

*"If Only The Walls Could Talk"*

## "The Coffee Shop"

By Denny Esch,  
Historical Society President

The year is January 1, 1963. A cup of coffee and a fried cake was 10 cents each while a slice of raspberry glazed pie topped with real whipped cream was just 75 cents. Visitors in Pigeon would be drawn in with the aroma of homemade pies, soup warming and the smell of fresh coffee and donuts.

After working for Pat Crabtree at Lori Ann Bakery and Coffee Shop for several years, Elsie Trowbridge saw an opportunity, purchased the business and changed the name to "The Coffee Shop."

I remember the shop well as it was next door to "Freda's Beauty Salon," owned by my mother. (That will be another story some day).

The coffee shop as well as a couple other businesses were located where Independent Bank stands today.

Fresh sandwiches such as egg salad, tuna salad, ground bologna or baked ham was always served on freshly baked bread along with a cup of hot coffee. In addition to the sandwiches, chicken noodle, beef noodle and chili were available during the winter months.

While home cooked food made "Elsie's" (as I remember it being called) a place for a quick lunch, it was the pies that people remember the most.

Starting with the lard crust and different fillings, many of the pies were still warm when the customers would start to come in. Business people would rearrange their day for a piece of pie as they knew they would not last very long as word spread what kind of pies were featured that day.

I can still see the horseshoe counter with 12 stools where customers could sit and enjoy home-style food prepared fresh daily.

"Watch the shop for a minute as I run down to Schumacher's (Meat Market)", Elsie would say to one of the customers, as she ran to pick up hamburger -- another favorite menu item.

She took pride in buying her food at all the local stores like Erla's, Niebels and A & P Store.

It was December 15, 1984 when "The Coffee Shop" closed as the building was sold to make room for a new "Mutual Savings and Loan" in downtown Pigeon.

Perhaps that was the start of the "New Pigeon" look.

Four or five other businesses on that side of the tracks are gone - buildings and all.

As I spent an hour or so writing this, I have been thinking about the past... The warm apple pie with a scoop of ice cream my mom bought me with her tip money. And I recall all the conversations that went on in "The Coffee Shop."

I can't help but think... "If Only the Walls Could Talk."

### PIGEON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 523 • Pigeon, Michigan 48755 • 989-453-3242

Denny Esch, President • Clayton Esch, Vice President

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Regular Meetings: *Second Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.*

Board Meetings: *Fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.*

Meeting Location: *Woelke Historical Research Center.*

## The Church Summer Picnic

by E. Jane Leipprandt Scandary

The Pigeon Methodist Church Ladies Aid picnic was one of the highlights of the summer when we were kids. Grandma was a steward and solid member of the Ladies Aid holding one office or another each year to ensure that the organization would continue to prosper and function along the lines for which she thought it was intended.

As best as I could gather, the major goal of this tight and tenacious group centered on the abolishment of "demon drinks and tobacco," the continuous gathering of clothing and household supplies for the missionary barrels, and keeping the supply of handmade quilts within the community at a constant high.

As I recall, the means by which all these goods were accomplished was through the monthly quilting meetings that were held at various members homes on a rotation basis. These meetings were all-day affairs with each member bringing all the gossip fit to share as well as that which was not.

On the day of the meeting the men in the household found work or activities designed to keep them out of

the house. Away from the home was even better! Young children were either in school, ushered to a neighbor to play or as a last resort, allowed to be present but with the understanding that they were to be seen and not heard.

In celebration of the completion of all these good works a picnic was held during midsummer for all Ladies Aid members and their families.

This picnic was the event of the year and no fly-by-night affair. The planning and logistical arrangements that went into this could be compared to those of a military campaign.

The telephone lines would be busy for weeks between the town and country members getting everything lined up as to who was to bring what. Whose husband could be counted on to man the huge ice-cream freezer or handle the milk cans full of lemonade.

The picnic lasted all day which meant that transportation of ladies and their children along with the food had to be scheduled for an early morning pickup.

The men would later join their families for the evening meal.

