



PENTWATER PRIDE



Past Present Promised

Spring 2025

A Presidential Connection- Continued

In our last newsletter, we gave you a brief glimpse into the life of Charles Mears. He was a successful businessman who helped shape the eastern shores of Lake Michigan; creating commerce, community, jobs, and accessibility.

Once Mears and his brothers had scouted the shoreline along Lake Michigan and settled in the Whitehall area, they began to acquire land, build and operate 15 lumber mills, and construct six harbors along the coast of Michigan to transport lumber.

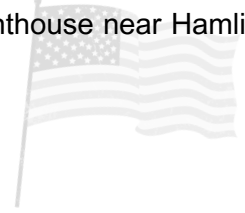
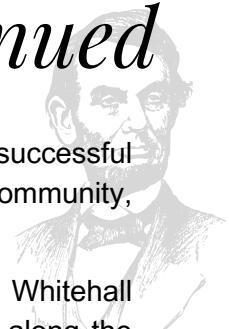
One of the harbors that was constructed by Mears later became Pentwater. Charles Mears dug a wider channel out to Lake Michigan and built a sawmill in 1855. To accommodate the laborers, he needed at his sawmill, he built a store and boarding house. In addition, after discovering a clay deposit in the area, Charles Mears built a tile and brick factory. The yellow bricked buildings in Pentwater were all built with bricks manufactured at this factory. He provided housing and supplies for laborers and even named Pentwater's streets, initially calling the settlement "Middlesex" after his childhood home.

Mears' dedication to the Republican Party brought him into close contact with Abraham Lincoln. Their friendship was commemorated in 1861 when Mears renamed the settlements of Little Sable (not to be confused with Little Point Sable) and Big Sable to Lincoln and Hamlin, respectively, in honor of the successful Republican presidential ticket of Lincoln and his vice president, Hannibal Hamlin.

In May 1860, Mears witnessed the Republican National Convention in Chicago, where Lincoln was nominated for president. He later attended a ratification rally in Springfield, Illinois, where he met both Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln. These personal connections underscored Mears' commitment to Lincoln's leadership and the values of the Republican Party.

Later in 1860, Mears was elected to the Michigan State Senate, representing the 31st District during the 22nd Legislature from 1863 to 1864. During his tenure, he successfully petitioned to move the Mason County courthouse to Lincoln, a settlement he had developed. This move not only centralized governance but also spurred economic growth in the area.

Beyond his legislative achievements, Mears was a fervent advocate for infrastructure improvements. He played a pivotal role in securing funding for the construction of the Big Sable Point Lighthouse near Hamlin village, enhancing maritime safety along Lake Michigan's coastline.





