



PENTWATER PRIDE

Spring
2024

Past Present Promised

Sears and Nichols Canning Factory

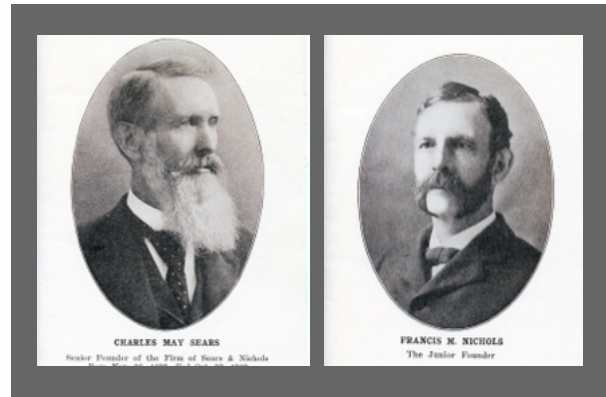
Gathered around the table, a group of women sipped their beverages gingerly and chatted while their children were forced to sit with their hands in their laps quietly. In the distance, a whistle blows. The women politely tap the edges of their napkins to their lips and push themselves away from the table. The children look at one another and try to suppress their ever-growing glee.

For the group of women, the whistle means it is time to go to work at the cannery. For the children, the whistle means they are free. They are free to play unsupervised games, get dirty, and be loud while their mothers put their time in at the factory.

For 25 years the people of Pentwater heard the whistle of the cannery blow signaling fresh foods needed to be canned. Time was of the essence, so everything was dropped to safely package goods.

Around the year 1901, the Sears and Nichols company came to Pentwater, Michigan expanding from their headquarters in Chillicothe, Ohio. They were one of the largest fruit and vegetable canning companies in the United States. They made agreements with the local farmers to harvest and deliver certain crops to be canned in their factory on the shores of Pentwater Lake.

A group of men, who were employed by Sears and Nichols, and overseen by Mr. Nichols, toured the countryside and signed up farmers each fall and spring for the use of their acreage. The farmers were supplied the seed for the crops and told when to harvest the crops at their prime. They were paid ½ of what was due, after the deduction for the seeds, when the crop was delivered to the cannery. The second payment usually came to the farmer in November.



Peas, lima beans, string beans, sweet corn, pickles, cucumbers, apple sauce, peaches, plums, and other fruits were all foods that were canned in Pentwater. When the early peas were harvested, the farmers brought their wagon loads to the cannery, unloaded, and returned to their field with the vines. These wet vines were spread over the pea fields to dry. They were then raked up like hay and fed as a nutritious treat to the cows to produce higher levels of cream content in their milk.

Continued on page 3

One Room School House

By Amy Vander Zwart and Karen Way

Did you know that one-room schools still exist in America? Today there are fewer than 400 functioning one-room schools in the nation, but in 1919 that number was significantly higher. Out of an estimated 190,000 one-room schools in the United States, around 7,200 of those were in Michigan. According to Michigan One Room Schoolhouse Association, in Oceana County there were 87 one-room schools.

For many years one-room schools were where the majority of the population learned to read, write, and perform mathematical equations. Because the Michigan Department of Public Instruction required the standard rural schools to meet certain specifications in 1914, each building was architecturally similar. The building was to be on a lot of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of land with trees and shrubs “tastefully arranged”. There should be two outhouses spread significantly apart from one another for student use. The school building itself should have a room heater and ventilator or basement furnace. Hardwood floors and lighting were to be strategically placed so that neither the students nor the teacher would have to face windows while working. The state also wanted blackboards and attractive decorations inside the one-room school.

By the 1930's the federal government made improvements in all one-room schools. They replaced the room heaters with a furnace, replaced outhouses with indoor chemical toilets, and put in windows on at least one wall of the building so that natural light would come in over the students' left shoulders. This remained standard for the one-room schools until they began to close in the 1950's.

Virtually anyone was allowed to teach in Michigan, especially in the rural schools. The teachers were often paid low wages, were young (often in their teens), female, and unmarried. A substantial number of women only taught for a year or two then married and moved on to new challenges. This led to a very high turnover among teachers. In Pleasant Hill School in Montcalm County, for example, there were 99 teachers who taught during the 86 years the school operated!