Grandpa, being a businessman  
See PICNIC, on page 4

## People's Oil & Gas Co.

*Story edited from the Pigeon Centennial Book*

In 1921, People's Oil & Gas Company was organized and received its charter with 200 people buying stock totaling \$40,000. Henry Clabuesch was president, Dr. Wurm, secretary, and George Dunn appointed first manager of the gas and oil business.

After the Pigeon station was going strong, two more stations were built in Elkton and Owendale. Two more locations quickly followed eventually serving eight thumb communities with service, fuel and accessories.

Following George Dunn's tenure as manager, five other men - Guy Townsend, Russ Turner, Harry Haist, Jack Oesch and Roy Lawrence - before Ron and Bud took over the business in 1973.

In July 1953, People's Oil & Gas Co. began erecting an addition to the west of the building on a lot used by Koch's Used Car Sales. Six months later, upon completion, open house was held on January 29, 1954. The addition of offices served well until the business expanded by merging with Thumb Oil & Gas under the leadership of Bud and Ron McCormick.

In November 1974, a warehouse with offices was built across the street from the original station.

Demolition was part of the renovation process in June of 1986 to expand the station. Future changes at the business would include a convenience store

See PEOPLE'S, on page 2

*The Passenger Pigeon once flew in Michigan skies in flocks so large they blocked out the sun for hours. Even though this event didn't happen in the Village of Pigeon, our village name did come from this then famous bird.*

## Slaughter of Pigeon's Namesake

As explorers and settlers came to the Thumb of Michigan via Lake Huron shoreline, many followed the Pigeon River inland for several miles. The river had been named several decades earlier by surveyors who completed the unfinished work of surveying Huron County left by General George Meade, when he was called to military service in the Mexican War in 1846.

Wild pigeons, or passenger pigeons, were so numerous along the banks of the river where they came to feed and nest, that the river was appropriately named the Pigeon River.

At the same time lumbermen were destroying Michigan's vast white pine forests, hunters and fishermen wantonly slaughtered much of the state's wildlife.

In 1880, commercial hunters shipped the meat of more than 100,000 Michigan deer to national markets. Some fisherman used dynamite in inland lakes and in 1871, one party fishing along the AuSable River caught so many grayling that they left more than two thousand on the shore to rot.

Bird hunters, many using a punt gun, a small cannon on a pole that fired a half pound of ball shot at a time, killed so many quail, grouse and prairie chicken that by 1865 those birds had completely disappeared in many southern Michigan areas.

The Passenger Pigeon, also once flew in Michigan skies in flocks so large they blocked out the sun for hours.

Many years earlier, ornithologist John James Audubon witnessed a flight that darkened the sky like an eclipse for three successive days. He estimated that an average-size flock, which took three hours to pass overhead, contained more than one billion pigeons.

The beautiful bird arrived in Michigan in March and remained until early autumn. During that time, professional hunters systematically attacked the pigeon's nesting places, killed the birds, salted them and sold them for \$2 apiece to Chicago and New York restaurant buyers.

In 1874, one nesting colony in Michigan, professional hunters killed 25,000 pigeons a day for 28 straight days.

But the most devastating murder of the birds occurred in Petoskey from March through June, 1878. During that time, professional hunters, using poles, guns, axes, nets and fire, slaughtered more than 1,000,000 passenger pigeons.

The systematic massacres continued until the last wild passenger pigeon, it is believed, was shot in Pike County, Ohio on March 24, 1900. By that time, everyone realized that the beautiful passenger pigeon had all but disappeared from the earth.

Martha, the last bird of the passenger pigeon species, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914.

*Exerpts from "Murder, Michigan" by Gary w. Barfknecht, ©1983; and Pigeon Centennial Book, ©2003*



PEOPLE'S, from page 1

and Laundromat. The George Dunn house would be purchased and moved by Lowell Kraft to a site on Berne Street, and turned into apartments.

The name People's Choice Market was added to the Company/Business upon completion in December of 1986 of the updating project. In addition to Shell gasoline and products, customers would now be able to wash their clothes in a new Laundromat and purchase groceries in the convenience store. The grand opening for this addition was held the weekend of December 23, 1986.