A Presidential Connection Continued



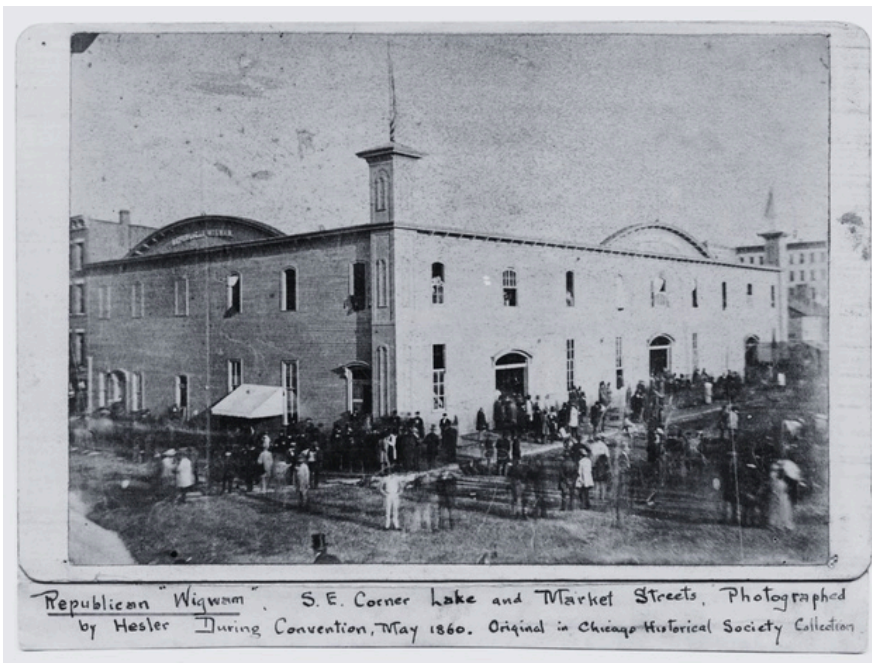
Hamlin Lake Mill Pond 1895



Charles Mears' contributions have left an enduring mark on western Michigan. In addition to the Charles Mears State Park, his efforts in developing the lumber industry and infrastructure not only bolstered Michigan's economy but also laid the foundation for many communities that continue to thrive today. Mears retired in 1883 and moved to Chicago, where he lived until his death in 1895.

While the lumber industry that defined much of Mears' life had faded by the early 20th century, the communities he helped build transitioned into thriving resort destinations, including Hamlin Lake, Pentwater, and the surrounding areas. Today, his contributions to Michigan's infrastructure and economy are celebrated as key chapters in the state's history.

Mears' life exemplifies the spirit of innovation and public service, bridging entrepreneurial success with civic responsibility. His friendship with President Lincoln adds a personal dimension to his storied career, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal relationships and historical developments.



**Republican
Wigwam
May 1860
SE Corner of Lake
and Market Streets
Chicago**



Roger Bailey – Setting the Tempo in Pentwater

by AnnaMae Bush



The history of Pentwater is intertwined with several families whose generations have been associated with the Village over many decades. One of those families is the Bailey family.

Roger Bailey has been setting the tempo for Pentwater with his drumming in community parades and civic band concerts since 1988. Roger was born on April 1, 1936, in Belding, Michigan. His father, Les Bailey, moved his family to Muskegon during WWII to take a foundry job. “A few years later my father heard about a hardware store for sale in Pentwater. He was interested in having his own business, so in 1946 he moved our family again, this time north to Pentwater. I started Pentwater Public School in the middle of 4th grade.”

Making friends has always been easy for Roger. He made two life-long friends that first year: Ed Bigelow and Barry Rought, both also familiar names in Pentwater history. One of Roger’s favorite school memories is the Gun Club which was started and led by the school principal, John Rottschafer. “We would all bring our guns to school and lean them up (unloaded) against our lockers for the school day and then grab them up to go out to the rifle range after classes ended. I got to be a pretty good shot.”

Bailey’s Hardware Store was the first place Roger worked; no child labor laws were in place to restrict what age he could work for his father. But he started earning money at the age of 14 as the drummer with a square dance band in Hart. Then he moved onto playing with an older, experienced saxophone player in a jazz band. His love affair with drums began with a toy drum in his childhood. “Then I went to a large round cheese container I adapted for a drum. Eventually I got a real drum set and dreamed about making my living as a musician.” But before pursuing that dream, Roger spent several years in the military. “I joined the Michigan National Guard in my senior year of high school. Every Tuesday I spent four hours in drills with my unit. After graduation in 1954 I was stationed with the army at the Redstone Arsenal in Alabama where I worked on Nike Air Defense Missiles and at Fort Devens in Massachusetts for three years. A highlight of those years was seeing Bill Russell play a game in his first season with the Boston Celtics.”

In 1958 Roger headed to California to pursue his dream of “making it big” in Hollywood as a musician. He returned to Pentwater and found work at Mears State Park. He also acquired drums, joined the Scottville Clown Band with his father who played trombone, and joined the Pentwater Civic Band. He really enjoyed the outdoor work and spent the next 30 years employed in several state parks and recreation areas. He explained that recreation areas were generally larger than state parks, and that recreation areas had a much longer hunting season than state parks permitted. It was during Roger’s employment at Lake Mitchell in Cadillac that Ed Bigelow arranged for Roger to have a blind date with Ruth, his future wife. They were married on June 15, 1963.



Roger felt a pull to his roots in Pentwater, the place that always felt like home, the place that centered him, that grounded him. So, in 1988 he retired from his career in state parks and returned to Pentwater where he completely immersed himself in the local community. He joined the Service Club, the Historical Society, St. James Episcopal Church, the Clown Band, the Civic Band, and for 11 years he was sexton at the Pentwater Township Cemetery.

