



PENTWATER PRIDE

Summer 2023
Newsletter

Past · Present · Promised

The Revolutionary All-Metal Lenert Aircraft Company Plane, Made in Pentwater 1928-1931

By Pam Vanderploeg, Copyright 2023

As a researcher and walking tour guide, I enjoy chasing down the back stories of Pentwater's fascinating early residents. Some died in Pentwater, but many made their historical mark and moved on. Willy Lenert is one of those temporary residents. He launched the Lenert Aircraft Company in 1928 in Pentwater, in a factory building on South Hancock Street, on the shores of Pentwater Lake, where he built his patented all-metal airplane to take to the Detroit Airplane exhibition. It was an aircraft he had been working on for 18 years. According to the newspaper account, it was the only all-metal plane at that time, was less costly at \$2,500, and weighed the same as the wood and cloth planes but had the advantage of being fireproof. The village acquired from W. H. Gardner about 80 acres at the east end of the town for a landing strip.



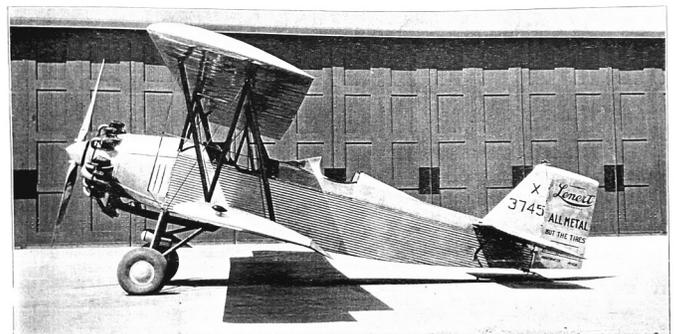
The Lenert All-Metal Bi-Plane - Photo most likely taken in Pentwater around 1928-1930

The story of Willy Lenert began at his Copenhagen, Denmark birth in 1886. After moving to Chicago with his parents at age eight, his education ended in the sixth grade. Around 1906, Lenert became a vaudeville "slack wire performer" and performed his act around the country in June 1908, including at the Grand Rapids Airdome, a new open-air performance facility at the corner of Crescent and Ottawa Streets designed with circus-style seating. For unknown reasons, Hoertz & Son contractors purchased and razed the Grand Rapids Airdome in 1911 for its lumber. By then, Lenert worked in aviation as a balloon ascensionist. Along the way, he opened and later closed a failed wholesale grocery operation in a Chicago residential neighborhood.

By 1924, when his son Willy G. Lenert Jr. was born, Lenert Sr. had an idea for an all-metal bi-plane to replace the cloth-covered, wood-frame bi-planes, which he described as a fire hazard. Willy came to Pentwater in 1925 to build his airplane, and in 1926, according to his recollections, it was a hit at the 1926 Detroit Air Show. The Lenert Aircraft Corporation filed articles of incorporation with the Oceana County clerk in 1926 with \$50,000 of capital. By January 1930, the company had just finished a third aircraft, a "model C" biplane, at the firm's Pentwater, Michigan plant. It was the only all-metal bi-plane on the market and was described as "all metal but the tires." The Pentwater News described test flights by Forrest King of Muskegon. Representatives of Detroit's Continental Motors and Sky Specialties flew to Pentwater to inspect the new plane for exhibition at the St. Louis aircraft show.

In the spring of 1930, the Ludington Daily News carried an article about Mrs. & Mrs. Willie Lenert and their children Willy Jr. and Ruth and their trip flying a Lenert airplane from Muskegon to Chicago through Dowagiac and Benton Harbor. Before that, Lenert took the aircraft on a demonstration tour to the Detroit, Selfridge Field, Lansing, and Grand Rapids airports. Licensed pilots tested the plane at those locations.

"ALL METAL BUT THE TIRES"



Lenert
PATENTED

MODEL "D"

Continued on page 2

Mr. Myers, a Michigan State Department of Commerce inspector, described the aircraft glowingly. According to the article, requests for information were coming into the Pentwater plant daily, and the company worked on a catalog. On June 1, the Ludington Daily News reported that Lenert planned a demonstration for invited stockholders the following Monday at the Ludington airport.

On January 18, 1931, the Ludington Daily News reported that a Lenert Plane carrying Willie Lenert and pilot William Butters en route to Florida made a successful emergency landing in foggy, rainy conditions in a farmer's field near Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The Lenert Plane, model X866N, was undamaged. The plane's chief test pilot, Bill Butters, also stopped on January 22, 1931, in Knoxville, Tennessee, on the way back to the Pentwater factory from North Carolina to fix a small leak in the oil tank. According to the Knoxville Journal, the plane had a 165 horsepower Continental motor with a high speed of 135 miles per hour and a cruising speed of 115 miles per hour.

