



PENTWATER PRIDE



Past Present Promised

Fall 2024

A Presidential Connection?

Pentwater Historical Society is always happy to hear from the community. We often hear from others who have historical information to share as well as those who have questions. Recently, we received a question about the relationship of Charles Mears to Abraham Lincoln. Admittedly, I was not aware of a relationship between the two men and my curiosity was peaked.

If you live in or frequent Pentwater, you would have come across the name Charles Mears. Our state park is named after him, a street in Pentwater is named after him, and even a nearby village is named Mears. He established the village of Pentwater, named streets, built saw mills, boarding houses, and stores in the area, and dug out what is currently the channel between Pentwater Lake and Lake Michigan. After discovering a clay deposit in the area, Charles Mears built a tile and brick factory in Pentwater. The yellow bricked buildings in Pentwater were all built with bricks manufactured in his factory.

Charles Mears was the son of Nathan and Lucy Mears. He was born in North Billerica, Massachusetts on March 16, 1814. He had three brothers; Edwin, Nathan, and Albert and one sister; Lucy Ann. Charles' father was a selectman of the town, built and operated a sawmill, owned several farms, and kept a store as well as one of the locks on a canal. It isn't too difficult to guess where Charles' entrepreneurial spirit originated from as well as his knowledge of sawmills and waterways.

In 1836 Charles and his brothers; Nathan and Edwin headed west to Michigan. They shipped goods by steamer to Paw Paw, Michigan. The three brothers first opened a general store under the name E. & C. Mears & Co in Paw Paw. They bought and sold anything and everything that the local settlers and Indians needed. They also dealt with the selling of land and village lots. The business prospered, but Charles wanted to set his sights to bigger and better things. He had heard there were locations further north along Lake Michigan that were better suited for business and lumbering. He was anxious to get ahead of others in taking advantage of valuable resources. In early 1837, he and his youngest brother, Albert, set off on an expedition with two other men. They went via waterway on a small craft up the coast.

The men went as far north as Manistee. Into 1838 they scouted a number of areas, looking for the best place to establish lumber mills along Lake Michigan. Eventually they settled in the Whitehall area and were the first white settlers there. Over the next 25 years, Charles Mears purchased about 40,000 acres of land in Michigan, built and operated 15 lumber mills, and built six harbors along the western coast of Michigan to transport his lumber.

Look for the conclusion of this article in our next newsletter.



The ANTLER



Sometimes you want to go where everyone knows your name. It seems that place in Pentwater may be one of the oldest continually standing business in the village, The Antler Bar.

The original building was completely lost in the fire of 1889 that swept through downtown Pentwater. The structure that stands there now was built in 1891 out of Pentwater brick from the Middlesex Brick and Tile Company. The building was originally owned by F. W. Fincher. He designated the south end of the building for a pharmacy and the north end a tavern. Seems from either end of the building one could find something to cure what was ailing them.



Over the years, the north end of the building changed hands many times. One of the earlier owners of the Antler was George Clouse. George originally summered in Pentwater and eventually made it home for 20 years. He was quite the entrepreneur operating a secondhand store, a pool house, a restaurant, and a tavern during the years he resided in Pentwater. Before George passed away in 1942 at the age of 75, he sold the Antler to Frank W Gray, otherwise known as Billy Gray, in 1936.

Knowing that Billy Gray was a bar owner for the majority of his adult life, one may have a specific picture in their head about what the man behind the bar may be like. Billy was more than his profession portrayed him to be, however. Having grown up in Cincinnati Ohio, at the age of 15 Billy began theatrical work as a vaudevillian and for more than 16 years was connected with Shubert Theatre, a Broadway theater in New York City. After moving to Chicago, he began vacationing in Pentwater and eventually moved to the area in the late 1920's. Billy lived in Pentwater for 40 years with his wife and two sons. Not only did he own the Antler, but he also served several terms on the village council and served as an honorary member of the Pentwater Volunteer Fire Department.