He shared, "I always had a passionate interest in history." Son Mark concurred. "No matter where we went on family vacations, dad would find a museum or battlefield, a library or historical site where he would take all of us for a visit to learn something." Since his return to the Village in 1988, Roger's passion has played itself out in ways that have benefited residents and visitors alike. In scattered locations all around the Village there are sites marked with weather-resistant "story boards" that bear original photos and historical information to explain the role the site had in the development of Pentwater. They can be found on the main street downtown as well as along the channel. Roger had the lead role in that large project. Standing at the bass and snare drums, for many years he set the tempo for the Civic Band selections at the weekly concerts on the Green. He was instrumental in establishing the annual combined Clown Band and Civic Band concert at the start of each Homecoming Weekend. Until health issues impacted their tradition in recent years, Roger and Ruth invited the entire Clown Band for a picnic meal in their large yard when they came to play for Homecoming.

Roger Bailey has seen many transitions in Pentwater over the years he has lived in the Village. He has watched how changes in the economy diminished industry and farm life. He has seen how city box stores and chain stores have replaced small town family-owned stores such as his father's hardware store. He has seen how soaring real estate prices have pushed many older residents out of the community. He also knows that before his time, Pentwater was a community that had to recover from three serious fires that destroyed much of the business district and industrial facilities. Did he have any theories on what enabled the town to survive, even thrive, after adversity? He mused and said, "The town had some long-standing churches. I think the strong faith communities had something to do with it."

Today Roger and Ruth Bailey enjoy a quiet life in their small home on Clymer. Their grandchildren and great-grandchildren live miles away, but both their sons live in Pentwater. Mark lives with them to help them with medical appointments and other needs. Chris is the sexton at Pentwater Township Cemetery and continues to do limited house painting work. Roger's contributions to the Pentwater Community were recognized in 2001 when the Service Club selected him as Citizen of the Year. He smiles and recalls, "It was a strange experience to ride in a car in the Homecoming Parade after all the years I had marched in the parade with the band."

Thanks to Mark Bailey for his help with photos and story details.

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****Lites Pharmacy: A Cornerstone of Pentwater's History****

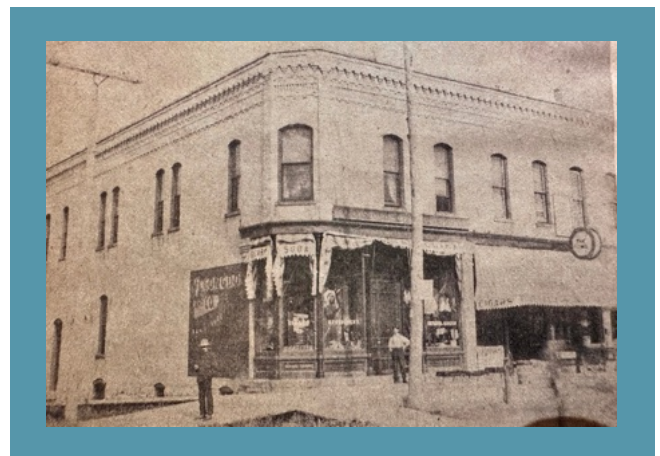


In the charming lakeside village of Pentwater, Michigan, few establishments boasted the rich history and community connection as Lites Pharmacy. Nestled at the corner of Hancock and Third Street in the heart of Pentwater's business district, the pharmacy had been a cornerstone of the community for over a century. In its later years, Lites Pharmacy celebrated 46 years under the ownership of pharmacist Ken Lites, marking a significant milestone in its storied history.

The site of Lites Pharmacy had been home to a drugstore since 1867, serving the needs of Pentwater residents and visitors alike. The original store, however, was lost to a fire in 1889, a devastating blow to the community. Undeterred, the store's operators rebuilt, constructing the current building in 1891. Frances W. Fincher Sr., who operated the Corner Pharmacy at the time, played a significant role in its reconstruction, using locally crafted Pentwater yellow bricks. Fincher, a multifaceted figure in the community, was not only a pharmacist but also a banker. His family's legacy extended into Pentwater's history, with connections to prominent local figures, including Chief Justice Robert Montgomery and Hattie Fincher Ayers, a member of Pentwater High School's first graduating class.

