



PENTWATER PRIDE



Past Present Promised

Summer 2025

From Denmark to Pentwater: A Family Journey

By Karen Way

My name is Karen Way, and I've lived in Pentwater my entire life. My roots here run deep—back to when my grandfather, Jess Petersen, first arrived in this country.

In 1910, my grandfather Jess and his brother John left their home in Nysted, Denmark, and arrived at Ellis Island, full of hope and determination. They had an aunt and uncle living in New York City who welcomed them and helped them settle in. Jess, who was a skilled tree surgeon, soon found work with Davy Tree Experts, a company that had him traveling quite a bit. His travels eventually brought him all the way to Orlando, Florida.



This is Jess, brother John and sisters Lilly and Clara with some of their children circa 1927 before my mother was born.

It was there that he met a man who had a friend named Hans Thompson, who owned a potato farm in Pentwater, Michigan. Hans needed help on the farm, and that's how Jess found himself heading north. In the late winter of 1913, Jess made the long journey to Pentwater by train. Once the train stopped, he walked across the frozen lake into town and then out to the Thompson farm. Along the way, he happened upon the Sayers family cutting ice on the lake. Someone took a postcard picture that day. In the photo, there's Mr. Sayers, two of his sons—including Chan, whom I still remember from my childhood—and my grandfather, Jess Petersen.

Jess quickly fell in love with Pentwater. The land was rich, the community welcoming, and the peaceful beauty of the area must have reminded him of home. He wrote to his brother John, still in New York, and urged him to come. John did, and the brothers began building a new life here.

They had neighbors—Peter and Ella Matson—who owned a dairy farm. The Matsons had emigrated to America back in the 1860s and raised seven children. It wasn't long before love found its way into the picture. Jess married their daughter Lilly in 1915, and John married her sister Clara.

Jess and Lilly went on to have seven children. My mother, Marilyn—though everyone called her “Tootie”—was the youngest. When they eventually sold the farm to one of their sons, Jess and Lilly moved into the village. My mom attended Pentwater High School and then went on to Muskegon Beautician School. Her first job was in a beauty shop in downtown Pentwater owned by her sister. It was there, while doing a lady's hair, that she met the woman's son—Corwin Gordon Brower—when he came in to pick up his mom.

continued on page 4

The History of The Brown Bear: A Pentwater Icon

The establishment currently known as Brown Bear in Pentwater, Michigan, holds a vibrant history, reflecting decades of evolution and community memories. From its early days as a grocery store to its current iteration as Brown Bear, this restaurant and bar has been a cornerstone of Pentwater's downtown culture.

The story of this location begins in the early 1900s, when it was home to an A&P grocery store, providing essential goods to the local community. As the decades passed, the building transitioned into Osan's Tavern, operated by George and Thelma Osan in the 1960s. Osan's became a gathering place for residents, offering a welcoming atmosphere for friends and neighbors to connect. This establishment set the stage for the location's evolution into a series of beloved community hubs.

In its next incarnation, the location became the Wheel Inn, owned by Russ Brown. Fondly remembered by locals, the Wheel Inn was a lively spot with a unique character. Patrons recall features like the barber chair at the end of the bar, often used for kamikaze shots, and the screen door that gave the establishment a rustic charm. Known colloquially as the "Wheel Inn and Wobble Out," it was a popular destination for young adults, particularly when the legal drinking age was 18. Russ Brown, a respected community member and volunteer firefighter, operated the Wheel Inn during its heyday, creating a space that many residents still reminisce about today.

Despite its popularity, the Wheel Inn closed permanently under mysterious circumstances. According to local lore, a massive fight broke out, leading to the destruction of nearly every glass, chair, and table in the place. After this incident, the establishment remained closed for several years, marking the end of an era.



By the early 1990s, the site found new life as the Belly Up Bar & Grille. Kris and Dave Wilson, along with Nan and Mark Babinec, purchased the property and opened the Belly Up on September 11, 1992. The new owners renovated both the interior and exterior, adding modern touches like a jukebox with 800 music selections, foosball tables, and pool tables. Open from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m., the Belly Up quickly became a vibrant social hub, hosting karaoke nights and attracting a diverse crowd of locals and visitors alike. The owners celebrated the Belly Up's 10th anniversary in August 2002, shortly before selling the business.

Brown Bear continued on page 3



Brown Bear continued from page 2

On September 12, 2002, Andrew Carter purchased the Belly Up, transferring over the liquor license and dance permit. With a vision to bring a fresh identity to the establishment, Carter renamed it Brown Bear and introduced a new menu, featuring its now-famous "Notorious Bear Burger." The Brown Bear quickly gained a reputation as a must-visit destination in Pentwater, beloved for its hearty food and welcoming atmosphere. Nestled among the charming shops of downtown Pentwater, the Brown Bear has become a staple of the community, continuing the site's legacy as a gathering place.