When Billy Gray was ready to slow his life down, he sold the business side of the Antler to Robert and Theda (Miller) Bergren but continued to own the building. The Bergren's owned and ran the Antler for about 10 years. During the time that Billy Gray had owned the bar, the Antler was known throughout Mason and Oceana counties for its amazing upstairs spring dance floor which Billy had installed in 1939. Once the Bergren's moved in with their five children, however, the dance floor was covered by beds for the children lined up head to toe and any dancing had to be done on the main floor by moving tables out of the way. Even after the Bergren's sold the Antler to Mr. and Mrs. Ted R Conklin of Pontiac in 1957 and moved to Ludington, they considered Pentwater home and spoke fondly of their memories of working in the Antler. When Theda Bergren passed away, her family brought her ashes back to the Antler to celebrate her life in one of her favorite places.

The Conklin's sold the Antler to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Blazo of Milan, Michigan. Unfortunately, Mary Blazo had cancer during her brief time in Pentwater and only survived for three years after their move. The Antler was sold around 1960 to Donald and Wanda Baker. Don Baker ran the Antler for about ten years and then he sold it to Colleen and David Plummer.

The Plummers had both worked at the Antler before they decided to purchase it. While working, the couple was offered ownership into the business. For a time, they were joint owners with the Bakers. After a profitable partnership, the Plummers offered to buy out the other half of the business from the Bakers.

The Antler was the perfect fit for the Plummer family. They followed in the footsteps of previous owners, the Bergrens, having their three children grow up involved in the business. They did not live above the bar however and opted instead to use the space for business purposes. Colleen Plummer was very involved within the community of Pentwater and volunteered her time, gifts, and talents frequently as evident in the many annual events that have been named in her honor after her untimely death in 2016.



Over the decades the Plummers have made changes to the Antler while maintaining its historical integrity. Peruse the pictures on the walls and you will notice pictures taken by past owners and patrons of good times gone by. The Plummers have perfected their menu, added trivia and karaoke to create an even more entertaining atmosphere, and have added updates to the building such as building an addition to the upstairs creating an inviting area overlooking the Village Green. They have seen many changes in the community and in business practices, but there is one thing that has remained the same. The purpose of the Antler has held strong. Its purpose has always been to create a place for people to come together, enjoy good food and drink, and to enjoy the feeling of a community.

Homecoming

a 94-Year Tradition by AnnaMae Bush
"Printed with permission from Echo Publishing."

"Homecoming – in August?? School is not even in session." I thought Homecoming was a high school dance connected with a sporting event and the crowning of a king and queen. If not connected with school, then maybe the return of soldiers from active duty. But I discovered a different definition of "Homecoming" after purchasing a cottage in Pentwater 22 years ago.

In Pentwater, Homecoming is a four-day celebration of the entire community when multiple generations of families who have lived in the Village or Township return to the family homestead to enjoy once more everything that makes this lakeshore gem sparkle in their memories. Annually scheduled for the second full weekend in August (Thursday – Sunday), the event highlights family activities, local traditions, and the spirited rivalry between University of Michigan and Michigan State University alumni residents. Nearly every street and driveway are filled with parked cars, confirming the normal summer population has temporarily doubled to 10,000 because not only former residents but also many tourists have arrived to enjoy the festivities.

This year marks the 94th annual Homecoming celebration. The Pentwater Historical Museum has a file of newspaper clippings, brochures, and photos that date from 1930 to the past decade. "Unfortunately, the material has not yet been digitalized," Beth Russel from the Pentwater Historical Society informed me. This meant it took hours to sort, review, copy, and photograph selected material for an article on the history of the event. It is impossible to do justice to 94 years of history in two or even three pages. But a view from 500 feet up will have to suffice for our purposes here. So, we will take a look at what has endured through the years and what has changed over time.



