

# PIGEON HISTORICAL SOCIETY RECORDER

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Pigeon, Michigan

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## ***"If only the walls could talk"***

*By Denny Esch, Historical Society President*

I really don't remember when I became interested in history and I can't say I didn't like history in high school. My teacher, Mr. Fran LePage, sure knew history and was a great at teaching the subject.

But why I needed to know all those dates and locations of events that happened way before my grandparents time, is beyond me.

Some people like "that kind" of history.

For me, history is that old coffee tin or whiskey bottle, maybe the Model T wrench or old hand tools that were used on the farm to mend a fence or harness.

Something I can touch. . . something I can see.

Several years ago (before I was old enough to be a historian, LOL), I walked into the Pigeon Depot Museum and was surprised to find hundreds of artifacts from the Pigeon Community on display.

My favorite artifact is still the old dentist chair and tools from Dr. Fritz's office (it's no wonder most people dreaded going to see him), and the "Perm-Machine" from Ollie Smith's Beauty

Salon (there must be 50 electric wires and heat-irons coming out of that contraption - you poor ladies).

I love the wood cook stove and kitchen cupboard, with all the utensils, flour sifter and tins. Just think what it like was to bake a pie or cook a chicken dinner for the wheat thrashing crew.

As I was leaving (a couple of hours later) I began to realize why I loved to dig through old barns, sheds, and go to estate sales.

I love all the neat "stuff" you can find.

But it is more than that. It is the story that comes with it.

The now-antique kitchen table that was once set for supper, the old cups, plates, spoons and forks. Mom would dish it up as dad washed the field dust from his hands and face. The kids would be busy telling stories about school that day and then when mom and dad sat down, there was silence.

Dad gave thanks for the food that they were about to receive and for the blessings of the day.

Wandering alone in the museum that day made me think, "If only the walls could talk."

## **What's "The Recorder"?**

The "Recorder" is created by history buffs who love to tell of the past while they discover, collect and preserve any material which may illustrate the history of the Pigeon Community and surrounding region.

We hope that this issue is the first of many more publications to come for the community to enjoy.

Our goal is to fill it with interesting articles about Pigeon heritage.

Watch for "bygone" ads and articles from the "Progress-Advance" newspaper.

We welcome your stories (long or short) to add to the collection of information the Society has gathered.

Contact any Pigeon Historian - or better yet - become a Historian yourself!

We don't demand too much: just the love of a good story, the appreciation of that "Old Stuff".

## **YOU are part of Pigeon's History!**

Everyone, in some way, is part of history.

If you are a native to the upper-thumb or a transplant from another place, you have some history about this area to share with others.

*Consider this:* It is necessary to share and teach others about the past.

Your family and ancestors told stories and left items that the Pigeon Historical Society and the people in our area would find really interesting. Younger residents need to know who, how, and why this area developed into the expanding agricultural, fishing, resort, and now technological region it is today.

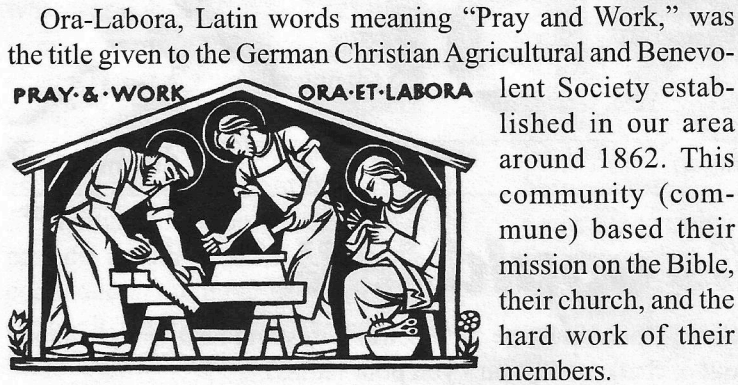
Therefore, whatever historical facts or artifacts you may possess, you almost have an obligation to share that and have it documented at the Pigeon Historical Society. Kids need to know the journey others made that allowed them to be where they are now and you can do your part.

Pigeon Historical Society meetings are held at the Woelke Center on the second Monday of each month starting at 6:30 pm, sharp.



