

THE PENTWATER SWING BRIDGE

1925 to 1949 By Ed Biglow



Pentwater retired the former channel ferry with this swing bridge in 1926. The houses still stand on Green Street but the factories, pictured at the foot of the channel, are gone.

You must be at least sixty-one years old to have seen the Pentwater Swing Bridge in use as it spanned 150 feet across the Pentwater harbor channel. Fittingly, the street leading from the channel towards what was then the Nickerson Inn is named Bridge Street. Some of us have many fond memories of the Swing Bridge as a place to watch boats entering or leaving Pentwater Lake. The Bridge was also a great place for swimming, as it was for some of us, a terrific platform for either jumping or diving into the channel. Of course, in the late 1940's diving into the channel from the piers or bridge wasn't against the law or even discouraged to the best of my knowledge,

(Continued on next page)



PENTWATER
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 54,
PENTWATER,
MICHIGAN 49449

and it was lots of fun too. Over the years that the bridge was in use, many kids liked to help the bridge tender operate the bridge for sailboats and other larger types of boat traffic. Being a "helper" consisted of pushing on the turn bar that was placed in the gear mechanism located in the center of the bridge and then walking around in circles to either open or close the bridge. Perhaps you too were one of those "helper kids" or daring "bridge divers"...

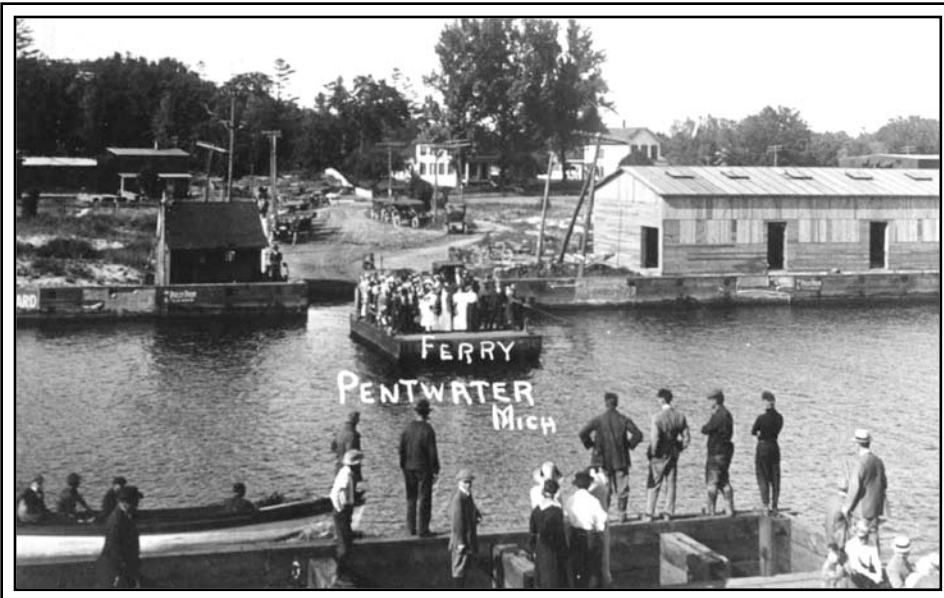
As recalled by Don Lambrix, Bud Stenberg and Bruce Bates, some of the bridge tenders were Merit Fisher, Art Reed, Burt Garvey, and Wade Maynard. Bud & Fritz Stenberg who owned the fishing tug Peggy Marie, along with Pat McMahan, had to both open and close the bridge to go fishing in the winter seasons of 1948-9, as the bridge was not attended during the cold months. In the Pentwater News publication dated Friday, June 10, 1949, there is an article entitled "Channel Bridge Closed as Being Unsafe". The article describes the fate and demise of the Swing Bridge. On Sunday, June 12, 1949, bridge ten-

tion of the entire bridge system. Claude Stover declared the bridge unsafe for traffic and ordered the bridge closed for an indefinite time.

The bridge closing action was the beginning of a five mile trip to downtown Pentwater for the twelve, year-round, families and a large group of summer cottage owners liv-



"Our new bridge" is the title of this photo. The bridge operator is standing in the middle of the bridge and a horse and wagon is just starting to cross at the south end.