1957

It was interesting to note the celebration was originally called a Water Show and Homecoming Event. Many activities in earlier years took place on the lake. Larry Konopka recalls small hydroplane boat races, waterskiing demonstrations, and long Venetian boat parades. "There were a couple of families (the Bates and the Todds) with teenagers and young adults who performed shows on a par with the shows you would see at Cyprus Gardens in Florida. I don't know how they developed skills such as making a pyramid on one another's shoulders, or how their parents allowed such risks. But it was very popular and ended when those youths moved on." It is not clear when Water Show was dropped from the title, shortening it to simply Homecoming.



1929

Current residents and participants may find some of the older practices surprising. Like the high school tradition of crowning a king and queen, the title of "Little Miss and Master Homecoming" was awarded to a pair of young children (aged 3-5) who were given special recognition in the annual Homecoming parade. This event was still listed in the activity schedule of the Homecoming 1985 brochure, as were a cake walk, a teen dance, a bed race, and a children's carnival. Similarly, there were years when a "Miss Pentwater" competition was held, and the winner was crowned and honored in the parade. The museum has a photo of seven young women in bathing suits who competed for the honor in 1968. The winner was Chris Carlson, 17, who was entering her senior year at Pentwater High School. She was crowned by the then mayor, Mr. Edward Schimke. Chris Carlson Stigailo is still in town, and she chuckled when she told me she was "Little Miss Pentwater" in 1955 at the age of 5, and "Miss Pentwater" again in 1968. The competition in 1968 was simple. It consisted of a promenade up the stairs and onto a stage where each contestant had to respond to a different question not given ahead of time. Carlson recounted, "My question was 'Who do you admire the most?' and my answer was, 'Betty Ford, because of her work with addictions.' I guess the judges liked my answer." Three or four individuals, all from outside of Pentwater to avoid partiality, served as judges. Records indicate that for a brief period there were both a "Miss Pentwater" and a "Miss Summer Pentwater." Contestants for both those awards were required to be between the ages of 15 and 18, with the first being a resident of Pentwater and the second being a seasonal visitor to Pentwater.



The most exciting feature for families was the carnival that was set up on the Village Green on the level area in front of the Yacht Club. Children could ride the Ferris wheel, the carousel, or the tilt-a-wheel and older youths could compete in the shooting gallery or the dart-throwing game to win prizes. Event planners decided to eliminate the carnival after years of extra traffic on the Village Green took a heavy toll on the landscape.



Larry Konopka remembered another event that occurred on Saturday mornings of Homecoming weekend for several years. "Mike Castor, who used to own a kite and toy store on Hancock Street, had a connection with an organization that rescued raptors which had been injured. The group would come to the Village Green with several of their resident animals for a demonstration. Kids could see the huge birds up close on the trainers' hands. That was a memorable experience."

Caroline Denlar remembered a log rolling event on the lake in which people tested their balance to see who could stand on their log the longest. "And the fire department had 2 teams and used the water from their hoses to see which team could stay standing the longest! ...on the Village Green."

Museum records indicate the originators (1930) of Homecoming were individuals, primarily a woman named Ann Flagg whose purpose in the earliest celebrations was a reunion of all Pentwater High School graduates. There were approximately 300 participants in the first such celebration. Flagg was the oldest of three Jepsen sisters and she was a "mover and shaker" in today's lingo. Flagg's youngest sister was Florence Jepsen who was Larry Konopka's grandmother, and Flagg's daughter was Madonna (Flagg) Shaw who figured prominently with her husband Harold Shaw in the Homecoming Parade for many years. The museum had a photo of the Shaws in one of the costumes for which they were known.

As the event grew in size and complexity it required more organizational work, and it became a project of the Chamber of Commerce. Dean Gustafson's parents owned a large import and gift shop in Pentwater and his father was very active in the Chamber. Dean recalled "I remember there were some tough years when it was hard to get a president for the Chamber because the job entailed chairing the Homecoming event. That was so much work and required missing many days at one's own business. Not too many businessmen wanted to do that." Today there are as many as 10,000 event attendees and leadership responsibilities are shared by the Chamber of Commerce with several local organizations.

