



# PENTWATER PRIDE



*Past Present Promised*

Fall 2025

## Honoring the Past, Building the Future: PHS Expansion Campaign Reaches a Milestone

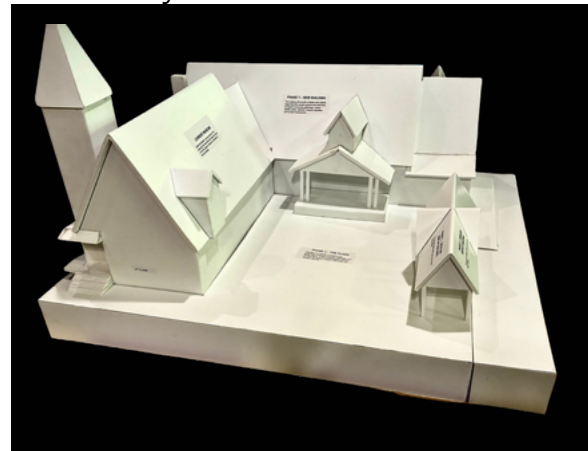
By Norm Shotwell and Beth Russell

We are proud to share that over the past few years, the Pentwater Historical Society has quietly and steadily raised more than \$800,000 of the \$1,500,000 needed to bring our expansion project to life. Thanks to the generosity of over 80 individuals and organizations, we have surpassed the 50% mark in our fundraising journey—a powerful testament to the shared belief in the vision our board first laid out in 2014.

That vision, championed by former PHS Board President Ed Bigelow, went far beyond the walls of a museum. In a heartfelt letter written over a decade ago to local leaders, Ed described a dream in which the former Baptist Church building would become more than a home for exhibits:

“The building will house the museum to tell the story of Pentwater’s heritage, but more than that, it will provide facilities to hold events for our members and the Pentwater community in general.”

It was a call to see the museum not just as a place to remember the past, but as a space to create new memories—with family, friends, neighbors, and visitors of all ages. That dream remains just as relevant today, and we are closer than ever to realizing it.



**“Together, we can build something lasting—for today, and for generations to come.”**

At this year’s PHS Summer Dinner, board member Steve Bass presented updated plans that breathe life into Ed’s vision. Final design concepts and construction estimates are now in hand.

The size and scope of the finished expansion will ultimately depend on the continued generosity of donors who, like one recent major contributor, believe this is “a way to give back to the community that I love and cherish.”

We're excited to announce that the Society has partnered with respected local builder and designer Dave Slachter, who will manage the design and construction of Phase 1 of the expansion.

Dave is working closely with the talented team assembled by Norm Shotwell to develop a plan that fulfills our goals while respecting the Society's budget. A zoning application has already been filed with the Village Zoning Administrator to move the project forward. According to our current timeline:

- Construction is expected to begin in early spring 2026.
- The current museum will remain open during construction, with minimal disruption.
- The new building will be ready to receive exhibits and artifacts by fall 2026.
- A fully connected and completed museum experience will open in time for the 2027 season.

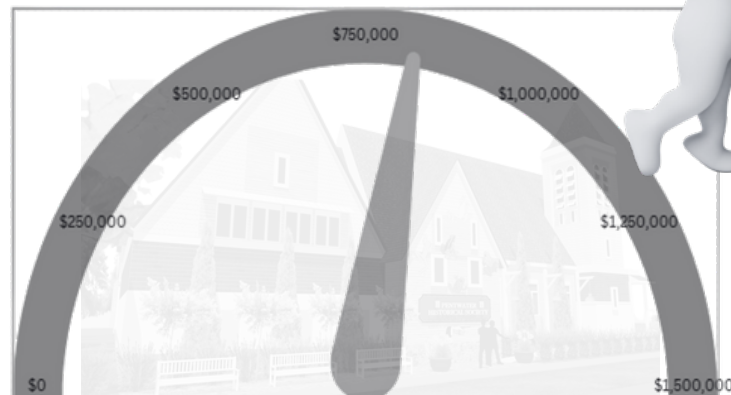
This expansion is more than just bricks and mortar. It is the continuation of a promise—to preserve and share Pentwater's rich heritage, while creating a welcoming space for community events, education, and celebration.

As we move forward, we invite you to be part of this extraordinary effort. If you love this community and value its history, now is the time to give. Together, we can build something lasting—for today, and for generations to come.