It might have been a holiday when this picture was taken of a busy day at the old channel ferry. Across the channel are Ford Model T's and other cars waiting to cross or perhaps to pick up friends now standing on the crowded ferry.

der Eldon Daggett informed Pentwater's Street Commissioner Eugene McDonald that he was unable to operate the bridge. McDonald notified village officials, who in turn called in the Oceana County Road Commission Highway engineer Claude Stover who performed a detailed inspec-

ing on the South side of Pentwater Lake. From that point in time, it became an up to ten mile round trip for the families who live on Chester Street. Some people would choose to use a boat to cross the lake when weather conditions permitted. Even today boating across the lake is an alternate shortcut.

Now let us examine our history more closely to see how people made their way across Pentwater Lake prior to the Swing Bridge and how the Bridge came to be. From 1858, until the Swing Bridge was operational in 1926, the primary method of crossing the harbor channel was to use a manually operated or hand-powered ferry. The ferry was moved back and forth across the channel by an operator, and any passengers willing to help out, using a notched wooden maul hooked on a taught cable stretched across the channel. A couple of weeks ago I was fishing in the channel right about where the Swing Bridge had been located, and while chatting with Larry Daggett about this article, he mentioned that his grandfather George Daggett was one of the men who oper-

ated the channel ferry. Now wouldn't that have been a real treat to see the ferry in operation!

Historical information shows that the ferry operators set the following fees to use the ferry:

Single person 5 cents; man and horse 10 cents; horse team and wagon 25 cents; sheep and hogs were 2 cents each. In 1867, Pentwater village assumed control of the ferry operation, annually let bids for operation of the ferry, and established user fees.

In 1925, the Pere Marquette Railroad gave the Village of Pentwater a railroad bridge that had been formerly used in Elk Rapids, Michigan. By the summer of 1926, the Swing Bridge was installed and operational thereby ending the

(Continued on page 5)



A view of the swing bridge opened to allow the passage of the sailboat. That's the water tower in the background.

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2011

Spring Dinner

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

Summer Dinner and Meeting

Wednesday August 24, 2011

Executive Board Meetings

Members encouraged to attend
1:00 pm in the Community Hall

January 5, April 6, May 4,
July 6, August 3, October 5

Museum

Opening June 6, 2011
Closing September 15, 2011

Presidents Message

Can you believe this story, taken from the New York News Letter of July 1876? Did the author? On the other hand, was it, as the Irish would say, "the varnished truth" carefully crafted to convey a moral lesson for the readers of the day and posterity.

A FATHER'S LESSON TO HIS SON

One day Robert's father saw him playing with some boys who were rude and unmannerly. He had observed for some time a change for the worse in his son and he knew the cause. He was very sorry, but he said nothing to Robert at the time. In the evening, he brought from the garden six rosy-cheeked apples, put them on a plate and presented them to Robert. He was much pleased at his father's kindness, and thanked him. "You must lay them aside for a few days, that they may become mellow," said the father; and Robert cheerfully placed the plate with the apples in his mother's store-room. Just as he was putting them aside, his father laid on the plate the seventh apple which was quite rotten and desired him to allow it to remain there. "But, father, said Robert, "the rotten apple will spoil all the others!" "Do you think so? Why should not the fresh apples rather make the rotten one fresh?" said his father. And with these words he shut the door of the room.

Eight days afterward he asked his son to open the door and take out the apples. But what a sight presented itself! The six apples which had been so round and rosy cheeked were now quite rotten and spread a bad smell through the room. "Father," cried he, "did I not tell you that the rotten apple would spoil the good ones? You did not listen to me." "My boy," said the father, "have I not told you often the company of bad children will make you bad? Yet you do not listen to me. See in the state of the apples that which will happen to you, if you keep company with wicked boys."

Your story can fill this space in the next edition.