In November of 1997, the brothers again expanded the Pigeon location, opened a new "Taco Bell Express." This was another venture into offering convenience food to our small community.

On August 29, 1998, the McCormick Brothers sold People's Oil and Gas Company, Shell gas stations and convenience stores in Pigeon and other locations around the Thumb to Forward Corporation of Standish.

Ronald McCormick retired after the sale while Bud stayed with the company until his retirement from the petroleum business in 2000.

People's Oil & Gas had many faithful employees through the years. Eileen Sturm, worked as bookkeeper for 40 plus years. Jessie Otto, Agnes Moran and Jim Dubey, to name a few.

Forward Corporation continues to serve the area today.

## Huron County Historical Open House Weekend

Saturday & Sunday, September 26 & 27 • 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

*Stop by the Pigeon Historical Depot Museum and see our new displays!*

### *From the Artifact Collection Washing Machine*

Horton Company was patented in 1905. Before that time other man had tried revolutionizing the every Monday task of washing the clothes.

In 1858, Hamilton Smith patented the rotary washing machine. These kind of machines were powered by electric motors and gasoline engines.

Consistently, people tried to create machinery that would make daily chores less taxing and strenuous for women.

Many upheld the slogan, "save women's' lives!"



## WANTED: Pictures of the Past!

Many of us have photo albums (or perhaps old shoe boxes) filled with old pictures of Pigeon rich history.

The Pigeon Historical Society is particularly interested in pictures highlighting the businesses which have come and gone.

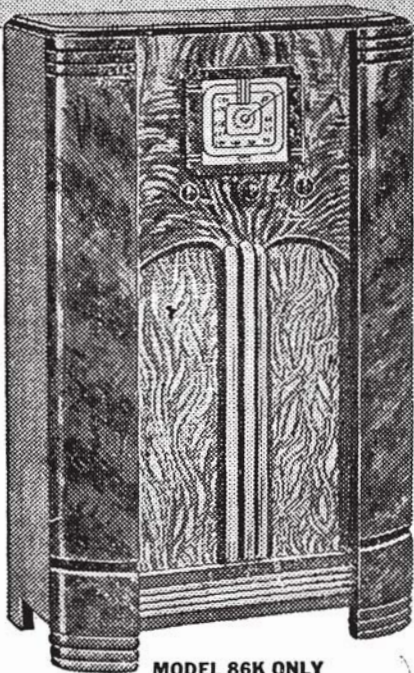
Contact us if you have pics to share. We can scan them and return the originals.

## Times Have Changed

Originally Published December 24, 1937 • Pigeon Progress



**Say Merry Christmas**  
WITH THIS 1938  
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EXTRA FEATURE Model 86K



### Extra Value Features!

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## Clabuesch Electric

Pigeon

**SELLING FAST—ORDER NOW—Big Trade-in Allowance!**

# A Mysterious Bit of Pigeon's Unknown History

A short February 17, 1899 news item appeared in Pigeon's local newspaper, *The Pigeon Progress*. It read:

John McLean will build a two-story brick building that will join the Heasty Block on the north. The upper rooms will be used as sleeping rooms for the Hotel. Work will be commenced on the foundation as soon as the ground will permit. John informs us that the job will be rushed from start to finish.

Later, another story stated: John moves into his new store on June 23, 1899 which will become the Gamble Store. Work on the Hotel Heasty bedrooms over John McLean's store is being pushed this week.

On August 4, 1899, the newspaper noted that "the bedrooms were build and electric light fixtures were in these rooms!" What forward thinking by McLean as electricity

didn't arrive in Pigeon until 1914. A little known fact about the "Gamble Building is that there was a third story bank of rooms used by the Hotel Heasty for sleeping. The door between the Hotel and McLean building was at the very front of what would have been the third floor, but is now bricked up. These rooms are like a time capsule still containing ceiling light fixtures, carpeting, wallpaper and a lead glass angling side wall that goes to the roofline looking south which can only be seen from the former Polewach building.