If you would like DONATE or see video of the design and ideas, visit our website at [www.pentwaterhistoricalsocietymuseum.org](http://www.pentwaterhistoricalsocietymuseum.org)

Send email to [info@pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org) to ask for more information.

“this is a way to give back to the community that I love and cherish.”



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## Pentwater – A Rhythm of Life

**\*Amy Jo's story is continued here from the last newsletter.**

By Amy Jo Smith

My brothers were Jerry and Ron. Jerry was three years older than me and Ron four and a half years younger. Each of us had our own way of experiencing Pentwater, but it was a shared landscape of childhood, full of memories that still echo when we talk. Recently, Ron returned to Pentwater and camped at the State Park—the very same place where we spent so many summers growing up. When he got back, he called me, excited to share what had changed and, more importantly, what had stayed the same. Talking with him brought so many memories flooding back, some that I had almost forgotten until he mentioned them.

We talked about Gustason's, where the glass blower used to mesmerize us with his delicate work. I could still see the way the molten glass twisted and shimmered under the heat. And the movie theater—how special it felt to go there on a cool evening, the scent of popcorn thick in the air, the thrill of sitting in the dark as the first images flickered onto the screen.

Ron reminded me of Pop's, the go-to place for bait. That was where every serious kid headed before trying their luck at fishing. The Coast Guard station across from the State Park was another landmark that anchored our summer landscape. And the Nickerson Inn—so elegant and old-fashioned—felt like something from a different world compared to our sandy tents and barefoot days.

He brought up Nelson's raft in Pentwater Lake, the one we'd swim out to with pounding hearts and aching arms, feeling so proud when we finally made it. We laughed over memories of the Blue Moon ice cream at the State Park store—how good it tasted, especially on a hot day, and how it was a treat we could actually afford. The frog pond at the base of Mt. Baldy was our childhood jungle, a magical place where we chased frogs and got our feet stuck in mud.

And then there were the Green Acres horse stables. I remembered the smell of hay and the thrill of climbing onto a horse's back, unsure but exhilarated. The green water fountains at the park still stood in my mind, with that faucet we used to fill our camp bucket. The wooden sidewalk had its own rhythm, a clatter under bare feet, leading us to the State Park playground where we swung so high we thought we might fly right into the trees.

Continued on page 4



**Amy Jo at the age of three playing at Pentwater Beach**



**Ron and (his wife to be) Martha on the beach**

## *Board Members*

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Museum Director    Marketing Director    Director of Membership  
Dan Hoekstra    Jim Lambrix    Beth Russell

Trustees  
Mark Roisen, Norm Shotwell, Karen Way, Amy Vander Zwart  
Newsletter Editor: Amy Vander Zwart

Ron talked about the slide—how we used wax paper to make ourselves go faster. We'd fly down with hair blown back, landing in the hot sand, laughing until our sides hurt. The gravel loop around the park marked our territory, our borders. We'd ride our bikes around it endlessly, feeling like kings of our tiny kingdom.

He even remembered the post office, with its little mailboxes lined up like treasure chests, each one with frosted glass windows that caught the morning sun just right. And the "haunted house" on the beach—abandoned and creaky—was a place of both terror and fascination. I had forgotten about the crayfish we used to catch near the pier, hiding among the rocks. We'd use them for bait, though I always felt a little sorry for them. Ron said the best place to fish was behind the lumber company, near the stumps—that's where the big ones were.

And then, of course, there was the small grocery store in town. Nothing fancy, but it had everything we needed. We'd walk there barefoot, with a few coins clutched in our fists, dreaming of candy or a bottle of pop.

Pentwater wasn't just a place—it was a feeling. A rhythm. A way of life, even if only for a few weeks each summer. And it's stayed with me, always.



**Carol Peck in 1953**



**THANK YOU!**

**Event Sponsors**

- Adams Marine Construction
- Anchor Summer Rentals
- Bella Design Salon
- Patterson Marine
- Meijer Foundation
- Bob and Dana French
- Steve and Beth Russell
- Anonymous



**Tribute Gifts**

- In memory of Mike Castor
- Dick & Sylvia Warner
  - Jim & Joan Gehringer
  - Larry & Anne Konopka
- Rick & Rhonda Buzan  
 “in honor of our lifelong Pentwater friends”

**Grants and Donations towards Journeys to Pentwater Exhibit**

- GLE People Fund
- America250MI
- Oceana Community Foundation
- Ron Beeber and Amy LaBarge



## Mike Castor



## A Life Well Lived

The Pentwater Historical Society is saddened to share the passing of our dear friend and former board member, Michael Stanton Castor, who left us on July 5, 2025, at the age of 82.