2010-2011 OFFICERS & TRUSTEES OF THE PENTWATER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

William O'Donnell	Ed Bigelow	Jim Alfredson	Dan Kelly
<i>President</i>	<i>V-President</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>

TRUSTEES: Roger Bailey, Myrna Carlin and Bob Childers

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRWOMAN: Karen Way

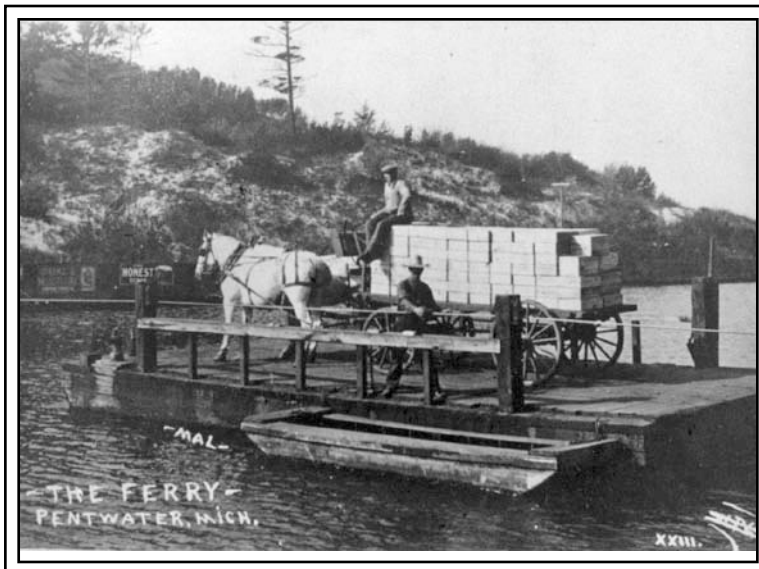
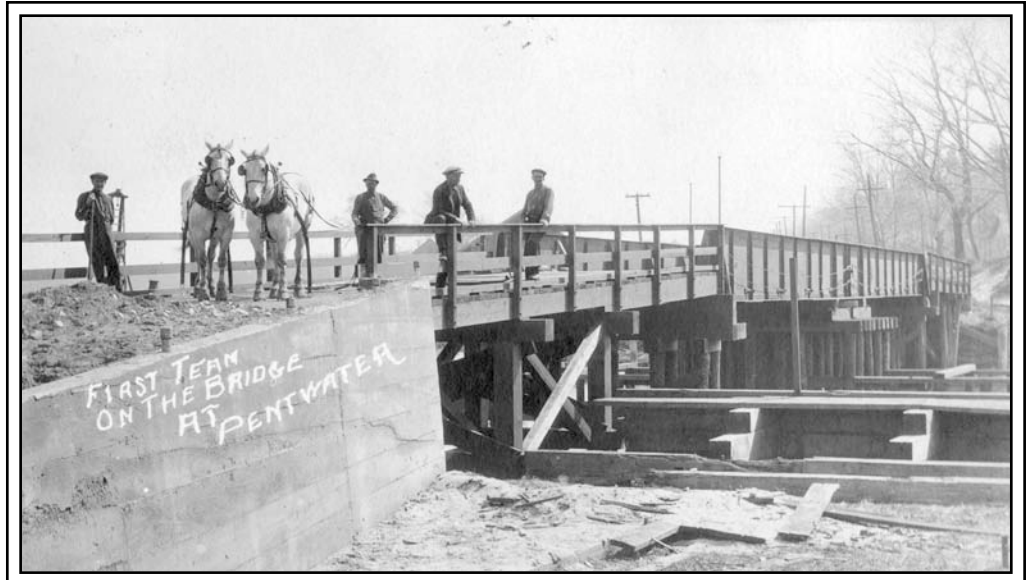
NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Sharon O'Donnell	Jim Pikaart	Bruce Bates
<i>Editor</i>	<i>Layout/Design</i>	<i>Photo Editor</i>

Here are some old postcard views and photos of the old ferry and swing bridge.

Top: The photographer was on site as the first team of horses cross the new swing bridge over the channel.