A year before, in 1930, the company discussed moving to Dowagiac, where one of the largest stockholders, Mr. Fitch, resided. The officers of the company were: Willy Lehnert, president, L. G. (His wife Lillian Lenert), secretary-treasurer; Martin Mullaly of Muskegon, vice-president; John O. Reed of Montague; Chairman of the board; D.W. Atkinson of Sparta, Jesse Bilderback; and A.W. How of Dowagiac. There is no evidence of this move.

The Pentwater plant built six airplanes but closed in the early 1930s, reportedly due to the stock market crash. By 1936, Lenert was living in Chicago and pitched his plan to reopen the aircraft factory to approximately 25 towns, according to newspaper reports in Victoria, Texas, and Bowling Green, Kentucky. Lenert tried to position the new company to build army and navy planes for the United States government and foreign countries. In 1939, a government flyer received by the company sought bids to supply an army training plane. Lenert opened a shop at the Pontiac, Michigan City Airport and got assistance in developing the design for this new plane from aeronautical engineers at the University of Michigan. He described the proposed plane as a "sleek, metal, low-wing two-seater." Lenert's government bid priced the training plane at \$3,000, apparently the lowest bid. However, the government awarded the contract to a different firm, returning the plans to him. Lenert then sued the government in a \$9.8 million lawsuit. The Lenert Aircraft Company (by then called the Zephyr Aircraft Company) sought compensation for losses suffered from the rejection of its design submitted for the 1939 pre-World War II war department

training plane.

By the 1940s, the Lenert family ended up in Sylvania, adjacent to Toledo, Ohio. Then in 1947, tragedy struck the family. Willy Lenert Jr. was now a 22-year-old World War II veteran and a student at Ohio State University. He and his wife, 20-year-old Louise Lehnert, succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning in their student trailer residence, dying a few days later.

In 1952, the firm founded by aviation pioneer Willy Lenert finally lost its \$9.8 million lawsuit filed in U.S. Claims Court. According to the government, although Lenert's company was one of twelve companies invited to submit, their application was rejected because their proposal needed to demonstrate an ability to fulfill a contract for the required number of planes. Furthermore, the submission needed proof that they had built at least a prototype. The Zephyr Company liquidated its assets at the time of the court decision, and Willy Lenert retired from aircraft design.

On April 15, 1966, New Castle News (Pennsylvania) article featured the life of Willy Lenert, who was by then living with his wife Lillian and daughter Grace (Lenert) Pifer and her husband, on a farm in that area in Scott Township, PA. He rebuilt the farm barn and had plans on the drawing board for rebuilding the house. He recalled to the reporter his fascination with flight in 1910, seven years after the Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. That flight inspired Lenert to begin his extraordinary Pentwater adventure, building and flying an innovative all-metal aircraft. Lenert told the New Castle News, New Castle, Pennsylvania, that he thought one of the planes was still flying in 1966 near Niles, Michigan. He claimed, "I was offered a half-million dollars for the enterprise by a St. Louis steel firm only months before it closed."

Early in 1966, Lenert wrote a vehement letter to the editor of that newspaper, decrying the Vietnam War and lamenting the lost Vietnamese and American lives. He described his bitterness, having lost the bid to build a training plane for the U.S. government. The letter may have inspired the newspaper's feature article about Lenert's life in April 1966. Thanks to that article, we know more about Lenert's extraordinary aircraft adventure. Willy Lenert died of pneumonia on September 18, 1968. Still, the memory of his airplane factory remains alive in Pentwater history, and as of 2007, a Lenert Plane was registered to an owner—more to investigate on that.

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Museum Hours

Tuesday—Friday

1 pm—4 pm

Saturday

10 am—4 pm



Summer Happenings!

Work is progressing on the scale model of the USS Sequoia. Our artisan, Gary Yakubowski, is assembling the model from materials he buys, builds, or modifies. The model was begun by a now deceased artisan years earlier and since there are no plans available for the Sequoia, as there are with other US Navy vessels, Gary must use photos to duplicate the original ship. The USS Sequoia model has only one more level to build, although this level may be the most challenging level of them all.

Historic Architectural Walking Tours will take place on four Thursdays in July and August. Check our website and Facebook page for details. Strolling through Pentwater's residential streets with a historian to tell the stories of Pentwater's earliest citizens and their homes will give you a better understanding of the transformations in styles and the abundance of architectural options that became available in the late 1800s. Pam VanderPloeg and Robin Martens are our docents for these tours.

History Cruises are back this year! Tour Pentwater Lake and Lake Michigan (weather and conditions permitting) to hear the stories of what happened on the lakes and on our shores. Docents will be on board to illuminate the early stories of Pentwater and answer your questions about life in the late 1800s. \$15 for passenger ages 13 and above. Children ages 3-12 are free, but you will need a reservation in order to reserve their seat. Make your reservations at ptwtaxi.com. Send inquires to pentwaterwatertaxi@gmail.com, call or text (231)742-8874. Bring your family and friends along for the cruise. All tips and donations benefit the PHS.