The Brown Bear's location has seen decades of change, yet its role as a community anchor has remained constant. From its beginnings as an A&P grocery store to the neighborhood camaraderie of Osan's Tavern in the 1960s, the rustic charm of the Wheel Inn under Russ Brown, the lively atmosphere of the Belly Up, and the enduring appeal of Brown Bear, this establishment reflects the history and spirit of Pentwater itself. Each iteration has left its mark, creating memories for generations of residents and visitors.

Today, Brown Bear stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of small-town businesses. Its storied past serves as a reminder of Pentwater's rich history and the people who have contributed to its enduring charm. As locals and visitors continue to gather at Brown Bear, they become part of a narrative that stretches back decades, preserving the spirit of this beloved establishment for years to come.



Garage Sale
JUNE 13-14

**GENTLY USED ITEMS
MAY BE DONATED ON
THE FOLLOWING
DATES:**

- WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 1PM - 4PM
- WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 1PM - 4PM
- THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 9AM - 4PM

continued from page 1

Mom and Corwin married in 1953. He was from nearby Bass Lake. They settled in the village and raised three children: my brothers Steve and Lee, and me—Karen. We all went to Pentwater School, but I'm the only one who stayed.

Pentwater has always been home. When I married my husband Marvin Way, he quickly came to love this place as much as I did. Before long, we bought The Abbey Bed and Breakfast, which I owned and operated until 2020.

There's something about Pentwater—something lasting and real. It's where my family took root over a century ago, and where my heart has always been. I love this town and truly wouldn't want to live anywhere else.



My Grandfather, the day he arrived in Pentwater. He got off of the train and walked across Pentwater Lake and met the Sayers family cutting ice.



Grandma and Grandpa with their seven children out on the farm. My mother was the youngest. circa 1940



Do you know what this 100-year-old downtown Pentwater landmark commemorates? Find out by taking the Hancock History Stroll.



STEP BACK IN TIME; TAKE THE HANCOCK STREET HISTORY STROLL

With its popular History Cruise concluding its five-year run last summer, the Pentwater Historical Society will now offer a "Hancock History Stroll" on Mondays and Thursdays, beginning June 23 through Labor Day. Free, one-hour strolls will depart from the top of the Village Green at 11 a.m.



Board Members

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Newsletter Editor: Amy Vander Zwart





Lamplighter Dedication Sunday, June 29 at 4pm

At the Museum!
85 S Rutledge St

Come meet *Free Refreshments!*
The Lamplighter Sculptors

Bass Lake History ... Now You Can Read All About It

To celebrate its 110th anniversary, the Bass Lake Property Owners Association (BLPOA) has published a commemorative book titled *This Is Bass Lake: A Destination for Generations*. Created by the BLPOA History Committee over four years, the book brings together personal stories, photographs, and historical accounts from six generations of residents, offering a rich and authentic look at the lake's nearly 140-year history as a summer retreat near Pentwater, Michigan.

From its days as a heavily logged area in the 1800s to its transformation into a peaceful haven, the book highlights the people, traditions, and events

that have made Bass Lake a cherished destination. Ideal for casual reading, it's a softcover perfect for the beach or the cottage.

This Is Bass Lake will be available starting in late June at the Pentwater Historical Society Museum (85 S. Rutledge) and online via Amazon/KDP beginning June 17.