When this building was owned by Dryden and Joann Haist, they discovered the story of the third floor mystery rooms to be true.

*Information for this story was gathered by research of Joann Haist as well as stories told to her personally and recorded in the Pigeon Centennial Book.*

## Winsor Township Beginnings

Huron County's Winsor Township was officially organized in 1880 and was originally part of western neighbor, Fair Haven Township. Winsor Township was named to honor an early settler and writer in Huron County named Richard Winsor.

Mr. John Linson was the first supervisor of this township having come to this area as a member of the famous Ora Labora Colony. He was a tanner of hides by trade.

Early settlers in Winsor Township were the Hysers, Warrens, Froebes, Jacobs, Moellers, Korns, Nitzs, Muenteners, Hoffmans, Draher, Wassermans, Dietzels, Roedels, Auchintz, Wilfongs, Newmans, Harders, Notters, Winters, and Murdochs; just to name a few.

Settlements in Winsor Township include Berne, Kilmanagh, Linkville and Pigeon with all but Pigeon sharing their boundaries with another township.

## Become A Member!

An individual or business can become a member by contracting any active member or by sending your tax deductible cash or check to Pigeon Historical Society, 59 S. Main St. / P. O. Box 523, Pigeon, MI 48755. Dues are renewed at the annual meeting each year.

Individual Membership: \$10.00 (active member with voting privileges)  
Life Membership: \$120.00 (active voting member with lifetime privileges)  
Supporting Membership: \$15.00 (nonactive supporting member)  
Business Membership: \$20.00 or more (contributing member nonvoting)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

*Everyone is welcome. Be our guest, become a member!*

## PICNIC, from page 1

didn't have cows to milk or fields that needed attention so he was considered fair game to serve as general chauffeur and a go-fer for the day.

Grandma would be up with the birds and by breakfast time, the kitchen would be filled with the smell of fresh baked rolls, cake, pie, fried chicken and spices.

Grandma was a fantastic cook but in return the kitchen would look like a disaster after a hurricane and much help was needed to clean up after her culinary creations.

But by ten a.m. all the dishes and pans of food were wrapped in waxed paper and newspaper and carefully stashed in the family car (an upright 1932 black Studebaker that had tremendous dignity but little speed).

The privileged grandchildren were lined up for last minute inspection and instructions as to expected behavior.

Grandma changed into one of her summer voile dresses while Grandpa was behind the wheel chomping at the bit to get "this circus" on the road.

It was a long eight mile drive to the Caseville County Park on the sandy shores of Saginaw Bay, which was the chosen site for the annual event.

Once there, the usual procedure of the day was to help Grandma find a suitable shady spot for the family members as they came and went throughout the day.

Next was the unloading of the food, locate the lemonade cans, check to see what other kids from Sunday School were around and then plead exhaustion and beg to be allowed to go down to the beach to swim and cool off.

Once Gram was settled on a bench close enough to chat with the other ladies and supplied with a fan to swish away the flies from the food (and create a bit of a breeze for herself) we were free to go with some "responsible older boy or girl" down to the bathhouse and beach.

There we would hastily shed our clothes and gallop into the water not to leave until some desperate adult screamed dire threats of mayhem if we did not "Get otta that water and get up to your Grandma if you ever want to come again!!"

The menu never changed from year to year. The tables groaned with cole slaw, potato salad, fried and baked chicken, home-cured hams, baked beans, melting Jello, pickles and relishes, sliced tomatoes, wilted lettuce salads, breads, rolls, cakes, and pies of every description.

Coffee was made in enamel coffee pots and fresh lemonade was made repeatedly throughout the day. One of the chores of the kids was the hauling of water from one of the numerous hand pumps that were scattered around the park, to make the coffee and lemonade.

The big treat of the day was the homemade ice cream for the evening meal when all the menfolk had arrived.

This marvel was made on the spot with ingredients brought by the ladies from the home.

Fresh cream from the morning milking, fresh

eggs, sugar and vanilla all mixed together and poured into the metal container which was then surrounded by crushed ice (from the nearby ice house) and salt.

Cranking the churn to make the ice cream was the job of the older boys and some of the men who had arrived early.