Private History Cruises on Your Boat!

A PHS docent will provide a free narrative on YOUR boat -- in return, we only ask for a total donation of at least \$25 to support the PHS's admission-free Museum. It runs on donations. This is perfect for when you have houseguests, or just want to round up some neighbors on your boat. Perhaps bring some nibbles and refreshments for everyone to enjoy. Do you know about landmarks such as Pentwater's horse racetrack, a site that's listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the "White Elephant," and where Pentwater's three movie houses were located? You'll learn this and much more. To arrange a mutually convenient day, departure time, and starting/ending location, contact ron.beeber@gmail.com.

Hear the **History of Hancock Street** and Pentwater at your own pace. Stroll through our business district and listen to the stories of the businesses that thrived over the last 150 years. Call (231) 720-0291 and follow the prompts to hear stories block by block. Thank you to Ron Beeber for his dedicated research, his fascinating scripts, and his adroit narration of those stories. Way to go, Ron!

Docent-led Museum tours

for groups of 5 or more are available with advance scheduling. Send email to phs.tours@pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org. Our only request is that you donate to the museum.

Hancock History Self-Guided Audio Tour



What's the history of Hancock St.?
Dial 231.720.0291
and follow the prompts to find out!

Expand your knowledge about Pentwater history by listening to six historical narratives (5-9 mins) that describe some of the history that occurred on six blocks of Hancock Street in Pentwater's downtown.

 Pentwater Historical Society & Museum

Pentwater Machinery Company

1946-1956

By Larry Konopka & Norm Shotwell

In 1916, Pentwater Machinery Company was organized by Daniel Halsted, who took over the factory building at 474 S Carroll Street from Saunders and Chase and continued to manufacture the "Pentwater Boy" net-lifter for use by commercial fisherman. In the years just before WW II, the company was nearly out of business and reduced to just a couple of employees. Demand for the net-lifter had waned.

When the war broke out, the company reorganized and became one of the leading war plants in western Michigan manufacturing airplane bomb racks and sway braces for the navy as well as other military supplies. With VJ day in August 1945, war production stopped and in November 1945 the Pentwater Machinery Company reorganized and remodeled the factory to prepare for peacetime products. The building was converted to a two-story concrete structure with steel girders and has 15,000 sf of floor space for Machinery plus 1,500 sf for storage & warehousing.

Larry Konopka was born in Detroit in 1942. His father was Bernard Konopka whose hometown was Detroit. His mother was Janet Kappler Konopka who was a Pentwater native. After WW II ended, Janet wanted to return to Pentwater to be near her parents and other relatives. Consequently, the family moved to Pentwater around early 1946.

In 1946, Pentwater Machinery Company was headed by Dr. William Heard as President and Bernard Konopka as Vice-President. Others who joined at the time were Boyd L Schmol, secretary-treasurer, Jerry Ferguson, sales manager, Arthur Haynor, general foreman and Patrick Corr, purchasing agent.

The company was known locally as "The Shop". It provided much needed employment in the post-war period for Pentwater men returning from the armed forces. The leading product was the "Pentwater Picni-Kook, a heavy-duty outdoor grill and hunter's stove. The company improved the manufacture and supply of spare parts for the net-lifter with a redesigned unit. However, in 1948, the "Pentwater Boy" net-lifter was sold to an east coast company. The shop machined iron castings into parts for the automotive and aircraft industry. Other products included an expansion arbor for machine tool shops, the Kirk-site mold and automatic cement block manufacturing machinery.

A new company governing board was formed in 1950 with Bernard Konopka as president, I.B. Harrington as vice-president, Henry Rule as treasurer, and Janet Konopka as corporate secretary. Bernard's office was located in the corner of the second

floor. His long-time secretary was Mrs. Helen Symanski. Larry Konopka visited the shop from time to time and remembers very well seeing the employees operating the lathes, milling machines and punch presses. The rhythmic noises of the machines and the smell of the cutting oil are also very memorable to him.

Bernard installed a patio and outdoor fireplace incorporating a Picni-Kook behind the family home at 815 North Hancock Street (the Cisler family home). Bernard and Larry were featured in photos of a family picnic that were then used to promote the Picni-Kook.

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Pentwater Picni-Kook

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Bernard Konopka Larry Konopka

Pentwater Machinery Co.

PENTWATER, MICH.

At the end of 1953, Bernard relocated the Pentwater Machinery Company to the industrial park in Fort Wayne, Indiana and the family moved there as well. Thereafter, the Konopka family would continue to return to Pentwater frequently as "summer people".

