitty became hers from then on. Of course, the Pentwater beach was one of her favorite places to be, as it has been for generations of local kids. If you know Kitty, said her son Bill, then you know she has an infectious and spontaneous laugh which is coupled with a great sense of humor. Her boys will tell you that Kitty is the greatest mom, an extremely unselfish and giving person who has always put her children before herself.

Kitty's boys have fared well under the good guidance of their mom. Amidst their humble beginnings, she continually taught them the value of an education. Subsequently, all three earned graduate degrees and have worked for over 20 years in their respective fields. Bill, a practicing doctor of Emergency Medicine, works at the Memorial Medical Center in Ludington. Doug, an ordained Methodist Minister, is currently head pastor at First United Methodist Church in Clermont, Florida. Gordy is a Professor and Program Director of Emergency Medical Services at the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls, Idaho. Naturally, Kitty just beams about her boys and of course those grandchildren of hers.

If you ask Kitty what it is about her art and painting that she loves, she will tell you that for her there are many rewards. Painting to Kitty is a way of life and provides fulfillment, a way to communicate her feelings to others, and a marvelous sense of satisfaction. It is a passion that demands the use of her knowledge, learned skills and the expression of freedom in knowing that she can, does and will continue to make paintings. Her paintings will provide enjoyment for others for life times to come. Son Bill has caught the painting fever too and has become an accomplished painter in his own right. When asked, Bill said his experience was to make one painting a month for 5 years and if you have the right talent, it will surface in them.

So now that you are more acquainted with Kitty and perhaps are feeling an artistic urge, who knows, she might just be willing to teach you a few things about expressing your inner-self through the wonderful and rewarding experience of creating a watercolor painting that you may call your very own!

President's Message

Once again, we are nearing the end of another year as 2008 draws to a close. As is usual in late summer or early autumn, many projects are undertaken to renew and preserve homes and buildings in our town.

This year the First Baptist Church of Pentwater had a major project to have the wood exterior painted and the wood shingles re-stained. It was decided to remove the steeple louvers for painting off-site thus exposing the steeple bell. The bell came from U. S. Bell Company of New York. While we can all hear the church bells ringing here in Pentwater, we usually cannot see them nor do we ordinarily have much knowledge about them. In this regard, I am attempting to do further research on this church bell and the church archives to enhance our knowledge of local Pentwater history. Included with this message is a picture of the old church bell and cradle.

The First Baptist Church of Pentwater had its initial beginnings when a



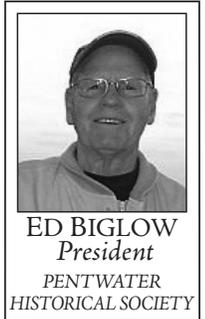
The Bell heard on every Sunday Morning from the First Baptist Church of Pentwater.

group of eight men and women met on April 4, 1882, with a desire to form a recognized church. On August 10, 1884, the new church sanctuary was dedicated. The first church building was destroyed by fire on November

30, 1893, and on March 22, 1896, the second church building was dedicated and is still in use today. These excerpts and other church history may be found in the First Baptist Church 100 Year Centennial Celebration Booklet of 1982 located in the church archives.

While this is one small facet about local Pentwater history, perhaps you too may have something of interest for the readers of our society newsletter. We invite you to search through those old boxes, trunks and storage places where little known treasures from the past may be waiting to again be discovered and shared to the delight of others.

Once again, a well deserved "Thank You" to all the fine staff members and contributing writers who diligently produce these excellent newsletters we so much enjoy during the year!



NEW MEMBERS

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NEW MEMBER - LIFE

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EXISTING MEMBER TO LIFE MEMBER

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DUES ARE DUE

Membership dues for the 2008-2009 year were due September 1, 2008. If you see "08" or an earlier year following your name on the mailing label, it is time to renew your membership. The dues amounts are shown on the Membership Application form on the last page of the newsletter.

Please send your check to:
Pentwater Historical Society
P.O. Box 54, Pentwater MI 49449.

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Bob's Corner

by Bob Childres

NEWS FLASH! Sept. 26, 1889, 2:45am FLASH!
BIG FIRE BREAKS OUT DESTROYING A GOOD
PART OF TOWN. By your ace reporter, Bob Childres.

Sorry, no photos. I forgot my camera. Since I first heard of this fire, I have been gathering anything I could find on it. I now have enough for a good article. I put a lot of this in italics to indicate it was a direct quote. Don't yell at me for the spelling. It's exactly as I found it.

"At 2:45am a fire broke out in the rear of George Warner's tobacco and variety store and was not under control until 4:30am. In a few minutes time the fire spread into a great conflagration which for a time bade fair to sweep that portion of the village lying north of 4th street (today's 3rd Street) east of Hancock. At the time there was strong indication it was incendiarism (arson) since it was removed from either stove or pipe. The fact the night watchman was at the farthest (their spelling) reaches of his assigned route at some three blocks distance he hastened to the engine house to give alarm. There are several ugly rumors afloat indicating a motive, but no proof of anything of the kind has been thus far discovered to our knowledge." From what I can make out, Warner's store was somewhere around what is now 3rd. and Hancock.

If this was arson, there are two points I would like to bring out. I am not saying it was or was not arson. That's for you to decide. The steamer Oceana was in port at the time and could easily have been employed to pump water to the fire but for some reason the suction valve would not work. The other point is that there was "no stove or flu pipe" anywhere near where the blaze started. "The fire started in some old fruit crates, banana boxes, straw, and refuse of all descriptions." Before anyone found the fire, it had reached the roof and set the buildings on each side of Warner's store on fire. Next door to that was Smith

& Plummer's meat market, which also burned. Almost immediately Fincher's and M.A. Rice's buildings went up. "The wind blowing hard from the southwest and south drove the flames along the length of the block, setting first one building and then another a fire and making the firemen frantic in the vain effort to stop it.

Chief Tuller begged by-passers for help on carrying hose and while many responded, others stolidly (their spelling) refused to do anything. Many women however, worked like heroines." Remember this was 1889 and only a few buildings were constructed mostly of brick. The rest were wood, very dry wood! Newspapers from around the state jumped to the conclusion the whole town went up in

smoke. Only about two blocks burned. The rest was not damaged. Immediately after the fire the Common Council met and as a preliminary measure passed a resolution fixing fire limits, i.e., more brick and less wood be used in building. The measure went into law stating brick be used as the primary material from what is

today Snug Harbor all the way to the Post Office.

Back in 1889, the newspaper went into great detail to explain the exact amount of property damage and loss for each person or business. If the fire was set as an insurance fraud, less than 29% of the people or businesses affected by the fire had any sort of insurance including J.W. Loomis, the insurance agent who was less than half insured. Of the 28 businesses or families listed as having lost either part or all their belongings, only 9 had any insurance at all. None were insured to the full extent of their losses, so I question if this was indeed an insurance fraud. Alas, all this happened 119 years ago and we will never know. Please note, the saloon owned by Widensee & Reilly and the saloon owner by S.K. Fisher succumbed to the flames. Probably the only ones happy to hear this were the Temperance League and The Law & Order League since they have been trying to close all saloons in our town for a long time.



The Pentwater Fire Dept in 1900