Among those trained by Fincher was Jeremiah Layton Congdon, who took over the pharmacy in 1892. Congdon's leadership marked another chapter in the store's history, during which he became a respected civic leader and expanded the pharmacy's role in the community. In the 20th century, the pharmacy underwent further transformations, becoming Mac's Pharmacy in 1940 and later the Jack Johnson Drug Store in 1947, both operating under the Rexall Drugstore franchise.

In 1949, Ken and Georgia Lites purchased the pharmacy, giving it its enduring identity as Lites Pharmacy. Ken Lites, originally from Michigan, had a deep passion for pharmacy and community service. A graduate of a prestigious pharmacy school, Ken worked in various roles before settling in Pentwater.



He and Georgia transformed the business into more than just a pharmacy, adding general merchandise, Pentwater souvenirs, and the ever-popular Park Dairy ice cream. The soda fountain, a standout feature, became a beloved gathering spot where patrons enjoyed refreshing treats and shared local news. For many years, the pharmacy grew into more than just a place to fill prescriptions. It became a gathering spot, a source of trusted advice, and a reminder of Pentwater's enduring spirit. The soda fountain added to the pharmacy's role as a hub of community activity and nostalgia.



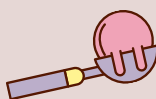
Ken and Georgia Lites

While honoring its history, Lites Pharmacy embraced change to better serve its customers. Over the years, the pharmacy expanded its services, offering everything from immunizations to health screenings. Ken incorporated modern technology, such as automated refill systems and electronic health records, to ensure efficient and accurate service. Despite these advancements, the pharmacy retained its small-town feel, with a focus on building relationships and fostering trust. In addition to its pharmaceutical services, Lites Pharmacy became a hub for unique gifts, home goods, and seasonal items. This diversification helped the business thrive in an era when many independent pharmacies struggled to compete with large chains.

By 1995, after decades of service, the pharmacy operations were discontinued, and the establishment transitioned into a general store. This marked the end of the building's role as a pharmacy, which had been a cornerstone of the community for more than 100 years. Although Lites Pharmacy ceased its pharmaceutical services, its legacy remains a testament to the dedication of Ken and Georgia Lites and the enduring spirit of small-town entrepreneurship. Whether patrons stopped by for a prescription, a thoughtful gift, or simply a friendly conversation, Lites Pharmacy remained a place where history and community came together—a true gem in the heart of Pentwater.



The Lites family's connection to the pharmacy was as much about people as it was about medicine. Ken Lites, a lifelong Michigander, followed in his father's footsteps to become a pharmacist, inspired by a shared passion for helping others. His wife and children also played roles in the business, contributing to its welcoming, family-oriented atmosphere. Customers often spoke of the personalized care they received, from friendly chats about their health to thoughtful recommendations tailored to their needs. This personal touch earned Lites Pharmacy a loyal customer base, with generations of families returning for their pharmaceutical needs.



Save The Red Barn



The **Save The Red Barn** group is dedicated to preserving the iconic 165-year-old Pentwater landmark, preventing its collapse, and securing its removal from the DNR's demolition list. With strong community support, the **Save The Red Barn** group aims to inspire local government entities to take on this project by applying for the required DNR use permit. This historic structure deserves to be preserved for future generations as a cherished symbol of Pentwater.

For updates and ways to get involved, visit **Save The Red Barn** Facebook page.

YOU ARE INVITED TO
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Appetizers, Dinner, Dessert and an
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May **21** | 5:30 Pm - 8:00 Pm
2025 | AgBio research center, 5185
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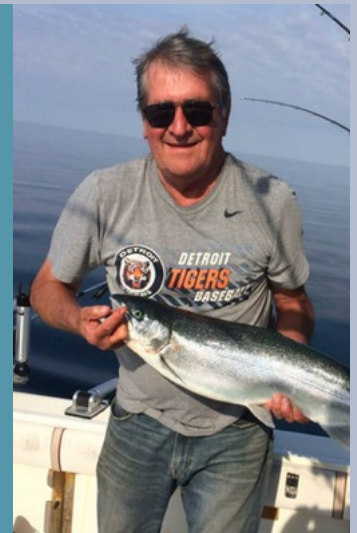
Tickets Available From:
www.PentwaterHistoricalSociety.org
and in town in early May