Continued on Page 9



**PHS took 1st Place in the Parade
for the Sequoia!**



Thank you to George and Cyndy Mikulyuk who designed and built the float!



This special group of Oceana County Council on Aging seniors visited the museum in August. They received a guided tour given by Ron Beeber and had free time to find their favorite things. "I think we will absolutely do that trip again and allow for more time. I had no idea!!" was a comment made by the Adult Day Services Manager, Tami Smith.



MUSEUM UPDATE

By Daniel Hoekstra Sr

The PHS Board has been busy. We have been going to various museums to see how they display and exhibit their artifacts. We are looking at upgrading our signage, technology, and overall feel of our museum. Part of that upgrade has already been occurring. Our paper history is being entered into Past Perfect which will allow us to easily locate anything in a digital search. This is a long and arduous project that takes many hours. We extend our gratitude to all who have been dedicating their time and efforts for this endeavor.

We have been blessed with the many donations of artifacts this year. The most interesting new permanent exhibit is the model of the Sequoia. We also obtained a motorized net retrieval system from the DNR near Traverse City. It was made and patented from our very own Pentwater Tool Company that is now the Fiesta Grande factory. Another artifact that was donated is a rowboat with six oars that was made in the 1920's and used on Bass Lake. These two larger items will be exhibits when the PHS expansion is finished. We are looking forward to displaying them for all of you.

Thank you to all our visitors who went through the museum out of curiosity, seeking information, or to share this experience with friends and the younger generation. As of this writing, we have had 1,373 visitors this year. We appreciate the attendance hope that you benefited from your experience.



10th Anniversary Event



A commercial being filmed



Summer Dinner

Welcome New Members!

Harry and Marsha Barter
Steve Bass
Susan and Trey Bize
Ted and Sally Butz
Valerie Church-McHugh
John Faas
James and Judith Jensen
Richard and Suzanne Jensen
Frances Johns
Jane Paine
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Al and Brenda Smith



Donations

Trey and Susan Bize
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Jon and Pam VanderPloeg
Libby VanderPloeg
Mike and Janet Waidelich
Dianne Yax

Thank you to Dennis Grossenbacher for donating and executing our golf cart fundraiser!