By Pam Chapman



The 2024
Unveiling
of the
Sequoia
Fundraising
Event
June 23rd

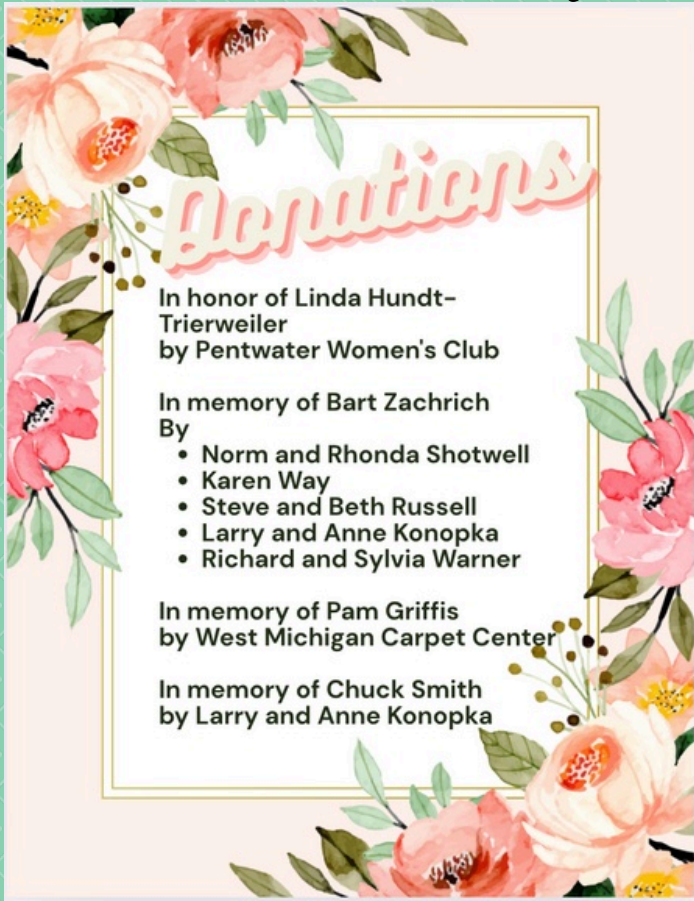


The Petal Project



The Petal Project is designed to create a colorful, fun, and family friendly display of daffodils throughout the Village of Pentwater during spring.





Donations

In honor of Linda Hundt-Trierweiler
by Pentwater Women's Club

In memory of Bart Zachrich
By

- Norm and Rhonda Shotwell
- Karen Way
- Steve and Beth Russell
- Larry and Anne Konopka
- Richard and Sylvia Warner

In memory of Pam Griffis
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**Welcome to our
Newest Members!**

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SAVE the DATE

**SUMMER
DINNER**

August 27, 2025
Wednesday

5:30 - Social Hour
6:00 - Catered Dinner is
Served
BYOB
7:00 - The History of Bass
Lake

Tickets: \$35 per person

Tickets Available August 1st From:
www.PentwaterHistoricalSociety.org and in town
Location: AgBio research center, 5185 N. Oceana Drive, Hart, MI



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Grants

Oceana Community Foundation
for Journeys to Pentwater
exhibit

Pentwater Service Club for
Journeys to Pentwater exhibit

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Zinc or “White Bronze” Monuments: A Unique Piece of Cemetery History

By Shannon Larson

Zinc, commonly referred to as “White Bronze,” was a popular material for grave markers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These distinctive monuments were produced primarily by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, from 1874 until 1914.

White Bronze markers were about one-third the cost of traditional marble or granite, making them an appealing choice for many families. Each monument was made to order, with customized bolt-on panels that could be screwed into place. Production of these panels continued until 1939, but World War I played a significant role in ending the broader production—zinc was declared a vital wartime material by the U.S. government.

You can easily spot a White Bronze marker in a cemetery by its crisp, pale blue-gray color. These markers are made from a sand-cast alloy of copper, tin, and zinc. They are hollow, nonmagnetic, virtually nonporous, and highly resistant to tarnishing. As a result, many still look nearly as pristine today as when they were first installed.

Despite their longevity, zinc has its limitations. It is a brittle metal, so over time, markers can develop cracks or dents. Larger monuments—some as tall as 15 feet—are also susceptible to “metal creep” due to their weight and hollow structure.

There’s even an urban legend tied to these unique markers: some say bootleggers once used the hollow interiors to stash liquor for customers to retrieve discreetly.

Want to see one for yourself? Our own Pentwater Township Cemetery contains four zinc markers. Take a stroll through and see if you can find them all!

For a fascinating glimpse into the craftsmanship of the era, check out the [1892 White Bronze Monument Catalogue](#).



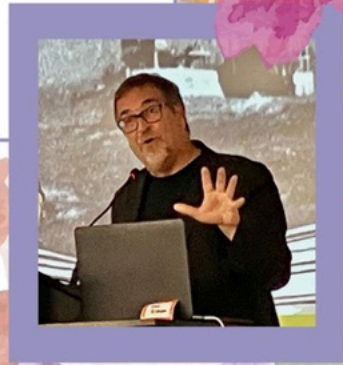
One of the white bronze markers in the Pentwater Township cemetery:
Esther (Bemis) Webb b.1829
d.1886
Block 1, Lot 6



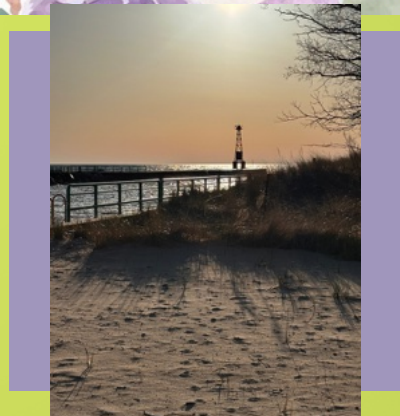
Interior view of a white bronze monument, taken during a Cemetery Preservation workshop at Mountain Home Cemetery in Kalamazoo, summer 2024



Spring Dinner '25



Seen Around Town



Have you seen Elvis and Nixon in town?