Pigeon Historical Society's Depot Museum houses a large collection of various Pigeon memorabilia.

# Ora-Labora



Initially, these settlers purchased almost 1300 acres on Wild-fowl Bay between Bay Port and Mud Creek.

The price per acre of land at that time was between \$1.25 and \$3.00 and it certainly was not the gentle woodland nor neatly-cleared and tiled fields we see today. These folks first encountered the task of draining huge areas of swampland and removing the towering white pine trees and monstrous oaks that grew near the shore. They had to move giant boulders so fields and log cabins could be built. Then they had to create roads so transportation could be established. Imagine all this work being done with axes, hand saws and shovels and assisted only by teams of sometimes not-too-cooperative horses.

In time, internal squabbling, the difficulty encountered in

## Woelke Center Library filled with local research history info

Art Woelke was a life-long resident of the Pigeon community. When he died, his family followed his wishes and donated his huge collection of local and regional history to the Pigeon Historical Society. The collection is housed in the Woelke Center.

Several volumes of documents, newspaper clippings, pictures, maps, and family histories were carefully detailed and catalogued.

The Center also contains an extensive collection of originals of the Progress-Advance newspaper, from 1959 to the last copy in 1985.

Thousands of newspaper pages are available for examination.

Soon, computerized access to many documents will also be available for easier research into genealogy and family histories. In addition, hundreds of books are located here, many of them associated with life in a small town like ours.

The Historical Society invites you and your family to visit our new center or become involved by joining the Society.

We are located next to the Farmer's Market and are open for business on Thursdays and Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and on Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Group or individual appointments can be arranged by calling Clayton Esch at 989-453-2143 or 989-550-2000.

Please come in and examine the heritage Art left for our community and share your findings with others.

Your history awaits you at the Woelke Center.

taming this primitive land, the Civil War draft imposed upon the men, and merely surviving the summer mosquitos and brutal winters took its toll on the members. By 1895 most of the original settlers had left the area for a much less trying existence. However, some of the settler's descendants still reside in Huron County.

Look around as you drive the highway north of Bay Port and imagine the faith and strength that was required to even attempt what these brave people had accomplished.

Also, visit the Woelke Center and read more about this interesting settlement. Much has been written and collected about Ora-Labora and it's all located in the Center's library.

## Times Have Changed!

From the pages of the Progress-Advance, June 4, 1964

Get More **EAT** in the **MEAT**  
"Super-Right" Guarantees It!

**Steak Sale!**

ROUND	SIRLOIN	T-BONE
75¢ lb	89¢ lb	95¢ lb

PORTERHOUSE STEAKS lb. 99¢

**Pork Loins**  
"SUPER-RIGHT" QUALITY  
FULL 7-8 LB PORTION  
Loins End Portion 39¢  
Center 8 lb Pork Chops 79¢

**Fully Cooked Hams** WHOLE OR HALF 59¢  
PREPARED FRESH HAMS TIMES DRY WAY  
**Super-Right Ground Beef** 3-LB. PKG. OR MORE 43¢  
Lesser Amounts Lb. 47¢

**Whole Kernel Corn**  
A&P BRAND GRADE "A" VAC. PACK 12 OZ. CANS 9 1<sup>00</sup>  
Stock-up and Save! Case of 24 Cans \$2.67

**Asparagus Spears** 4 89¢  
A&P GRADE "A" 1 1<sup>00</sup>

**Apple Sauce** 7 1<sup>00</sup>

**TOMATOES** HOT HOUSE 39¢  
**Fresh Peaches** 2 29¢

**Northern Tuna** 12 89¢  
LIGHT CHUNK 4 99¢  
SPECIAL! JANE PARKER - 13 OZ. Banana Nut Loaf 2 79¢  
REG. 48¢ EACH SAVE 15¢  
Apple Pie 39¢  
JANE PARKER Old Fashioned Cookies 3 1<sup>00</sup>