Mike was not only known around town as the joyful face behind Air Fun Kites and the Pentwater Toy Box, but also as a tireless advocate for Pentwater's history and heritage. After retiring from a successful engineering career, Mike and his wife Susie made Pentwater their permanent home. Here, they poured their energy into local life—brightening the lakeshore with their kite programs and lending their talents to preserve the stories of our community.

Mike served actively with the Pentwater Historical Society, including on our board of directors. His dedication was evident at countless events and projects, where his enthusiasm and steady presence inspired us all. Whether helping with exhibits, supporting programs, or sharing his love for Pentwater's unique character, Mike's contributions left a lasting mark on our Society.

We are deeply grateful for the time, effort, and heart he gave to our mission of preserving Pentwater's past for future generations. His passion for community, history, and fun will not be forgotten.

Our thoughts are with Mike's family, and we join together in honoring a life so well lived and so generously shared.

Respectively, Dick Warner; President

**JOURNEYS TO PENTWATER**

SOME SUMMER VISITORS WERE AMAZED TO SEE THEIR PAST FAMILY MEMBERS FEATURED!

NEW LOCAL RESIDENTS FOUND THE EXHIBIT ENTERTAINING, EDUCATIONAL, AND LOVED BEING ABLE TO LEARN ABOUT THE HISTORY OF PENTWATER THROUGH THE PUSH OF A BUTTON!

STEP BACK IN TIME AND RELIVE HISTORY LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

**DID YOU MISS THIS?**

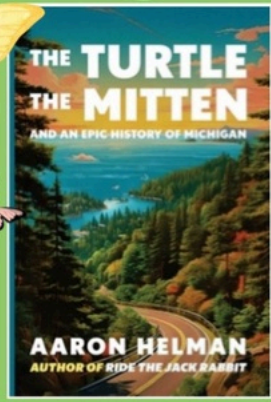
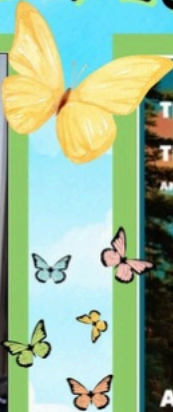
Whether they come on foot, with horses, by train, by ship, or by car, their journeys to Pentwater were all different. Learn in their stories, experience their journeys, and understand why they made Pentwater their home.

JOURNEYS TO PENTWATER

JOURNEYS TO PENTWATER

SAVE THE DATE!

# SPRING DINNER MAY 20, 2026



Join us for an evening with Aaron Helman, a Midwestern historian, storyteller, and acclaimed author whose work uncovers the surprising, forgotten, and fascinating corners of American history—often with a special focus on the Great Lakes and the communities that grew around them. His books include *The Turtle* (a regional bestseller in Michigan, featured on NPR and in museum gift shops across the Midwest), *The Turtle The Mitten An Epic History of Michigan*, *Ride the Jack Rabbit*, and *An Incomplete History of St. Joseph County, Indiana*. With his engaging style and passion for overlooked stories, Helman brings history to life in ways that entertain and inspire



The Pentwater Historical Society did it again! Our SS Sunk-It float — dreamed up by George and Cindy Mikulyuk — sailed away with Best Float at the 2025 Homecoming Parade. Don't miss the fun in 2026... join the crew or cheer us on from the sidelines! 🇺🇸🌟



## Historic Hancock Street Strolls —a Summer Highlight

This summer, nearly 100 people joined one of four Pentwater Historical Society docent-led strolls during Farmers Market days between late June and Labor Day. Volunteer guides Beth Russell, Debby Roisen, Ray Kloostra, and Ron Beeber brought history to life while leading walkers along the six blocks of Hancock Street.

Beth Russell shared, "Things we talked about on the stroll included Pentwater's big fire of 1889, the 'White Elephant,' Pentwater's silent movie house, someone's 'Furniture and Undertaking' business, John Cahill's saloon, the 'finger factory,' Esther Dempsey's information booth, a businessman's attempt to build airplanes, how 'Birdland' got its name, the 100-year-old monument to Civil War veterans at one downtown intersection, and the hotel that featured an outdoor goldfish pond."

Ron Beeber added with a smile, "I think about 100 other folks told me they really intended to join one of this summer's strolls. Hopefully they'll find an hour to do so next year!"