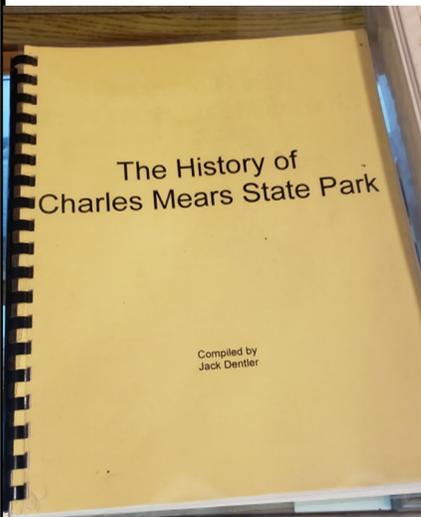
The shop building at 474 S Carroll was then acquired by Ludington businessman Maurice Dore with financial assistance from local businessmen Dr. Warren Mullen, F. Shaw, Ken Lites and Clarence Loree. In 1956, the new company was named Pentwater Wire Products with Mr. Dore as General Manager and Head of Sales.

Museum Update

By Daniel Hoekstra Sr

We are now open for our 2023 season. Come see our new exhibit this year, the Charles Mears State Park Exhibit. What do you remember about your summers at the beach? Did you carve your name into a wooden bench? Remember the metal tasting water out of the green drinking fountains or the old wooden signs in the sand? Come on in and see if you can find your name on the old bench or your face in a picture. We have plenty of Charles Mears State Park signs and memorabilia. Along with the exhibit there are 2 books that you can look at detailing the history of the Park.

Just for fun, we have the old Park Survey mailbox all set up. We are asking for you to bring in a story about your remembrances of the State Park and put them in the slot of the survey mailbox. Let's keep these memories alive for future generations!



Don't forget to use our Engage by Cell. Dial (231) 720-0291 on your phone to listen to 54 recorded narratives that explain various exhibits and artifacts that are on display. Each recording is 45 seconds to 2 minutes in length.

thank you



A special thank you to everyone who donated items, volunteered their time to collect, price, organize, carry, and sell items as well as those who came to purchase treasures at the Garage Sale this year! Because of everyone's generosity, the Pentwater Historical Society was able to raise over \$3,000!



Historical Discoveries

Janet and Chuck Strahan were cleaning out the crawl space under their 6th Street home, which sits about 75 yards west of St. Vincent's Catholic Church, when they came across a partly scorched, 17-foot wood beam. Engraved on the beam is the date is "April 16th, 1882" as well as some letters. The date goes back to about 30 years after the first settlers of European ancestry arrived. The Strahan's believe the beam was repurposed from an earlier structure elsewhere in the Village.



The Pentwater Historical Society is investigating the unique engravings.

Giving Back One Window at a Time

By Amy Vander Zwart

Tom Blackburn is a patient and industrious individual. For the better part of a year, Tom has been painstakingly restoring three of the unique stained-glass windows of the Pentwater Historical Society Museum which once housed First Baptist Church and date back to the late 1800's. This is not the first time that Tom has stepped up to complete a seemingly insurmountable task for the Pentwater Historical Society. During the time that the church building was being converted to the museum Tom restored eight of the building's windows.

Fixing a stained-glass window is not an easy process. The restoration process is much more detailed than new construction. In addition to the expected intricate detail work, Tom experienced many underlying issues that shouldn't have been a problem, during his current rehab project. Some of the challenges he faced were materials unavailable because of labor issues, no workspace, and Kokomo Opalescent Glass Company (in Kokomo, Indiana) deciding to rebuild their massive kiln for the first time in 70+ years.



When asked how Tom knew how to restore these works of art, he replied, "My knowledge is from 48+ years of experience. I started and ran a studio in Grand Rapids. We designed, constructed, and restored leaded glass. We also had a beveled glass department, abrasive etching and hand painted and kiln fired glass in conjunction with our design department. We worked in MI, IN, OH and IL and shipped painted glass to studios in Pennsylvania, New Orleans and Florida. I had a great crew of Artists and crafts people. I miss working with them every day. I was a lucky guy."