Tickets: \$30 per person



OUR NEWEST PERMANENT RESIDENT

Saying Goodbye Bart Zachrich



Bart was an individual with tremendous dedication to education throughout his life and he demonstrated that dedication to activities in which he became involved in Pentwater. His participation in the Historical Society was particularly meaningful. Bart always acted with grace, patience and humility and demonstrated excellent organizational skills.

Shortly after moving to Pentwater, he began volunteering at the museum as a docent. With the advent of history tour cruises, he quickly volunteered his time to assist and was soon helping as docent on the boat.

Ever the educator, Bart helped to organize and arrange the tours of students at the museum, and helped the other docents by showing them how to do a hands-on demonstration of the breadth and width of our history for the students.

He worked with a local high school student to interview and record the stories of long-term Pentwater residents, preparing their stories for sharing with members and friends of the museum. He continued that work in the last year, interviewing more residents and capturing more stories.

He worked tirelessly to handle any tours that might be needed. During one off-season the museum was experimenting with a tour down Hancock Street. It was decided to try it for locals and visitors during the month of December. Each Saturday that December, at 5pm, Bart could be seen trudging down Hancock from Snug harbor to the Methodist church, regaling those following him with the stories that make Pentwater loved by so many. The part they didn't love was the 40mph wind gusts with sleet and snow flying into their faces, but Bart didn't seem to be at all phased by the weather.

Most of all, we appreciated his willingness to pitch in with whatever was needed.... setting up for the annual dinners and handling ticket sales there, working the garage sales, handling the board jobs that others could not or would not handle. Bart did all of those things without complaint, supporting the museum and its workers, and making suggestions when he saw opportunities for improvements, but making those suggestions in the kindest and gentlest of ways.

He will be sorely missed by all of us at the society and museum.

Museum Update

The PHS Museum is looking forward to a great summer opening. We will be sprucing up the museum and refreshing some of our exhibits. We will be adding a small exhibit to show how the streets in Pentwater have changed throughout our history. Included in the exhibit will be some early porcelain Michigan License Plates of the first plates Michigan issued.

We are looking for a non-board position to schedule the docents for the 3-4 months that we are open. We were blessed to have Joan Gehringer do this for many years. She did a fantastic job! It will involve lining up docents to work when we are open. This candidate will receive help from myself and the rest of the board to fill the docent slots.

If you are interested in this position please call or text Dan Hoekstra Sr., at 616-734-2103.

New Exhibit

Have you ever wondered what it was like to arrive in Pentwater in the 1800s?

What did our forebears see and do when they first came to Pentwater, and why did they come here?

The museum is preparing a "Journeys to Pentwater" exhibit, to be displayed beginning in the summer of 2025.

Come to the museum to see and hear the stories of those that came to Pentwater many years ago.

Expansion News

The Society's group planning the expansion has had a survey company perform a survey. The drawings from the surveyor will be used to support our Zoning Permit application in the Spring.

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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
Phone: 231-335-3689



Time With Tim


During my life's adventures, few things stand out more than the day one of my five favorite sisters called to ask if I knew how to catch an emu.

At first, I thought she was joking, but I got in my old truck and drove to her house, only to find the biggest bird I had ever seen. This massive bird could outrun my truck and turn 90 degrees at full speed, so a footrace was quickly ruled out. We contacted a man who owned emus, and he warned us that the bird could be dangerous. However, he also mentioned that emus are very curious and attracted to shiny objects.

I pulled out my keyring and jingled it a little, and, sure enough, the oversized roadrunner waddled over to see what I had. A plan was devised: I turned my back on the bird and continued shaking the keys over my shoulder while my sister opened the barn door. I walked in, closely followed by Big Bird, and she quickly shut the door behind us.

That's when the real battle began.