*Through the Years  
One Church One Promise*



**Jared and Pam Griffis 1976**



**Gloria (Griffis) and Thomas Gale 1973**



**Bethany (Jones) and Lucas Elenbaas 2025**



**Anna (Gale) and Brian Johnson 1999**



**Angie (Gale) and Jeff Ostberg 2003**



**Amanda (Griffis) and Keith Jones 1988**

Once a place of worship and now home to the Pentwater Historical Society Museum, this historic building has long been a silent witness to the milestones of our community. For generations, families have gathered within its walls to celebrate faith, family, and love. Though its function has changed, the memories remain. This summer, Bethany and Lucas joined that continuum of history by celebrating their exchanging of vows, honoring both their own love story and the tradition of those who came before them. In doing so, they reminded us that while buildings may take on new purposes, the spirit of community they hold endures. It is our privilege as a museum to preserve these stories and ensure Pentwater's history continues to be shared for generations to come.



Thank you Bethany for sharing your family's pictures!

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# Welcome To Our New Members!



Paul & Dawn Anderson  
Michael & Sue Berardi  
Betty Chambers  
Karen Gooding  
Craig & Wendy Jonkers  
Richard & Debra Magrath  
John Miller  
Dan Reser & Ulli Steinecker  
Mark & Elizabeth Scott  
Amy Jo Smith  
Ann Soles  
Cynthia Zacharias



## What's Your Story?

What is your story of coming to Pentwater? Are you the first generation of your family to arrive here, the second, third, or sixth or more? We would love to hear your story! You can drop it in the mail, send it via email, leave us a phone message, or recommend an interview. Don't be shy... everyone has a story, and we want to hear it!

Mail: PHS, P.O. Box 54, Pentwater, 49449  
Email: [info@pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@pentwaterhistoricalsociety.org)  
Phone: 231-335-3689

## Museum Update

As we step into October, the museum is beginning preparations for its seasonal winter closure. While we look ahead to securing our exhibits and preserving artifacts for the colder months, we're also looking forward to welcoming a couple of special guests who are visiting to reconnect with their family histories rooted here in Pentwater.

### Exploring the Mears Family Legacy

Later this month, we'll welcome Janet Senior, a descendant of Nathan Mears, brother of Charles Mears. Her grandmother was a cousin of Carrie Mears, and Janet has long held an interest in uncovering more about her family's history. A few years ago, she and her cousins conducted research at the Chicago History Museum, deepening their understanding of the Mears family's legacy in the Pentwater area.

During her visit, Janet will view select materials from our Mears exhibit and additional archival pieces that reflect her family's local influence. She will also enjoy a private tour of the Carrie Mears home, generously offered by the current owners, and take a trip to the Mears River Barn, just outside of town.

### A Minister's Legacy Returns

On October 11th, we're honored to host Janet Browne, whose family also has strong ties to Pentwater. Her grandmother's family, the Hartmans, settled in the area in the late 1800s. Her great-grandfather, Rev. John G. C. Irvine, served as a minister at First Baptist Church in 1916.

Janet is eager to see where her great-grandfather once preached, and with the cooperation of the First Baptist Church, we'll be sharing some materials from our archives that highlight his time in the community.

We're always thrilled to help visitors discover personal connections to Pentwater's past. These special visits remind us how rich and far-reaching the roots of our local history truly are.

Stay tuned for more updates — and thank you for supporting the Historical Society Museum!

**Dan Hoekstra Sr**  
**Museum Director**

## STAY CONNECTED WITH PENTWATER'S PAST ON FACEBOOK

Do you use Facebook to explore topics that interest you? If so, we invite you to follow the Pentwater Historical Society Museum page. Since August 2, we've been sharing our "Museum Closeup" series — short features highlighting artifacts and stories from our collection. In just six weeks, we've posted about 15 fascinating topics!

Most of these highlighted displays are numbered, so when you visit the museum you can dive deeper using our Engage by Cell system: simply dial 231.720.0291, enter the display number, press the pound key, and enjoy learning more.

Recent "Closeup" posts have featured:

- Henry Carter Johnson's delicate glass figurines
- Early hotels and gas stations in Pentwater
- Pentwater High School Class of 1929 graduate Jack Dipert
- Our new Journeys to Pentwater audio exhibit
- The historic cable ferry across the channel
- A 100-year-old public restroom sign
- The Presidential yacht Sequoia
- The freighter Novadoc
- Birdland Hardware
- The "Pent Water River" noted on an 1830 map — more than two decades before Pentwater became a thriving lumber town

Follow us on Facebook to keep discovering the remarkable stories and artifacts that connect Pentwater's past to its present!