Museum Update

Welcome to summer and the opening day of the museum on June 3 at 1:00. You will notice an empty spot on the north wall. This is where the Journeys to Pentwater will be on display at the end of June. It will be an interactive exhibit that will teach us all about how our Village Founders and others made their way to Pentwater.

There is a small exhibit that will allow you to find your home in current Pentwater vs 1890's Pentwater. You'll notice street number changes from the 1950's but the signers of the Declaration have remained the same. Included in that exhibit are license plates from Michigan dating 1911-1945. These are original ceramic mounted into a shadow frame with museum glass protecting them.

Last, and most importantly, we need docents for the open days of the museum. The docents should have received an email from the board on a new and exciting procedure to sign up for your days. The calendar will be at the museum on the docent desk for those that like to sign up.

Joan and Jim Gehringer have been running the docents schedules the past few years and have done a bang up job.

Dan and Lin Hoekstra will be trying to fill their shoes this year. Feel free to contact us at 616-734-2103 if you have any questions about being a new docent.

Thank you,
Dan Hoekstra Sr
Museum Director

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

Pentwater – A Rhythm of Life

By Amy Jo Smith

I came to Pentwater because my parents, Anne and Ira Smith, were good friends with Lillian and Joe Scane. Lillian was originally from Hart, Michigan, and the Scanes had a small cottage tucked behind the State Park. They had three kids—Jimmy, Jerry, and Judy—who were close in age to me and my siblings. I've seen old photos of my parents with the Scanes at the Silver Lake dunes, smiling and carefree long before I came along.

My connection to Pentwater goes all the way back to when I was a baby. My parents continued to visit the Scanes, and I tagged along in diapers while my older brother was three. One of my earliest memories is camping at the State Park when I was about seven or eight.

We didn't live in Pentwater—we lived in Detroit, where my father worked at Ford Motor Company—but every summer, we'd pack up for what felt like a great adventure. My parents had bought a big army surplus tent and cut it down to suit our family. It was huge—we could fit at least five army cots, a park bench, and even a picnic table inside. We had no electricity in those early days. We relied on a Coleman lantern and stove, and our refrigerator was literally an ice chest buried in the sand. A truck would come through the park selling blocks of ice, and that's how we kept things cold.

Back then, park regulations were pretty loose. We'd stay from the Fourth of July until mid-August. Later, when rules changed, we simply moved our tent a few feet and continued our stay. There were no designated campsites. You just picked a spot under a tree. Drinking water came from a faucet a few sites down, and we kept a bucket and ladle handy for everyone to use. We'd often hike up to the beach store—a big white wooden building we called the "White House." That's where the restrooms were, too. I remember buying a gallon of milk there for 50 cents. I don't think I ever took a proper shower in those early years—we swam in Lake Michigan every day. My mom loved to visit the Scanes' cottage, mostly for the luxury of a hot bath, since the White House only had an outdoor shower.

The campground became its own little village each summer. All the kids knew each other, and the moms would gather to chat. My dad could only stay during his two-week vacation, so when he arrived, it felt extra special. One of my favorite memories is of the weenie roasts we'd have at the beach cove. The older kids would collect driftwood and sticks, and the adults brought hot dogs, buns, and marshmallows for s'mores. Once the fire burned down to embers, they'd sing—"Goodnight Irene," "On Top of Old Smoky," "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain"—songs that still echo in my mind. At night, the sky was a masterpiece. I loved picking out constellations and tracing the Milky Way. One night, a girlfriend and I slept on the beach and counted over 100 falling stars. We weren't afraid. Pentwater always felt safe.



My mother Anne, my father Ira, my older brother Jerry, my younger brother Ron, and myself around 1953. Jerry and my parents are now deceased.

Lake Michigan was where I learned to swim. As I got older, I'd dive off the pier or float in the warm channel where the water from Pentwater Lake met the big lake. Jumping into big waves from the pier was especially thrilling—and somehow, no one ever got hurt. When the perch were running, everyone would show up with just a hook and line. You didn't need much else.