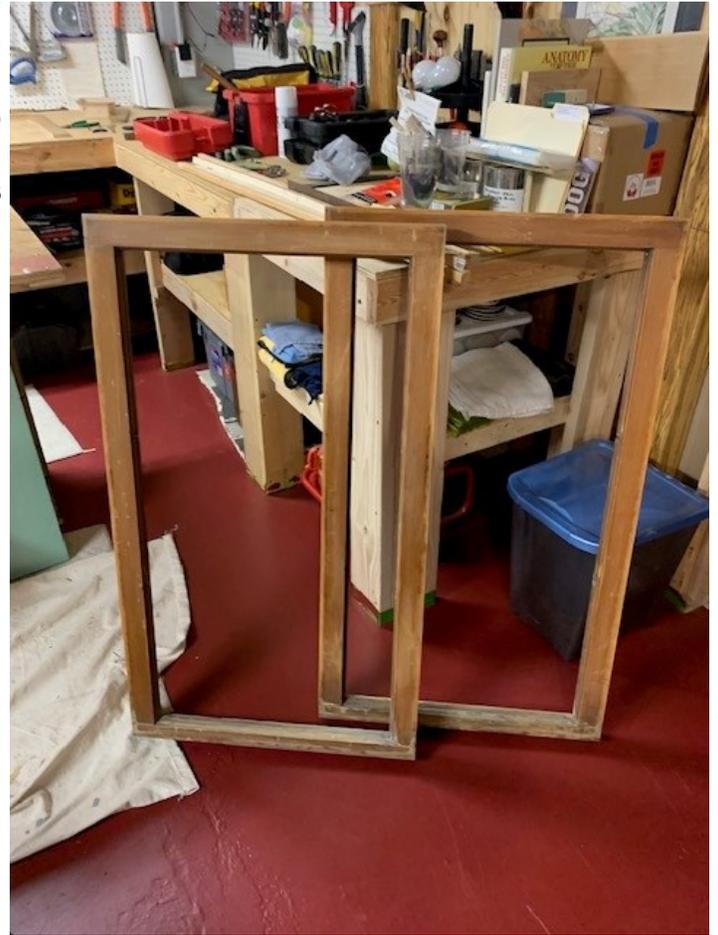
Tom began the process of restoring the window panels by delicately removing the windows. Each of the three windows had to be removed completely, transferred to Tom's home, traced to capture the pattern and disassembled piece by piece. Each window has 74 pieces.

Some of the original glass pieces inside of the window panels were missing or broken and therefore required replacements. The glass inside the windows is an amber cathedral color. It was difficult to match the original amber color with what present manufacturers now create. Tom had to travel to Kokomo Opalescent Glass Company in Kokomo, Indiana with samples to attempt to find a match. In the end, he decided the only way to accurately match the color was to have a batch custom made. The glass was not done in the normal double rolled style but in a puddle form that is custom rolled. This gave us a similar look to the glass as well as a very good color.



Tom also found that the frames of the windows were in poor condition due to moisture damage and age. They required sanding, repairs, and more color matching for interior stain and exterior paint which was also a challenge.

Once Tom had all of the correct pieces for the window panels, it was time to reassemble them piece by piece. After assembly, The panels needed to be soldered at every joint of lead channel on both sides of the panel. The final stage is the grouting / cementing of the panels on both sides. The process is similar to the grouting of tile. This is a multiple step process and takes two to three days to complete. The final stage is installing the soldered pieces into the frames. The steel rods are set into the frames and the windows set to the rabbet (The amount of space necessary to accommodate the glass and hold it in place). The windows are held in place by a series of carpet tacks set through the edge of the border channel and into the wood rabbet. Glazing compound is used to fill the rabbet. After the glazing compound skins over it is painted with a coat of



white exterior paint. The wire ties are twisted around the rods and the panels are ready to reinstall into the opening.

Tom Blackburn volunteered months of his time and countless resources for a simple reason. "Ed Bigelow. I live kitty corner to Ed's house. He was part of a great crew of giving people restoring the Baptist Church for the Historical Society.-No- they were actually doing this for the greater Pentwater area and community. I was impressed with what the people were doing and decided to offer my help with the old main sanctuary windows. Ed passed too soon. I miss talking to him."

The Pentwater Historical Society would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Tom for his selfless gifts of time, talent, and resources in the restoration of our historic windows



Without people like Tom Blackburn, Pentwater Historical Society and Museum would not be where it is today.

Thank You, Tom!



★ ★ ★
MEMORIAL DAY
Remember and Honor



Getting the beach ready!



Summer visitors are here!

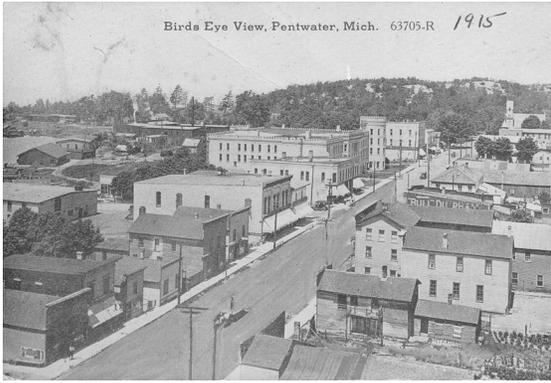
New colors this year!

Historical Pentwater Icon Might Ring a Bell

By Peter Rexford

Pentwater has a good deal in common with New England. Both have an abundance of maples providing ample sap for syrup and extraordinary autumn colors. The surrounding lands abound with wildlife in rolling hills that ebb from woodlands to endless expanses of cool water and were once populated by countless American Indians. And, akin to every settlement in the glens and valleys of the eastern seaboard, when entering the halcyon village of Pentwater, a towering church steeple and bell have been welcoming icons.