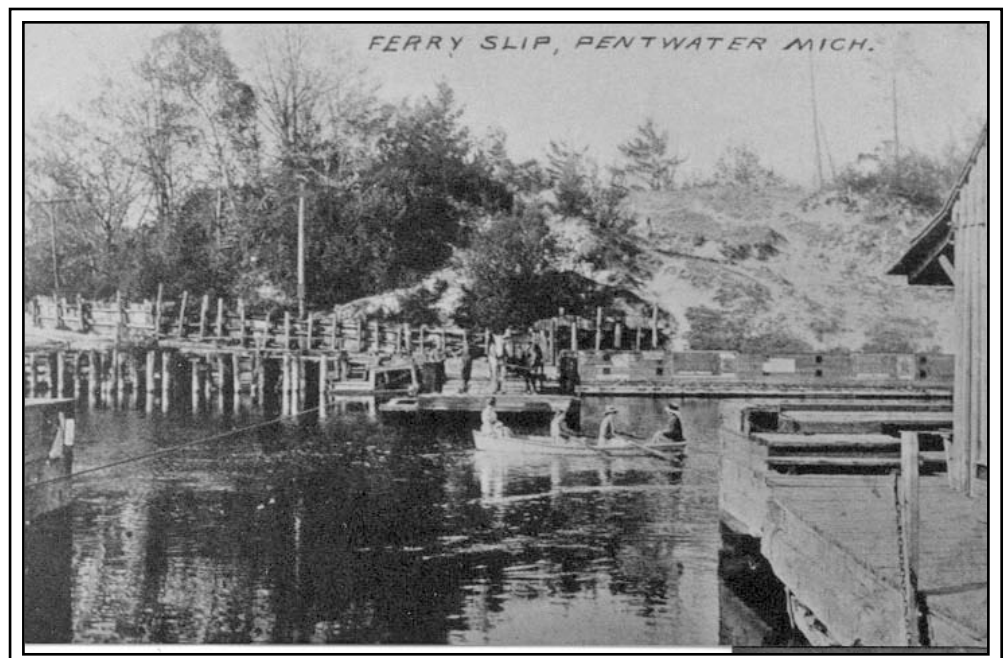
Bottom Left: A photo of the former cable ferry carries a team and wagon to the south bank of the channel with goods that probably will be brought to the railroad depot. Note the man pushing against the cable with the slotted bar. He will soon come to the rear of the ferry, return to the front of the ferry, and by pushing against the cable, walk the ferry to the south bank.



Above Right and Photo on Page 5: Horses and wagons are being transported from the foot of Bridge Street to the south ferry landing.

Left: The cable is plainly seen in this photo. A rowboat is waiting for the cable to be lowered so they can continue their leisurely cruise while another wagon waits on the south shore to cross the channel.

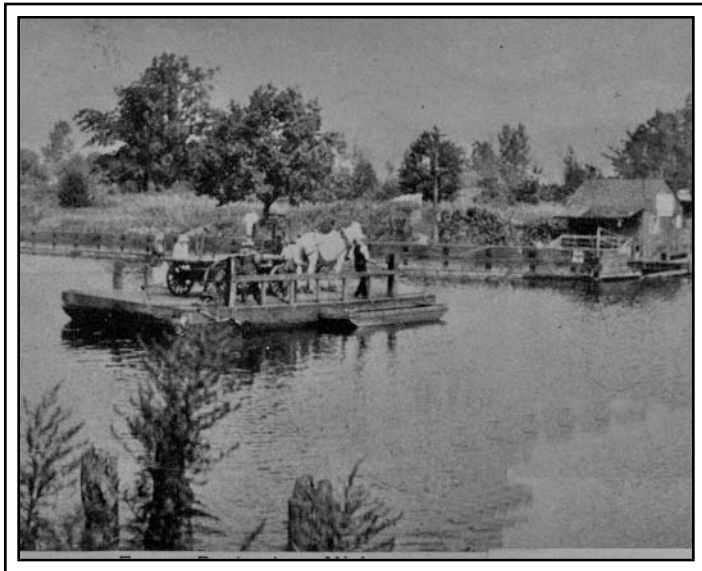
You can view this and other Pentwater Historical Society's Newsletters and photos on our website at: pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org



era of the channel ferry after 68 years of service to the Pentwater Community.