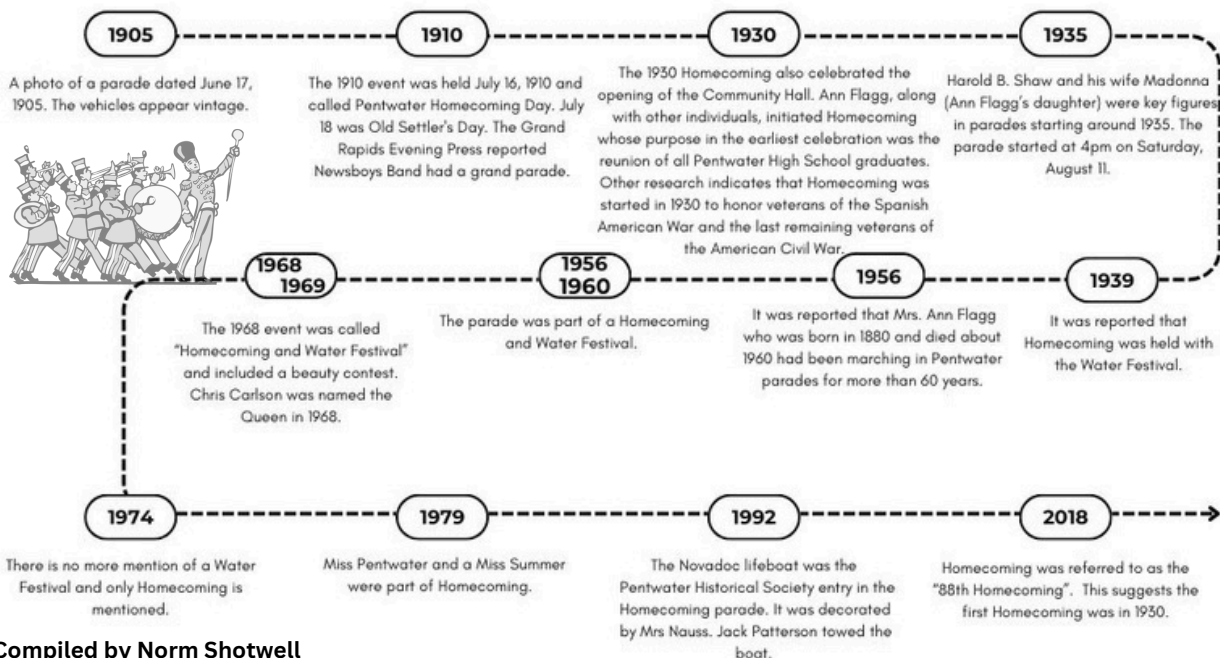


Homecoming features that have endured through the years include the strawberry shortcake social, band concert, horseshoe tournament, golf outing, sand sculpture competition, Big Ten Tailgate Party, Grand Parade, fireworks and Sunday morning pancake breakfast. Some of the features have remained unchanged while others have undergone minor alterations. The Scottville Clown Band has been a part of the event from earliest years because the founders of the Pentwater Civic Band were youthful bandmates with founders of the Clown Band. The earlier Grand Parades had a larger presence of veterans and guest bands than in more recent decades. Pentwater sent 111 men to the Spanish-American War of 1898, and the veterans marched in the Grand Parade as long as they were able. Larry Konopka described one memorable guest band as a Drum and Bugle corp. with delightful fifes out of Detroit.

Fireworks are now exploded over Lake Michigan, but they previously were shot over Pentwater Lake from the downtown marina. Caroline Denlar commented, "A negative result was that we had holes burned into our sails from the sparks." One year the wind took an unexpected turn and blew the fireworks over the Oceana Beach Association. No fires were ignited in woods or homes, but the homeowners' fears and complaints motivated the move to a safer location. There is consensus that Homecoming fireworks are a greater display than the Fourth of July or New Year's Eve fireworks. Funds for fireworks are collected in local stores and by Pentwater Service Club members during the Grand Parade for the following year's fireworks.

The sandcastle competition produces some unbelievably good works of art and some highly entertaining entries. Prizes are awarded for multiple age groups and various categories and one category is how well the sculpture fits the theme which changes every year. The theme for 2024 is Floating in Pentwater.

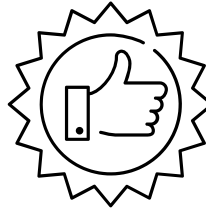
Homecoming promotes family cooperation by inviting families to enter their own floats in the parade and their own sculptures in the sandcastle competition. Planning their entries can take families the better part of a year. With consistently high attendance, it appears the 94-year long tradition of Homecoming is healthy and will continue far into the future.





Time With Tim

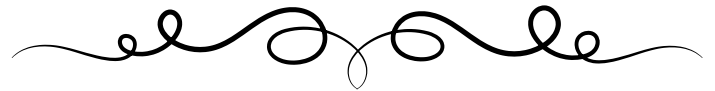
Growing up in Pentwater was great fun, hard work, and a real adventure. I Love Pentwater! I remember many activities my family was involved in. School was very important, and we were active academically, musically, and athletically. My grandmother, father, mother, and siblings are all Pentwater alumni, along with aunts, uncles, and cousins ... yet some of my fondest memories were not about school but were of the homecoming celebration and parade when I was young. As a family, we entered the parade in costumes my mother made, and I think it was cool. One year I recall our entry was "The Pied Piper". I have 5 sisters and 2 brothers and most of us were in rat costumes. While Pam Pierce played the "pipe" wandering back and forth down the parade route, the rats followed closely. My sister Tammy was "The living doll" one year. Mom made a dress and hoop skirt that fit over a tricycle. Tammy rode the bike the full length of the parade and it looked like she was just floating down the road. Her picture was in the papers, and it was a big deal. Another year Dad put wheels on a bed and Donna Jay, who spent summers at Pentwood with her parents and sister, was "Sleeping Beauty". I think you can guess that Mom made 7 dwarf costumes for us, and we followed Beauty down the parade route. I do not remember if there was a handsome prince involved that day or not. What I do remember is that my brother Todd was so distracted by the crowd that each time we stopped he walked into me ... yes, he was doopey and was applauded for playing the part so well. Grandad drove an old firetruck, Dad marched with the VFW, and the entire community was involved, and fun was had by all. There was always a picnic with the family