There was no swimming or horsing around among the kids when the ice cream making was in progress.

You had to BE THERE if you wanted to get

your dishful or have a chance at licking the paddles.

It was always tired and water logged grandchildren that climbed into the Studebaker for the trip home.

The dirty dishes rattled together in the truck of the car and the bathing suits swung damply from outside car door handles as the car lumbered down the gravel roads back to Pigeon.

Usually Grandpa was the only one awake by the time the car turned into the driveway of home.

### *Grandma's Potato Salad*

- 6 Large potatoes boiled, skinned and sliced while still warm
- 1 Cucumber, peeled and diced
- 1 Small onion, peeled, quartered and sliced
- 2 Stalks celery, finely sliced
- 6 Hard-boiled eggs, shells removed

#### *Dressing*

- 1 cup Kraft Miracle Whip salad dressing
  - 1 tsp prepared mustard (French's)
  - 2-3 Tbsp. sugar
  - ½ cup milk (more, if dressing is too thick)
  - 1 tsp salt
- Beat altogether until smooth and fairly thick in consistency.*

### *E. Jane Leipprandt Scandary*

*Gently stir dressing into warm potato mixture until well coated. Add salt to taste. Slice and add five hard boil eggs to the potato mixture. Stir gently. Cover and let set in the refrigerator until near time for use. Remove from refrigerator and check to see if salad needs more moisture. If so, mix and add more dressing as outlined above. Slice remaining egg and place slices on top of salad and top lightly with paprika.*

## *A kid growing up on Saginaw Bay*

# The Winter Wind Shifts

*Part 6 in a series, by Jim Leinbach*

This particular Saturday found the sixteen-year-old on the ice about a quarter mile out from the north shore of Sand Point. His heavy, wooden ice shanty had been maneuvered into place, his fishing hole spudded, and now inside the shanty a fire was sparking in the tin heater. The effort of getting to this particular spot had been worth it. The interior of the shanty was dark, cozy and warming quickly. At his feet the water in the fishing hole was crystal clear and appeared to be like a turquoise television screen tuned to one channel. The kid could see schools of minnows and large perch gliding over the sandy bottom several feet down. With his tiny Russian hook baited with a golden rod grub and lowered toward his prey it was almost immediate that a large, yellow perch would snatch it up and make its escape attempt.

This action was repeated over

and over again in the course of the afternoon, and soon a growing pile of large, frozen perch was heaped outside the shanty door. The wind buffeted and blasted at the shanty and despite all the action inside and the crackling fire the kid was surprised at how noisy it had become. The blowing snow hissed against the wooden walls and at one point the kid was startled when the shanty actually moved a bit on a particularly harsh blast of wind. Adding to this was that the door to the shanty had become difficult to open against these blasts and he understood that the wind had shifted to the northeast and had increased in velocity. Fewer and fewer fish were appearing in the hole and the meagre sunlight had been obliterated. Once when the kid shouldered the door open to toss out a fish he was met with a stinging, freezing rain that caught him off guard and he noticed that the mountain and shoreline were barely visible. A slight apprehen-

sion stirred in his mind and he briefly considered quitting and going home with his ample catch but decided that he would wait until the rain stopped or he'd be soaked on his return trip.

Another hour or two passed and darkness came early on this stormy, winter evening. The freezing rain had increased in intensity on what the boy realized was a tremendous northeast gale and the ice mountain directly behind him was invisible. The boy gathered his gear from inside the shanty, forced the door open and stepped out onto the ice which had become almost grease-like on its surface. It took several minutes to locate his sled, break it loose from its ice covering, load up his fish and gear and contemplate what direction he should head. The ice mountain had been just to the left of his shanty and the pressure crack only feet in front of it, but where exactly?

Next: A Wrong Decision

**THE PURPOSE OF THIS SOCIETY shall be to discover, collect and preserve any material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the Pigeon Community and surrounding region, as well as provide accessibility to the collected material for all who wish to examine or study it. The Society will also disseminate historical information to promote interest in the history of the Pigeon Community.**