**Tissue** 4 45¢  
WISCONSIN BRAND SIZE  
**Shrimp** .3 1<sup>00</sup>  
JUNE IS DAIRY MONTH  
CHOCOLATE COVERED ICE CREAM  
**Cheerio Bars** 12 49¢  
WISCONSIN CHEDDAR Sharp Cheddar 69¢  
FOR CEREALS AND COFFEE  
Half & Half 39¢

**A&P Grade "A" Grapefruit Juice** 1 QT. 14 OZ. CAN 39¢

**A&P's Pure Vegetable dexo Shortening** 3 49¢

**Coldstream Pink Salmon** 1-LB. TALL CAN 49¢

**Giant Package CHEER** 69¢  
A&P's Own Powdered Detergent  
Giant Package SAIL 2 LB. 13 OZ. 49¢

**A&P FROZEN VEGETABLES**  
Peas, Cut Corn, Spinach, Mixed Vegetables, Chopped Broccoli 7 1<sup>00</sup>

**AP Super Markets**



## **Damm's Incorporated**

Roy Damm began his career in the farm machinery business in 1919. Damm's remains the oldest farm machinery business in Huron County and the renovated building is located on M-142 in downtown Pigeon.

At first Roy was in partnership with John Doecker. Later, Roy and his three sons, Merlin, Clayton, and Harold formed a partnership until Roy's son, Merlin, passed away. Clayton, Harold, and Roy stayed with the business and it became known as Damm's Incorporated. The enterprise continues with this company name handed down to the next generation.

Roy is gone now but recorded his history as an implement dealer and service provider. Roy reported that many years ago when horses were the common form of transportation, travelers would house their horses in a makeshift stable at his business for the huge sum of ten cents per night. As horses were phased out as farm animals Roy and his partners introduced plows and tractors to the growers in our area. Today, sales and service at Damm's continues with modern equipment and new innovations. Visit Damm's and discover history in the making.

## **From the Artifact Collection**



Here is a framed postcard of Campbell's Drug Store. Once located just south of the railroad tracks on the east side of Pigeon's Main Street, the store was a focal point of Pigeon's commerce. This artifact is just one of the thousands of unique historical pieces available to the public.

## **A kid growing up on Saginaw Bay**

By Jim Leinbach

Weale Road runs east and west a mile south of the Village of Pigeon and west of the Caseville Road.

Back in the 1940's and 50's it was a not-so-good dirt/gravel road, that was finally blacktopped in the 1960's, and if you were a kid on a bike peddling down Weale Road you had to swerve around the holes and big stones so as not to take a spill.

Unlike today, bike helmets were not usual gear and one had to learn NOT to fall off and get scabbed up with dirt and gravel embedded somewhere on your body.

It could be an adventure going west on Weale especially if you were loaded down with a fishing rod or two, some hooks, sinkers and bobbers, and a coffee can full of night crawlers. If you were really equipped for the day you might also be hauling a bag of sandwiches, some hard candy, and a bottle of Nesbitt orange pop; however, those extras were usually a luxury for this biker.

Weale Road ended far to the west at

Wildfowl Bay.

Today, several small cottages and a few well-constructed homes dot the marshy landscape. Back then, if my memory serves me correctly, the Weale area had a few permanent residents and



at one point in time even had its own post office.

The mouth of the Shebeon Creek was very close and a trading post existed there in the early 1800's. However, this modern kid didn't know anything about the history of the spot nor did he much care. Fishing was on his mind this day.

In one of these older buildings, propped up off the ground on cinder blocks, lived the proprietor of the boat rental and property owner, a Mr. William Anderson.

Mr. Anderson was a minimalist and stocked very few fishing items other than night crawlers. He did, however, have on hand to rent a half dozen or so older wooden row boats. He might have stocked a couple old outboard motors to rent for those wealthy enough to afford the benefit of not rowing.

These boats in Anderson's fleet were the unpainted type with low sides and flat bottoms with removable floor slats, two seaters mostly and nowhere near seaworthy enough to rate today's strict government restrictions. These boats were tied to a rickety dock with an equally rickety rope and usually had two or three inches of water standing in each of them.

This area was commonly known as the Weale Landing or simply Weale to the locals.