I loved hiking to the top of Mt. Baldy, then following the path that ran parallel to the lake. One summer, my younger brother Ron and I decided to walk the beach all the way to Ludington—with our dog Rex, of course. We did it! Dad picked us up somewhere near Ludington, and it felt like the biggest adventure of our young lives.

When we needed a break from the beach, we'd walk into town for an ice cream cone from the drugstore or browse the old dime store with its creaky wooden floors. I always found the Antler Bar intriguing, but it was totally off-limits. On Thursday nights, we'd go to the band concert and sit back while the music played and cars honked their approval. Sunday mornings meant church, and afterward, jelly donuts from the bakery—our weekly treat. We rarely ate out, but I still remember having a delicious perch dinner once on Main Street. When company came to visit, we'd go to the dunes, maybe even take a ride in a dune scooter. Once, we hiked across the dunes to Lake Michigan and found what we believed was the ghost town and home of Swifty Lathers, the reclusive writer. On windy days, we'd swim at the Bass Outlet, and one summer, I even got to ride horses at a nearby ranch. In high school, a friend and I rented a canoe and paddled up the Pentwater River.

When summer ended, I always hated leaving. We'd head back to Detroit with sun-bleached hair and golden tans. I'd slip into shoes again and feel like I'd lost something important—freedom, maybe. To this day, I'm deeply grateful for the sacrifices my mom made so we could have those magical summers.

Of course, it wasn't always perfect. Getting into a cold cot with a sunburn stung like crazy. Sand was everywhere—between the sheets, in our clothes, on the tent floor. Sweeping out the tent was a daily chore. One summer, my mom and us three kids picked cherries for money. It was grueling work, and washing off in the cold lake afterward was not my favorite memory.

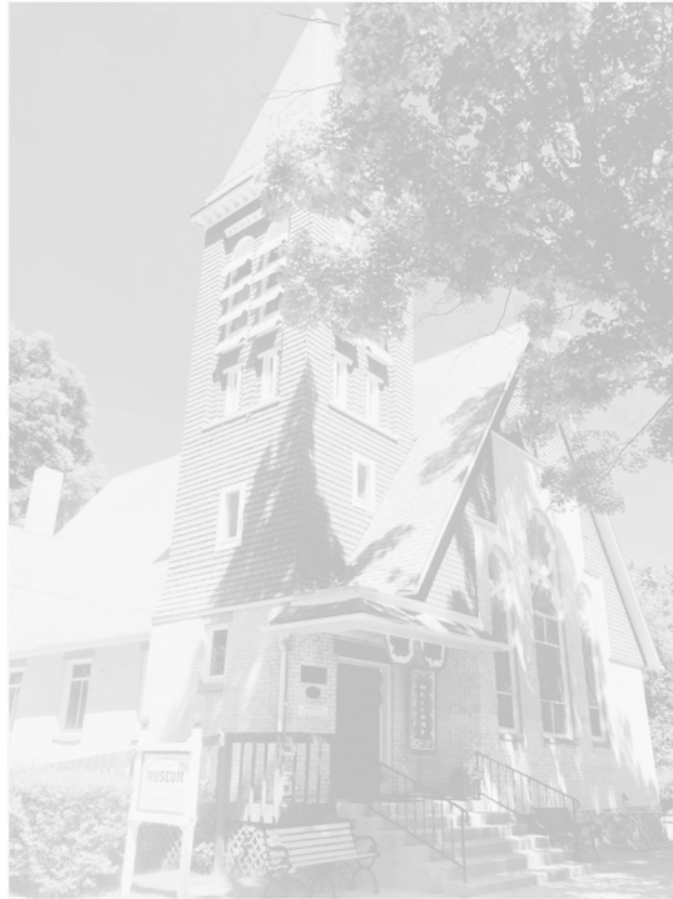
Still, there were so many quiet, peaceful moments. I read a lot during those summers—lazy afternoons with a book while the wind stirred the canvas tent.

I remember how, on Monday mornings, especially after it rained, we'd search the beach for treasures left behind by weekend visitors. We collected empty bottles and turned them in for a few pennies at the camp store. Honestly, we didn't like the weekend crowd—they often left the beach and bathrooms in a mess.

Some of the people I met during those summers left a lasting impression. I remember two camping mothers in particular. One older woman, who was allergic to the sun, would sit with me in the shade and play cards or chat. Her son Denny and I were close—we once swam across the channel with snorkel gear and explored underwater. Another woman, much younger, had stunning long hair and let me brush it. I wish I remembered their names. They were kind, generous, and quietly shaped me during those impressionable years. I also became close friends with Mary VanRaalte from Holland. Her dad used to float in the lake with his feet in the air and arms crossed behind his head—he delighted all of us.



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Lampighter

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June 29

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