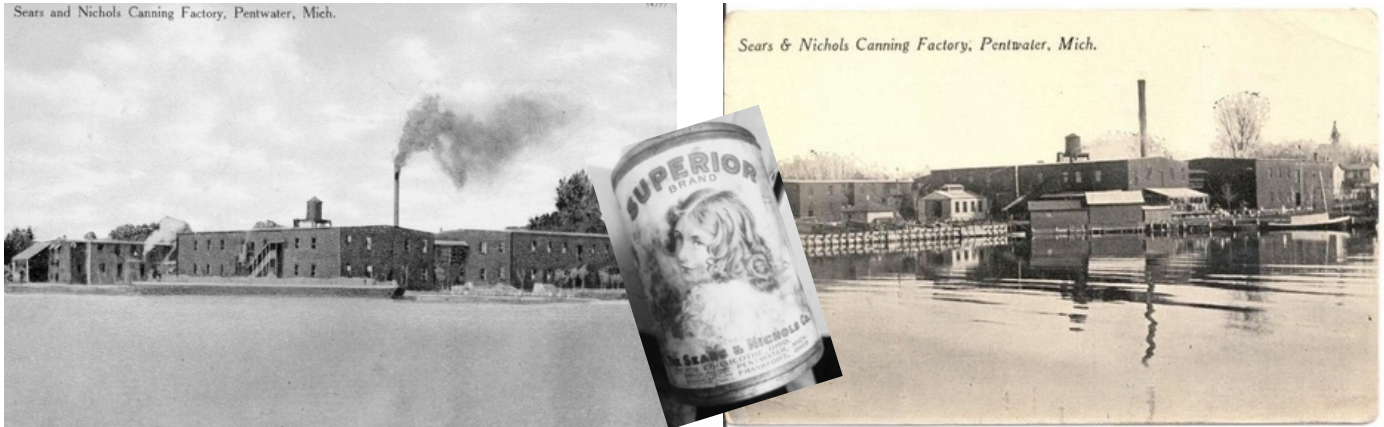


Mary Lou Bowden-VanNortwick-Mitteer, a long time Pentwater resident, remembers having a new teacher each year she attended the one-room school of Cedar Creek from 1935 to 1938. Margaret Westbrook, Agnes Watson, and Ellen Babenic were all teachers at Cedar Creek which was located at Jefferson Road and Oceana Road in Weare Township during Mary Lou's education there. Many teachers stayed in a student's home as temporary boarding while they taught.

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When the green and yellow string beans were harvested, large boxes of the whole beans were distributed around town to the women at home who picked out the bad beans and prepared them for canning. The people were paid by the box and welcomed income they wouldn't normally have earned.

When produce was brought into the canning factory, each day's delivery had to be processed from start to finish. There were many times the factory was in operation non-stop for as long as a twenty-three-hour period. When one round of produce was packaged, all of the machinery had to be taken apart and cleaned before the next batch of produce arrived.



The Sears and Nichols Canning Factory required as many as 400 people to operate. As cans came down the line, lids were sealed closing the can to outside air. A worker stood and hand-stamped each can with a code identifying the product in the can. The cans were then moved to a "Labeling shed" where they waited to be sold. When a buyer was found for the canned produce, labels were added according to the purchaser's qualifications and shipped out to the delivery point. Most of the sales and labeling took place over the winter months.

Transporting of the canned products to the labeling shed resulted in many cans being dropped and dented. The dented cans were put in wooden cases and set aside. During the fall and winter labeling season, when a large number of dented cans were accumulated, a notice was put in the local newspaper, or fliers circulated in the village. Local citizens were allowed to pick up cases for the sum of \$1 per case. If a member of your family knew the codes, you knew what you were getting, otherwise, only upon opening the can did you know what you would be eating that evening. It was normal for large families to purchase ten cases at a time and the contents consumed over the winter months. It was a source of good cheap canned goods.

One of the managers who came from Ohio, Len Chipman, really enjoyed being a part of the Pentwater community. He recognized that during the long winter months when the cannery wasn't running, people needed more to do. He secured the services of Louis Peterson from Ludington who had a dance band. Mr. Peterson worked with community members to help them purchase and learn to play the instruments of their choice. The newly formed band met twice a week; once to practice and once to get lessons from Mr. Peterson. Once the band was well organized, they began to hold concerts every Thursday evening. It was an immediate success and became a popular community event.

Although the cannery was a significant source of income for many people in Pentwater, it was not without trials. On April 25, 1919, Mr. Sears testified that lack of Federal dredging sometimes prevented Pentwater produce from being delivered to Milwaukee in time for the daily market, noting that "Oceana County is the greatest fruit section of Michigan; that the value of fruit...is 10 to 20 times as much per ton as lumber."