*See "KID" continued on page 4*

The boat landing area bordered on what was called "The Middle Grounds," which was accessible by two distinct channels that wound through the tall cattails and rushes. One channel, the one in front of "Weale" was unnamed as far as I remember, but if you rowed far enough to the south on it you would pass the mouth of the Shebeon and come out on the inner bay at the end of Geiger Road. The main channel within the Middle Grounds was called Dynamite Cut. This channel started at the northeast corner of the inner bay at Geiger Road and would eventually take you out to Wildfowl bay somewhere between Heisterman and North Island.

From there, if the big bay was calm enough and one was real daring, you could prow the waters around Heisterman, North, and Maisou Islands. As I recall, these inner cuts within the Middle Grounds were anywhere from ten to forty feet wide and somewhere between four and eight feet deep. Until you exited the cuts at either the Geiger Road inner bay or the big bay you were literally enclosed in rushes, similar to perhaps the everglades in Florida. Ducks, geese, snakes and frogs were everywhere and so were mosquitos, but the fishing in the cuts and either bays was excellent. One of the best things a kid who rode a bike out to Weale could look forward to was the fact that even if

it was a windy day (which as we know is most often), and access to the big water was not possible, the Middle Grounds provided one with a safe place to catch buckets of bluegills, crappie, pike, perch, bass, and of course, all the bullheads one could ever want to clean.

Mr. Anderson's boats rented for \$2.00 per day, a sunrise to sunset price. I would arrive at Weale around mid-day and if I agreed to bail out all the other boats tied up at the dock then Mr. Anderson would charge me only .50 cents for the remainder of the day. All this depended on the number of boats he still had available and what day of the week it was. A few fortunate fishermen kept their own boats tied up at the dock or pulled up on shore in the weeds but owning a boat back then and having the time to use it was something most men could not afford.

With the boats bailed and the squashed cork life jacket as a seat cushion and Mr. Anderson putting my .50 cents in his pocket, I loaded my one steel rod and my two bamboo rods and gear into my favorite boat, a leaky slug named, "Molly," untied it from the dock and headed out toward Dynamite Cut. I recall a beautiful, cloudless July afternoon as only a Michigan summer can provide on the great lakes and I was anticipating some outstanding fishing. One didn't really have to travel far to start catching fish and even the dock area at the landing held loads of little perch and bullheads. However, this angler wanted some sizeable ones to take home so I aimed for my favorite spot well out on the big cut.

For a kid of ten years, rowing a wooden, water soaked boat down a narrow channel could be a bit difficult, but this sportsman didn't think about the effort. A hot sun, not too many deer flies, and acres of lily pads and shaded lagoons filled with lunker fish waiting for his night crawler were the only thing concerning this kid. It was an adventure that no modern television or computer game could ever equal.

*To be continued.*

Next: The Storm

### Microwaved Fish (Lake Trout, Walleye, Whitefish, etc.)

Scorned and laughed at, this recipe produces excellent results and it's really simple.

- Place one Lake Trout fillet (skin removed) on a plate.
- Liberally coat the fillet with butter-flavored cooking spray or I can't believe it's not butter.
- Shake minced dried onion bit over the fish and over the pooled imitation butter.
- Now shake some Chicken Seasoning over the entire preparation. Don't use too much cause it's rather salty.
- Cover the plate with one microwave cooking cover and place in the micro.
- Cook on high for seven minutes if you have a cool micro, something like 900 to 1000 watts. Cook for five and a half minutes if you have a hotter micro, like 1100 to 1300 watts.
- When done, use a hot pad to remove plate set it aside for a five minute cooling.
- No mess, no smells, no grease and only one cooking plate to wash up. TRY IT.

**Pigeon Historical Society Meetings are the  
Second Monday of the month, starting at 6:30 p.m. sharp  
at the Woelke Building. Everyone welcome to attend.**

#### **Museum Hours**

**Thursday and Fridays 10:00 am – 3:00 pm**

**Saturdays 10:00 am – 1:00 pm**

#### **Woelke Historical Research Center**

**Thursday and Friday 10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

**Saturdays 10:00 am – 1:00 pm**

**Both facilities open with an appointment by calling  
Clayton Esch at 989-453-2143 or 989-550-2000**