Almost 150 years ago, that lone Pentwater steeple rose above the wooden shingle roof tops. Belonging to the Centenary Methodist Church it was the first and, then, sole house of worship in the village. The first official church building was a wooden structure on the site of the current church at Hancock and First Street. Centenary's history began a bit earlier, in 1856, when a particularly compelling sermon was delivered in a different building.



The early village men led a hardscrabble life working in lumber, fishing, brick-making and shipbuilding. They were predominantly of white descent so one might suspect the presence of racial discord toward the resident native Indians, of which there were plenty.

By 1857, over 800 Ottawa, Pottawattamie and Chippewa Indians called Pentwater their home. First-hand accounts from the lakeshore recall the sight of dozens of nightly Indian campfires visible in the woods and hills surrounding Pentwater Lake.

Happily, the racial sentiment was predominantly positive. Evidence of that came during that 1856 sermon. Prior to the wooden church being built, it was delivered in the village boarding house to a crowd of 100 or so men by a Methodist clergyman named Joseph

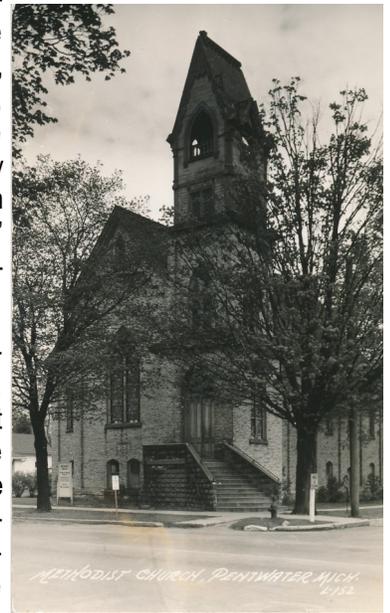
Elliott – himself a full-blooded American Indian. The crowd listened intently and even offered tithes and donations in the form of meat and potatoes. Elliott had been adopted at a young age by a wealthy white family and received a Boston college education. During his adult years in Oceana and Mason counties, Elliott returned to Pentwater to preach to both white and Indian congregations.

Services continued in the wooden Centenary church. During the Civil War, Pentwater was a notable port on Lake Michigan where, when sailing into the channel to the safe harbor of Pentwater Lake, sailors saw the reassuring sight of the church just up the hill to the northeast. By 1874, a parsonage was added behind the church. Today, the steeple of Centenary Methodist remains visible through the trees from the east end of the channel.

Barely a year later, on April 23, 1875, the first of several setbacks struck when a fire broke out at 1:00AM. Rudimentary firefighting was no match. In no time, the church, parsonage and a nearby hotel were lost to the flames. An initiative was immediately launched to raise funds to rebuild the church building. The groundswell of support was significant. Less than two months later, a cornerstone for a new “gothic-style” church was laid.

By that December, a basement foundation in the same location had been established. A “fireproof” structure of brick would replace the former wooden church. (Speculation remains as to the actual source of the bricks used. Bricks on the church match the yellow-ish hue of the other buildings in and near Pentwater, said to have been made at the Pentwater Brick Factory located on what is now Lake Street in town. Yet, some contend those bricks were of a different type. Others are adamant the church bricks, those of the old Village Hall; Ships Store; Gustafson Building and other homes and structures are absolutely “Pentwater Bricks.” However, a September 16, 1875 story in the **Pentwater News** stated, “The brick from Spring Lake, which have been contracted for the new Methodist Church, have already begun to arrive.” Ergo, unless the bricks for every other building in town also came from Spring Lake – near Grand Haven – it remains a mystery.)

Construction took over three years to complete. On July 13, 1879, the new brick church was open for services. Eight years after that, the iconic steeple created expressly for the Centenary church was installed. Inside the steeple was housed the large, resonant church bell heard throughout the village and beyond. It regularly signaled the beginning of worship services to the community. It also became the audible village harbinger for other events of note. In 1918, when the Spanish Flu swept the nation killing 675,000 – more deaths than in all foreign wars in which the US was involved – Pentwater wasn't immune. By that November, everyone hoped the epidemic was beginning to wane. The public was still justifiably wary. On Sunday, the citizens were told to listen for the Centenary church bell. If they heard it ring, it would signal the flu ban was lifted and services were to be held. The bell rang.



A quieter setback took place in the early 1930s. Attendance at all area churches had plummeted. For a while, Centenary Methodist was the only church in the village to hold regular services and Sunday school. Other churches were open only sporadically – some just in the summer. Attendance was so scant, local businesses were solicited for donations to pay the minister. The “Great Depression” had taken its toll.

In 1937, an inspired young minister named Oliver Drake was assigned to the church. Upon arrival he found mainly empty pews, no Sunday school and even less enthusiasm. Drake was determined to regain and rally his congregation. He reorganized the former faithful and compelled them to return including teenagers in a Youth Fellowship program. He reinstated Sunday school with volunteer teachers and resurrected the Ladies Aid Society. Once again, a damaged church began to rise from the ashes.