### ***Crossing the Channel: Pentwater's Historic Waterway Journeys***

Long before roads and modern bridges shaped Pentwater's shoreline, crossing the channel between the village and the south side was a task that called for patience — and sometimes muscle.

#### **The Hand-Pulled Ferry (1858–1926)**

For nearly 70 years, a sturdy wooden scow served as Pentwater's lifeline across the channel. Guided by a heavy wire cable and pulled hand-over-hand using a notched wooden mallet, the ferry carried people, wagons, livestock, and eventually automobiles between the village and Frenchtown.

Fares were simple: five cents per person, ten cents for a man and horse, twenty-five cents for a wagon and team, and just two cents per animal. Operated by a ferryman — often with help from passengers — the ferry was more than just transportation; it was a daily necessity. With the railroad depot on the south side of the lake, the ferry linked travelers, workers, and goods to the heart of the village.

Continued from page 10- Crossing the Channel

### The Swing Bridge (1926–1949)

In 1926, Pentwater turned a page in its history with the arrival of the swing bridge, a former railroad span relocated from Elk Rapids and donated by the Pere Marquette Railway. Unlike fixed bridges, this structure pivoted at its center, allowing boats to pass while connecting the shores for cars and pedestrians.

Operated day and night by attendants who turned the span for passing vessels, the bridge quickly became a vital and iconic feature of the harborfront. Locals hailed it as the village's greatest civic improvement of the century — replacing the aging ferry, shortening travel times, and tying together Pentwater's land and maritime life.

By 1949, however, the bridge had deteriorated and was deemed unsafe. Though removed that same year, its legacy lives on in local memory and historical records.

Together, the ferry and the swing bridge tell the story of a community growing and adapting — from rope-pulled scows to steel spans — all in service of keeping Pentwater connected.

To dive deeper into these stories, visit the **Pentwater Historical Society**, where local history comes alive through exhibits, archives, and first-hand recollections.

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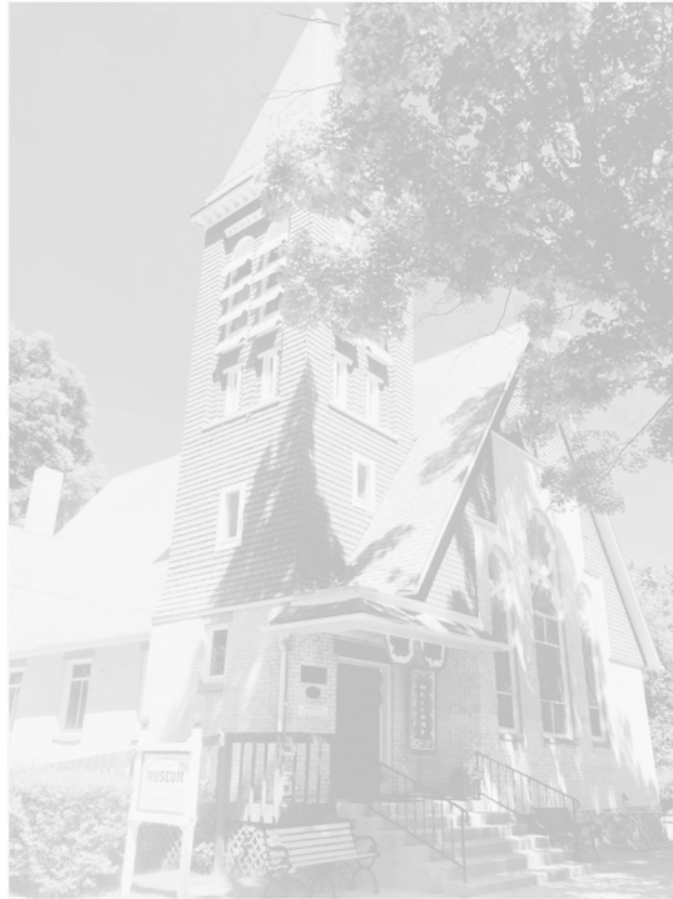
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**MARK YOUR  
CALENDAR!**



Corwin Brower, the father of Karen Way,  
around 1935 at his home where his  
parents owned a operated a grocery store  
and gas pump