A huge thank you to **Mike Russell** for the removal and clean-up of the roots and trunk of a large tree on the Museum grounds!



We would like to extend a special thank you to **Steve Brock**, the Interim Village Manager, for his assistance in obtaining a more detailed preliminary model of our expansion and for allowing PHS to test the removal of the historic Community Hall basketball court floor.



Women dressed and ready for the Homecoming Parade

after the parade and at dark there were fireworks. Back then the fireworks were shot over Pentwater Lake from the west side by the south pier and we would watch from the lumber yard near the large piles of coal. I have many fond memories of life in Pentwater ... as I lived the dream.

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Kathleen McAuley
Bob and Mary Beckman, Karen Cheadle,
Kathie Holley—in memory of Aunt Joyce Dark
Harry and Marsha Barter—in memory of Bill
and Gail Bluhm
Oceana Beach Association—in memory of
Barbara Webster
Juanita Pierman—in memory of Bill Bluhm
Jane Paine—in memory of Chuck Oehrle

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Oceana Community Foundation – Sequoia Project
Great Lakes Energy People Fund – Sequoia Project
Historical Society of Michigan – Digitization Project
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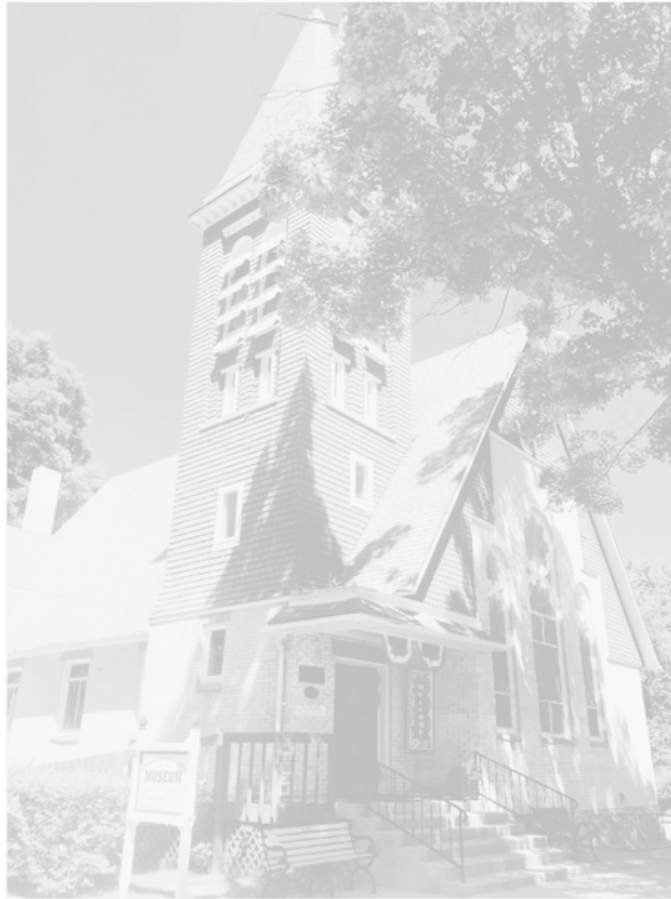
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**MARK YOUR
CALENDAR!**



**Spring Dinner:
May 21**

**Garage Sale:
June 13 & 14**

**Homecoming:
August 9**

**Summer Dinner:
August 27**