The year 1954 marked a third challenging setback when lightning struck the wooden bell tower and steeple which had stood for three-quarters of a century. The powerful bolt splintered timbers and shingles causing considerable damage. The harm was significant enough to require the dismantlement of the steeple beam by beam. It was replaced by a distinctly unremarkable and uninspiring flat covering. No one was impressed.

Fast-forward to 1981. It was decided to again crown the classic brick edifice with a traditional, pronounced and recognizable steeple. The one to grace Centenary included a fitting housing for the historic bell serving both a visual and audible beacon for the community. Adding to the charm would be an electronic carillon to play canticles and seasonal carols to the community. Upon wise reflection, the cross at the top of the spire was retrofitted to discreetly house a lightning rod and minimize any future "heavenly" episodes.



Over the years, expansions to the once solely rectangular building have been made. To the west, the addition of Fellowship Hall and a full kitchen. An entire wing with offices, meeting rooms and activity areas was added to the north. On the south, an elevator was installed to help worshippers travel from street level to the sanctuary on the second floor.

The steps in front once led directly up to the door from Hancock Street. When the street was widened and more room needed for the village sidewalk, the steps were reconfigured at the angle they are today. At the top are the original wooden doors

and entry vestibule.

Extant also is the stained glass. Colorful windows grace both sides of the sanctuary – some dedicated to early members. One from 1915, at the front entryway, is dedicated to the US Coast Guard which has served the community and sailors over the decades.

Finally, the pews inside the sanctuary. The small, wooden shield-plaques with numbers in relief on the ends belie logic. They are in no discernable order and skip multiple rows. That's due to their being acquired in 1879 from a previous – albeit unknown – church. Consequently, the pews predate even the church where they still serve.

During Christmastime, parishioners assured a tree would be colorfully decorated and laden with presents for the children of the village. Such distributions and accompanying Christmas parties became a regular tradition.

Soon to celebrate the 150th anniversary of its cornerstone and construction, Centenary has endured into the 21st century despite many challenges. The church entered the digital age by adding streamed Sunday services online. Naturally, that can result in less in-person attendance and, potentially, lower donations without an in-person plate passing.

A robust summertime crowd contrasted with an aging population and thin winter residency creates another enigma – particularly in the form of young families. Nevertheless, the historic church has been unwavering. Attendance by regular parishioners is, just that, regular. So too are community outreach programs that are both charitable and sociable.

From autumn through spring, Centenary has shouldered responsibility for a weekly supper program offering cost-free dinners in Fellowship Hall to whomever wishes or needs them. For some, it's an economic necessity... For others, an invaluable regular communal time. In the summer, C Centenary is also present on the Village Green where it holds outdoor services open to all.

It's been said that a church should be a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. That makes sense. Yet, with an account as rich as Centenary Methodist, along with the legacy of a building of almost 150 years, it not only continues its original mission but offers an literal trip back in time. Sainly or not, that's a heritage any museum would be proud to boast.

Peter Rexford is a nationally syndicated newspaper columnist who writes about collectibles and related history. He is also a radio host and the author and contributing author of several books. He makes his home in Pentwater near where the old Pentwater Brick Factory once stood as well as in St. Louis, Missouri.

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Newsletter Committee

Amy Vander Zwart
Mary Marshall

Summer Newsletter Acknowledgements

New Members	Memorials for Dan Filius		
Elizabeth Alderman John & Cindy Dipangrazio Ross & Carol Feltes Doug & Karen Irvine Carrie & Bill Roberts <div style="text-align: center; font-family: cursive; font-size: 2em; color: black;">Welcome</div>	Mark & Judy Ross John & Sandra VanDyken Susan Kierstead Pentwater Service Club Lake Michigan Dental P.C. Judith Gunia James & Joan Gehringer Dennis & Sylvia McNeal Anita Reed Tave & Lesley Reser Glenn & Louise Beavis Wesley & Roxanne Roth	Jon & Nancy Denhof Todd & Karla Van Houten Edward & Mary Simpson Kathie Holley Karen Cheadle Larry & Lois Vermaire Larry & Lucy Filius Eugene & Judith Jankowski Buz & Terrie Graeber Robert & Sandra Kittendorf Lee & Sandra Oppenheimer John & Kathleen Wilson Sam & Jane Morrison	Steven & Susan Lesky Thomas & Diane Lambrich Ronald Christians Raymond & Sheryl Kloostra Ryan & Raquel Kloostra Tim & Sarah VanderVeen Patricia Dale Rose Baker Jim & Kay Chase James Piccard Rog & Fern Alberts Connie Busser Anonymous
Memorials for Raymond Dewyer	Donations to Building Expansion Fund		
Karen Way James & Courtney Hackey Alan Hackey Ronald & Roxanne Berger	Dick & Sylvia Warner Ron Beeber & Amy LaBarge Jon & Christi Daly Anonymous	<div style="font-family: cursive; font-size: 3em; color: black;">thank you</div>	

Around the Village.... Building Stories!

By Beth Russell

Look inside our local businesses along Hancock Street and you'll start to see panels popping up. This project is a collaboration of talents between historian, Pam VanderPloeg and artist, Libby VanderPloeg.

Unearth the location of our own airplane manufacturer, see pictures of the Maywood Steamer, learn about the flying boats in Pentwater, see photos of the Pere Marquette Railroad, and even discover the truth about the Pentwater Racetrack! The panels supply interesting historical facts along with pictures or illustrations.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Michigan Humanities, Pentwater Junior Women's Club, GLE People Fund, and Oceana Community Foundation. We couldn't have done it without them!

PENTWATER HISTORY

Birch Michigan and the Big Maple

In 1889, John Bonga established a livery stable on this site. By 1911 brothers W.C. and Charles Bonga and their cousin Mr. Tillie D. Nichols owned the building. They hired John Grabham to erect the Big Maple Garage. The storable one-story concrete block structure named for the large maple tree in front featured large front and back doors.

It became a Texaco Station with two pumps at the Hancock Street curb. Each pump had the iconic glass globes with a picture of the Texaco Fire Chief and hat and a

Texaco Star. The shop also sold Hudson-Eves automobiles. Drivers would bring the cars from Grand Rapids to the Big Maple's Pentwater customers. For a while, it was a Greyhound Bus Depot. In 1934, after Charles Bonga died, W.C. Bonga and Miss Nichols sold the garage. On Wednesday, August 17, 1949, the Texaco Station owner Rex Fratchley opened a roller rink called the "Rollermac," a name Mrs. Charles Taggart chose in a naming contest. Design details included a blue plastic floor for skating and dancing, freshly painted blue walls, and a white ceiling. It was open from Tuesday to Sunday, and the owner often threw open the big doors to catch the breeze as passersby could watch the skaters. On Saturday nights, from 9:30 pm to 1 am, dancers moved to the music of Bill McGraw's orchestra.

Bob Lucas combined the long-vacant building with his Lucas 5 and 10-cent Store around 1966. He opened the popular Redford Hardware & Variety, named for the birds that flew through the broken windows

and sat on the rafters when the building stood empty. In 2008, it became a mini-mall of retail shops.

In 2018, Niki Brunsdale and Michael Haack turned the historic building into Birch Michigan, a home decor shop offering custom interior design services. The new candle shop opened in the adjacent space in 2021. It features the store's original Pentwater and Beach Crows scenic art-style reclaimed wood cabinets and display shelves. Niki describes her design aesthetic as eclectic. She might "put a 190-year-old wash stand with a mid-century bamboo chair on a vintage Kilim rug with a set of berms or ottoms on the wall."

Scan code to learn more.

Additional support for this project has been provided by:

PentwaterHistoricalSociety.org
PentwaterHistoricalSociety.org



Pentwater Historical Society
 PO Box 54
 Pentwater, MI49449



Dan Hoekstra educating third graders from Pentwater Schools about local history.

SUMMER DINNER
AUGUST 23
 5:30 SOCIAL TIME
 6:00 DINNER
 7:00 PRESENTATION

\$30 PER PERSON
 CATERED DINNER
 BYOB

TICKETS
 WILL BE AVAILABLE
 IN EARLY AUGUST

HELD AT:
 AGBIO RESEARCH CENTER
 5185 N OCEANA DR, HART, MI
 49420

Bee Tree

By **Tim Scovill**

In a time, long past, my great granddad hunted "wild honey" with this device.



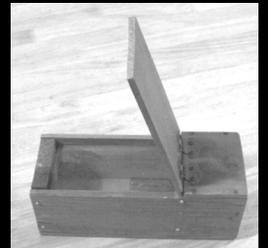
I was lucky enough to have witnessed the harvest of wash tubs of honey from a large white pine "bee tree". As I recall, some cussing is required shortly after the tree hits the ground. A little dancing or jumping around was also involved. Yet, my story is about another bee tree hunt which began at a local tavern.



The wager was a pail of beer. The bet was that a beehive could be located by following a "bee line". After a few beers, Great Grandpa George Scovill

and some of his friends set off to get his bee box and track down a hive.

The group would release one bee, watch it fly, mark the direction with a compass, follow that line, and then release another bee. East, they went across fields into a swamp and across the river. They were getting tired and had run out of beer when they released the last bee, which they followed to Chris Stubb's domestic beehives.



As the group hiked the five miles back to town, they argued about who won the bet. George had in fact found a beehive, yet those who bet against had expected a bee tree. Once they reached the tavern, the discussion continued and much more beer was consumed.

A day in the life of Pentwater people from a simpler time ...

FIND US ONLINE

www.pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org