Excerpts taken from Pentwater News articles in 1949, recorded the ending fate and disposition of the Swing Bridge for Pentwater: "Village President William Yonkman said that bridge repairs were estimated at about \$40,000 or a new bridge cost of approximately \$130,000. The Swing Bridge operated for 20 years with few breaks in service and the last 3 years with excessive maintenance and repair costs.

In late 1947, the village council attempted a seven mills request for bridge operation and repairs, which was rejected by the voters. The village discovered that it was spending one-third of its total income for bridge operations and very needed repairs. Interested parties provided helpful funds for bridge operations during the resort season. Barricades



were erected on both approaches and the bridge was swung open so navigation through the channel would not be obstructed. Many times in the past years attempts were made by the village, Chamber of Commerce and resort groups to secure state or federal financial help for a new bridge, but no such help was granted." (Continued on last page.)

DUES ARE DUE

Membership dues for the 2010-2011 year were due September 1, 2010. If you do not see "11", "L" or "P" 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

BOB'S CORNER

The Mysterious Case of The Folding Fire Ladder

For many years I have written about Pentwater the town and life in our town but nothing about the Historical Society's Museum. Why? I do not know. I have no idea. Anyway, to correct this oversight I went to the museum and looked around. The first item I laid eyes on was the fire ladder hanging on the north wall just behind the desk. This thing has fascinated me for years. OK, now that we know it's location in the museum and the fact it fascinates me, what's so special about it worth a newsletter article? Probably the first thing you notice is when it is folded it looks like a log about 12 feet long and about 6" in diameter with a steel band on the top and on the bottom to hold it together. I should say the ladder is not entirely made of wood. It does have these bands, metal caps on the ends of the rungs and metal nails holding it in place. In addition, there's a metal support strap that holds the ladder open when a fire fighter starts to climb. Open, the rungs are just under 12" wide. Way too small for my big feet.

When the ladder is folded, all rungs fold up neatly inside a carved channel that was once the core of the tree and the ladder looks like a 6" diameter log split it's entire length. It would be fascinating to know who made the ladder and where they got the idea.

There's a sign hanging from the ladder;

**One-Man Folding Ladder Collapses into
a single pole folds out into a regular ladder.**

Used by Pentwater Fire Chief - Maurice Kokx

donated ladder through his sister Phyllis Christensen.

OK, I know your next question is why have I not added a photo of the ladder for this article. The answer is simple. I want you to stop by the museum and have a good look at the ladder and everything else in there.

In conclusion, I know I didn't have to call it the "The Mysterious Case...." but I thought it would pic your interests. See you at the Museum.