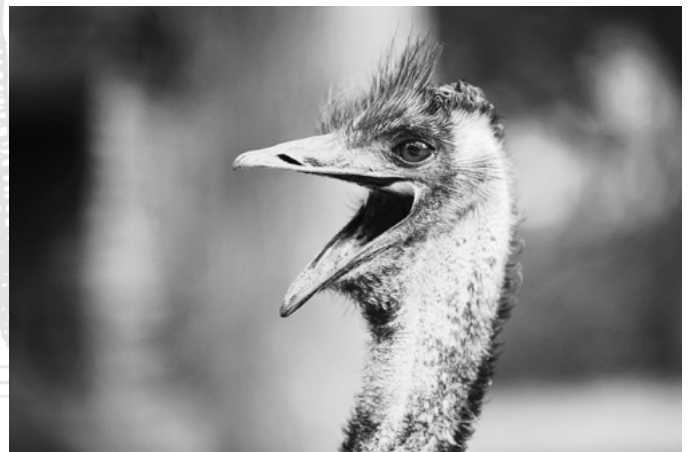
I first tried roping this turkey-sized creature, only to realize it was faster—and possibly smarter—than me. I grabbed for its neck, but the bird kicked me in the chest so fast I didn't see it coming. The blow was so hard it nearly knocked me down. Finally, I got the idea to create a loop on the ground like a snare. On the second attempt, I managed to close the loop around one leg and tip the bird over.



Unfortunately, this only made things worse. As I was securing one leg, the bird was kicking me with its other leg like a professional martial artist. My niece ran and brought a pillowcase to cover Woody Woodpecker's head, hoping it would calm him down. To our surprise, it worked. My sister backed my truck up to the barn door, and I somehow managed to pick up this 80-pound feathered menace and hold him down in the back of the truck. She drove about 10 miles to return him to the farm he had escaped from a week earlier.

Once we arrived, I carefully untied him and set him down in his pen. The bird got up, shook himself off, and went straight to the feeder as if nothing had happened. Thankfully, he was unhurt. I, on the other hand, was bruised, exhausted, and sore—but grinning like an idiot. I stuck an emu feather in my hat as a souvenir of the adventure.

Another day, another wild story in my life as I live the dream.



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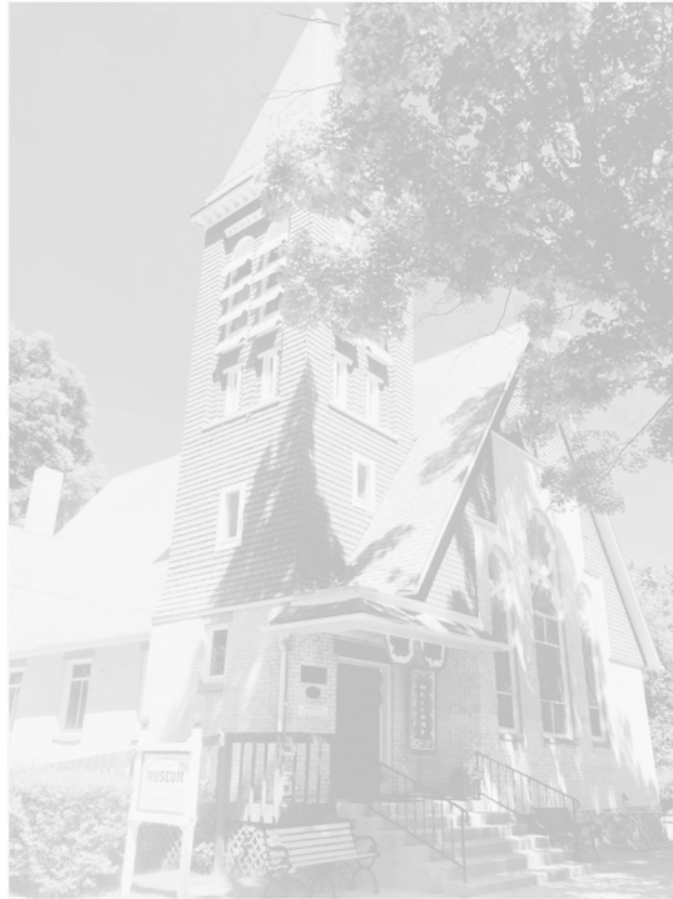
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