Sears and Nichols lost their bank financing and declared bankruptcy in April of 1922. The cannery ran for 4 more years, however. According to the Oceana Herald, on March 5th, 1926, Sears and Nichols Canning Company had an overproduction in 1925 resulting in a surplus of canned goods on the market. The company canned 100,000 cases of vegetables. 40,000 of those cases remained in the warehouse awaiting sale. This caused the cannery to halt production and close its doors. According to Len Chipman, the manager at the time, the shutdown would only be temporary.

Unfortunately, Sears and Nichols Canning Factory never recovered. It was sold on a mortgage foreclosure sale at public auction on August 17, 1927. The building was bought by Columbus Storage Company for \$14,000. The items inside the building were auctioned off for \$700 and in time the building was removed. Block 33 of Middlesex Addition to the Village of Pentwater, lots four to twelve were sold individually.

For over a quarter of a century the Sears and Nichols Canning Company was a staple in the Pentwater community. They not only supplied many jobs, but also brought a tradition of music to Pentwater that continues today.

Local History Volunteers Needed

The Historical Society is tapping into the rich sources of personal Pentwater history. We would like to hold recorded video interviews of long-time residents to preserve this history. If you have been a long-time resident of Pentwater and would like to be interviewed, we would love to talk to you.

We are also identifying individuals who would like to help conduct these historical interviews.

If you would like to be interviewed or would like to help with this project, please contact Bart Zachrich at

**810 577 6591 or email
bzach1949@yahoo.com**



This was taken in Pentwater. FM Nichols is on the far left and his wife, Emma Sears Nichols, is on the far front right with one of their daughters in the middle by the pillar. The other two ladies and little girls are friends of theirs.

Mary Lou was one of about 14 students who attended the one-room school until it merged with Pentwater schools in 1938 when she was in fourth grade. The students walked to and from school each day. Mary Lou walked a mile and a half to get to school. She remembers during some treacherous winters being unable to get to school because the snow was too deep and having to stay home for up to six weeks at a time! The students arrived about an hour after the teacher had gathered water from the hand pump outside and warmed the room with the wood stove on cold days. Students would huddle around the stove to warm themselves until the teacher instructed the students to take their seat.

Mary Lou has been a generous donator of artifacts for many years. Pictured below is one of her donations: a post office box which is on display in the museum.



Every day began with reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and practicing penmanship. As the day progressed each class was called to the “recitation” bench in the front of the classroom. There the teacher worked with only that group of children for a time while the other students busied themselves studying or doing an assigned lesson. The children had a brief morning and afternoon recess as well as an hour break at lunch time. Children brought their meager lunches from home in lard buckets. During recess the students would go outside to play ball, tag and “anyeye” over the school. This was usually the highlight of the school day according to Mary Lou.

A special thank you to Mary Lou for sharing her experiences with all of us!

With Gratitude

By Elizabeth Russell

Exciting things are happening at the museum, and we are grateful for the financial help we receive that allows that progress: donations from members, foundations, and some state cultural organizations.

We recently applied for and were awarded an Operations Support grant from the Michigan Arts and Culture Council / Michigan Economic Development Corporation. This grant helps pay for, literally, keeping the lights on, as well as providing funds for software subscriptions and day-to-day maintenance around the museum. It allows us to focus your donations on improving our artifacts and exhibits.

We have also earned a grant from the Historical Society of Michigan, to help fund the archiving and storage of our paper artifacts. The funds will help buy a new laptop and software to scan and digitize text and archival materials for better storage of our paper artifacts. Four people have already volunteered to assist in this effort; two are year-round citizens and two are seasonal citizens. There will be room in the schedule for 6-8 volunteers to help in this effort as we scan our materials. The eventual goal is that our materials will be searchable and available on the internet.

Thank you to all who continue to contribute to our goal of preserving Pentwater’s history and making it accessible to all.



Pentwater School

small beginnings...

When Pentwater's first school was established in 1854, it was housed in a room in a private home, was taught by Miss Emily Daniels and had one pupil: Eugene Cobb. As enrollment grew to as many as eight students, the school was moved near the blacksmith shop into a building which also functioned as a church and town meeting hall.

During the next four years, the student population grew, and a school district was organized and overseen by Henry D. Flagg as the director. The board voted to hold school ten months out of the year and Oceana County was divided into districts. District 1 included Pentwater Village. In 1861 a new schoolhouse was built on the corner of Carroll and what was then, Fourth Street to accommodate the growing village. The school's first library arrived a month before the new building was ready to be inhabited. By 1866, 87 students were enrolled in the small school building, but attendance varied from 21 students daily to 65.

By 1870, there were too many students attending regularly for the school building to accommodate. The youngest students were moved above the fire engine house until a new solution was found.

(possibly where the Chamber of Commerce building stands on Hancock)

The unlikely solution came when a new cemetery was established on the north end of the Village. In 1878 the Township Board resolved to remove all of the bodies in the cemetery located in Block 36 to the location of the new cemetery. This freed up the ideal central location in the Village and the school district purchased it in order to move the existing building to that location.

The frame structure was moved onto a stone foundation and two classrooms were built in the basement. A large wing was also added to the south end of the building and the entire building was covered in Pentwater brick. The move was not without some turmoil, however. Shortly after the building was moved, there was an outbreak of typhoid among students. When the first well was drilled for the school, it went through a then empty grave of a person who had died of typhoid resulting in infecting the student population.

In 1881, there were two Districts in Pentwater. District 1 had 377 students and 6 teachers. One of the teachers was male and earned \$800 a year. The other five teachers were female and cumulatively they earned \$1200 a year or \$200 a piece! District 2 was located on the south side of the lake and called French Town School. It only had 47 pupils with one female teacher.

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Mark your Calendars!

Spring Dinner
May 22, 2024
Wednesday

5:30 - Social Hour
6:00 - Catered Dinner is Served
BYOB
7:00 - The American Great Loop
A 7,000 mile journey around the Eastern United States
by Dan Girvan

Tickets Available From:
www.PentwaterHistoricalSociety.org and in town in early May

Tickets: \$30 per person

Location: AgBio research center, 5185 N. Oceana Drive, Hart, MI

Coming Soon to Your Museum

By Elizabeth Russell

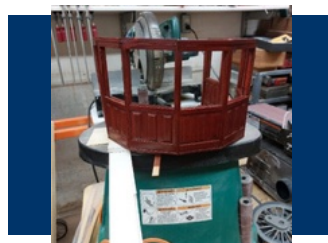
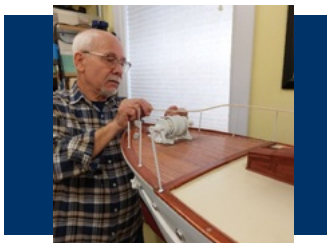


You may remember that in our Fall 2020 newsletter we featured the USS Sequoia, its trip to Pentwater, and the model given to us. The Sequoia, the “floating oval office” used by Presidents from FDR to Ronald Reagan, visited Pentwater in 1984 (under private ownership) and created a sensation, thanks to Fred and Jenny Cisler.

A scale model of the USS Sequoia was built by Mr. Fred Wolff, but was far from complete upon his death. Uncertain how to proceed, it remained in storage for years. A search began for a model builder with the skills to complete the model in a manner that was suitable for a museum display, and PHS member Tave Reser recommended a model builder in Coopersville, MI. An agreement was struck between the museum and Mr. Yakubowski. The model was delivered to his workshop and is now nearing completion. An unveiling is planned for Sunday, June 23rd at a ticketed event on the channel. We cannot wait to share this world-class model of a grandiose ship and an its epic story in Pentwater with all of you!

Plans for the expansion of the museum include an exhibit featuring the Sequoia model.

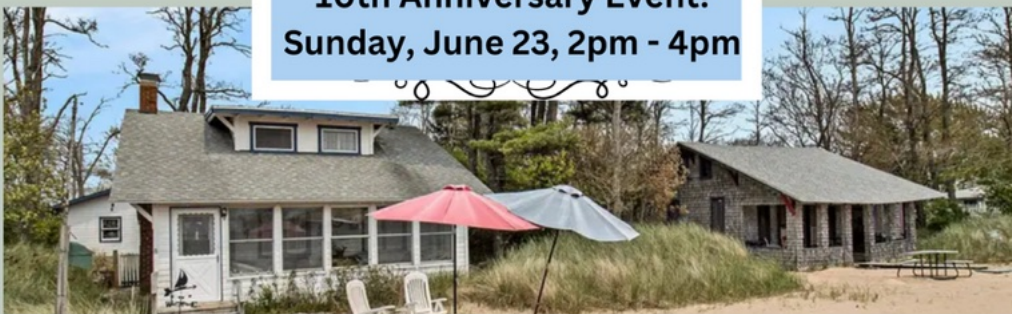
Funding for the project was graciously donated by Michigan Humanities through a Bridging Michigan grant. Additional funding is still being sought.



Welcome New Members!

Vern & Shelley Blocher
Christine & Charles Bloemsma
Lesly Murray
Lauretta Warner

10th Anniversary Event! Sunday, June 23, 2pm - 4pm



Pentwater Historical Society and Museum has been in our historic building at 1st and Rutledge for Ten Years! To celebrate we are hosting a unique event.

For the first time, all are welcome to come tour two historic cottages on the channel; the Graynook and Breezewood. Inspect the interior of these structures which contain original historic furniture and items while discovering the history behind these unassuming structures and the people who occupied them.

As an extra bonus, the exquisitely detailed one-of-a-kind scale model of the Presidential Yacht, USS Sequoia, which was in service from 1933 to 1977, and visited Pentwater in 1984, will be unveiled and available to view for the first time!

Ticket cost is \$20 per person.

*Light food and drink will be included

Sears and Nichols Family History

By Trystin Vanderstelt

The two founders of the Sears and Nichols Canning Company were Charles May Sears, my great, great, great grandfather and Francis Marion Nichols, my great, great grandfather. Francis married Charles and Mary Sear's daughter, Emma. Francis used the images of his daughters on the cans and invented the modern-day canning process according to files collected by our family.



This is a picture is my grandmother revisiting her beloved Pentwater Channel, where she played as a little girl-about 1985, with my mom, and my two younger sisters and I (I'm the eldest kid)

"This is the 'Channel'- between Lake Mich at right and Pentwater Lake, that we called the 'little lake'- but it was bigger than Duck Lake - much longer. Once this was all shored up with big timbers and a broad boardwalk on each pier. The lighthouse was pretty but now replaced by automatic light. George Larson's father used to tend the light. Burton (her cousin) and I used to play 'scouting' and war games against George and Jan (a pet name for her sister Jeanette) - mostly hiking and tramping the big dunes, like there are at Jerry La Blanc's. I felt so unsteady - sure planted my feet! Barb took the picture. South pier all in ruins. Little lake is yacht harbor now. Big fire destroyed lumberyard and camp." {Written on the Back of the Above Photo}*

It was Francis who LOVED Pentwater and who oversaw the factory. He and Emma had 4 daughters. The daughters also loved Pentwater so much, that one of them, Ada, who was a doctor, was married in Pentwater. They summered in Pentwater from Chillicothe, Ohio.

My maternal grandmother, Ardis Honeywell, born in 1906, died 1993, spent her childhood summers here in Pentwater at her grandparent's summer home. She fondly remembered taking the train up from Ohio to the Pentwater Station. She remembered that the Buckeye Burr once had a wraparound porch. She reminisced about the factory whistle and remembered that there was a wooden boardwalk at the beach that the kids would play on. She also talked about Native Americans that had a camp near the water north of the beach. As children, she and her sister and her cousins played with the Native American children in Pentwater on the beach. I THINK she said they had a camp on the beach on the north side of town and they would trade things. My grandmother remembers playing with the Native American children fondly and that her family admired their culture and way of life.



As a little girl, my grandmother was a good swimmer from all her summers in Pentwater, but she was once caught in the riptide at Mears State Park and almost drowned. She had to be rescued. It left a lifelong impression on her because I recall that when I myself was a little girl, she was always very concerned about us drowning and bought us orange whistles to wear, so that we could blow them if we got caught in the riptide.

The family owned a sailboat in Pentwater, and they also had an automobile. In correspondences, one of them mentioned that the barber in Pentwater called the sailboat and the automobile, their Pentwater "toys". In other correspondences, the family often mention dining across the street (on 1st street) at Arbor Rest (where the post office is now).

In several cards, they mention the "cabbage patch"...where "the large cabbages are grown"...and there is an image of a horse drawn cart with HUGE cabbages on it...but I can't tell if it's real or fake (they are SO huge). The cabbage patch was somewhere they used to walk to in Pentwater. We've never been able to figure out where that is, or if it was some joke between them or really where cabbages were grown. (see picture on last page)

The Sears family were some of the first settlers to America in the 1620's. They arrived just after the Mayflower. Thomas Sayre, whose ancestors later changed the spelling to Sears, along with his brother and some other men first landed in Massachusetts with the Puritans and were the founders of Long Island. Charles Sears, who started the Sears Nichols Canning Co, was also a Captain during the Civil War, served in the Kansas legislature, and was a Justice of the Peace, as well as an author. Charles's parents joined the Shaker colony in New Lebanon, NY, when he was young. This is where Charles Sears grew up. It was the Shaker community that taught him how to preserve foods. Charles' wife, Mary, also became a Shaker.

Charles Sears died in 1900 just around the time that the Pentwater factory opened. Francis Nichols died in Michigan in 1920. The factory is gone, but their summer home is still here. While they owned the summer house in Pentwater, they called it the "Buckeye Burr" because they were from Ohio and his daughters all attended Ohio State University. Shortly after Francis Nichols passed, the family sold the Buckeye Burr as the daughters all ended up in California and Europe. After it was sold, it became The Abbey and then The Abbey Bed and Breakfast. The Buckeye Burr was right across from the factory.

My mother and father bought a cottage here when I was a child. In 2018, my husband, Jason, and I bought our own cottage here. In 2020, we moved our two small children, Elsa and Spencer, here—to our happy place! Pentwater is very special to us, and we are honored to be a part of its history!



Tribute Donations

***In Memory of Dan Filius
Brian & Ann Fillion***

***In Memory of Fred Cisler
Amy LaBarge and Ron Beeber***

***In Honor of Dick and Sylvia Warner
Garth & Judith Warner***

***In Honor of Ulli Steinecker
Tave and Lesley Reser***

The first class to graduate from Pentwater High School was a group of seven young women. The graduating class was Lou Pringle, Annie Jensen, Ida Whittington, Emma Pringle, Emma Brillhart, Minnie Stebbins, and Hattie Fincher.

As the years marched on, so did the students and educators of Pentwater. Gone were the days of a janitor carrying wood strapped to their backs from stove to stove to heat the school. A drinking fountain replaced the tin cups next to the water filled pails lined on the benches in the halls. Indoor bathrooms replaced outhouses and electric lights were installed in the building. Classes became more specialized with music, drawing, cooking, sewing, and agriculture being added to the curriculum. The school went to great lengths to fully equip a physics and chemistry laboratory that received recognition as one of the top in the state for a school of its size.

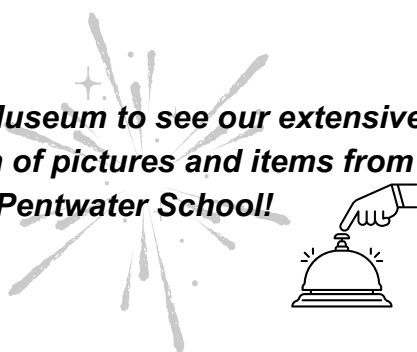
In 1938 a school bus was purchased for \$2300 and students in rural areas began to be bussed into the Village to attend school. As much as the district tried to keep up with the growing population and repairs of the building, by 1950 it was evident the school was becoming overcrowded and outdated. In 1952 the community voted to finance a new building and furnishings for an elementary school. On May 15, 1954, the new building on Park Street was dedicated. In 1959 voters approved a second stage of the building to include a gymnasium, locker rooms, three additional classrooms, and a new office. Construction was delayed due to a steelworkers' strike so the new building was opened in January 1961, in time for the last half of the basketball season.



Prior to the new gymnasium being built, basketball games and practices were held on the third floor of the community building. In 1964 the third floor that was also once used as a secondary school was closed and another addition was added to the new elementary to accommodate students in grades 7th to 12th. By March of 1966 all school aged children were housed in one building on Park Street. In April of the same year the three-story brick building was demolished, and the block became for sale. The First Baptist Church acquired the land.

Pentwater Public Schools has remained in the same location on Park Street since 1954. In 2023 it educated 230 students. According to its website, Pentwater Public Schools has one teacher per grade level K – 6th grade. While the secondary level teachers are primarily 1 teacher per core content area as well as a Physical Education teacher, a music teacher, a special education teacher and music teacher for a total of 11 teachers (19 total highly qualified teachers).

***Visit the Museum to see our extensive
collection of pictures and items from
Pentwater School!***





Time With Tim

Pentwater had a very active Boy Scout Troop in the 1960's. We built Klondike sleds, and had a primitive winter camp with lean-tos for shelter over near the school property. We also had a district jamboree behind the Red Barn near Watson Creek. We did a mile swim in Pentwater Lake escorted by a couple row boats and we took hikes. I will tell you about the 50-mile hike 21 scouts from troop 145 went on ...in the next "Time with Tim"

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YOUR
CALENDAR!**



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May 22, 2024

Garage Sale
June 8, 2024

Cottage Tours
June 23, 2024

Homecoming Parade
August 10, 2024

Summer Dinner
August 21, 2024