NEW MEMBERS

Dick Ardrey Sara von Koschembahr

EXISTING MEMBER TO LIFE

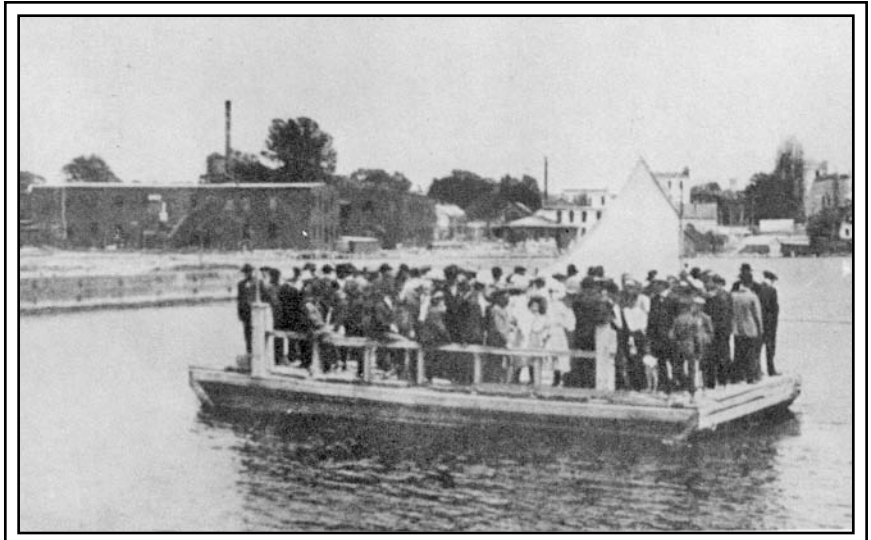
Dolores Sameul Ray & Sherry Kloostra

DONATIONS

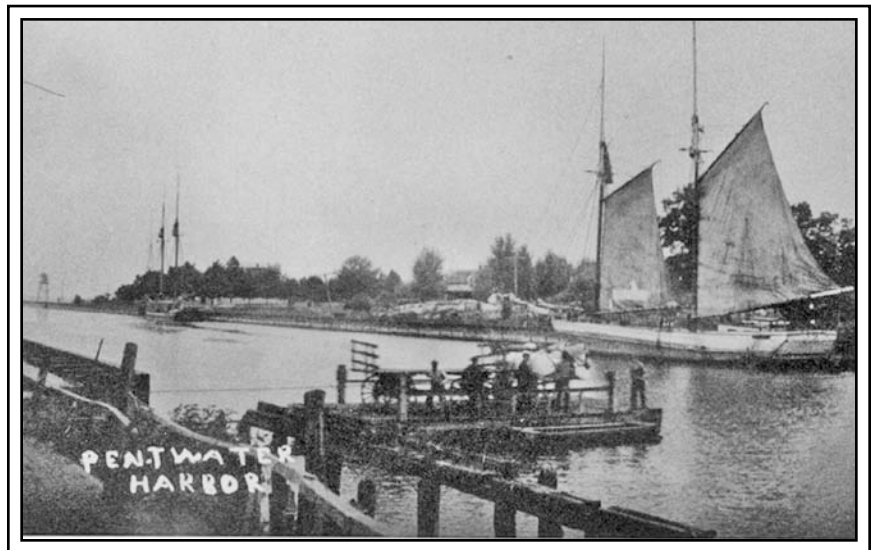
Nancy Wright Pentwater Yacht Club

On October 29, 1949, village council members Yonkman, Taylor, Frutchey, McLlquham, Gustafson, and Graham, with Bill Belfour absent, awarded Hinkle & Bultema Marine Contractors from Muskegon the contract to remove the bridge, piling and timber from the channel to a level of the surrounding water depth for \$975.00. Of the seven bids for removal of the bridge and related materials, local resident and marine contractor Donald G. Cluchey's bid of \$1,000.00 was a very close second.

In the 23 years of service, two fatalities are associated with the Swing Bridge. In December 1944, Mr. Burton Garvey, 52 and daughter Rose Beatrice, 23 were drowned when attempting to drive across the bridge at 7:30 a.m. At the time of the tragedy the bridge was in the open position. According to the Pentwater News article, Mr. Garvey's car skidded on the North approach to the bridge, crashed through the guardrail, and plunged into the 16-foot deep channel water. Bridge attendant Wade Maynard had opened the bridge for the Stover & Fischer fish tug that was proceeding towards Lake Michigan. By the way, while not confirmed, the story is that the barge being used by Hinkle & Bultema Marine Contractors to tow the Swing Bridge from Pentwater to Muskegon sank along the way! So, as Paul Harvey would say in closing his radio program, "And now you know the rest of the story".



The ferry is jammed with merry makers! The school and factories are in the background.



Schooners are moored along the channel in this old photo. Lower left shows the railing along the ramp leading down to the ferry dock. Extreme left is the observation tower that was moved to its present location at Snug Harbor Marina.

USE THIS FORM TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE PENTWATER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HOME ADDRESS _____	SUMMER ADDRESS _____	From _____ To _____
NAME _____	NAME _____	
ADDRESS _____	ADDRESS _____	
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____	CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____	
PHONE _____	PHONE _____	

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP:	●Patron \$500*	●Life \$125*	●Sustaining \$40*		
	●Annual \$10*	●Student \$3	(* Includes Spouse)	STATUS:	<input type="checkbox"/> New
					<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal

Would you like to be contacted to participate in society activities? If so, your area of interest is: _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:
The Pentwater Historical Society, P.O. Box 54, Pentwater, MI 49449

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE _____