

# RECORDER

## *“If Only The Walls Could Talk”*

### **“First Village Election – December 1st, 1902”**

By Denny Esch  
Historical Society President

Anyone who knows a little about the history of Pigeon, would also know the town was first referred to as “Berne Junction.” No history is written as to why that name didn’t stick. Perhaps it was the early 1890 “politics” of the growing town that helped make the name change to Pigeon, after the nearby river.

As the town continued to grow it became apparent that it needed to incorporate as a village. By August and September of 1902, petitions requesting incorporation were being circulated and sent to the County Supervisors.

At the same time, petitions were also being circulated to change the name of the town. Some contend that “Pigeon” did not bring to mind a place of dignity and prosperity. One businessman said, “What kind of name is that, the name of a bird?” A popular suggestion was “Winsor City” after the Township name. Many of the businessmen seemed to think that it would promote better recognition to the village. However that petition lost out and in October of 1902 the petition request for the incorporation of the Village of Pigeon was granted by the Board of Supervisors and the first election was to be held December 1st, 1902. Ernest Paul, Alphonso A. Pruner, Edmund Bundscho and George H. A. Shaw were selected as inspectors of the first election.”

If we could only go back in time and set

in on the first village council meeting. I can see Village President Joe Schluchter call the meeting to order and open with the Pledge of Allegiance, Village Clerk E.W.E. Bundscho doing roll call, Louis Staubus, J.W. Leipprandt, A.G. Kaumeyer, Albert Hartley, H.H. Gould and Harry Hirshberg all present. The business of a new incorporated village began.

A declaration was published in the Pigeon Progress December 5th, 1902 issue to the citizens of the newly incorporated town: “Now that we are incorporated and the officers of the village elected, let every citizen do everything in his power to help the advancement of our town. Let every citizen stand by our village officers.”

The council must have the support of the citizens in order to accomplish the purpose the incorporation was intended for. On the part of the council, they should always bear in mind that they are servants of the people and should always



*We can imagine the men of early Pigeon, discussing politics while having lunch at the Arlington Hotel. This is an early image from the 1890s. Later the Hotel Hasteley proved to be the most popular hotel in the area.*

work for the interest of the people.”

Oh what a first Pigeon Village Council meeting that must have been.

“If only the walls could talk”

## **Politics In Pigeon - A Tradition**

Pigeon residents were at one time probably more politically oriented than they are today. “Many of them came from oppressive regimes and thoroughly enjoyed new privileges, freedom and opportunities to participate in the affairs of government when they settled in this area. At the time of the vote for incorporation of the village, there were 107 registered voters among the 510 residents of Pigeon. All but five voted in that referendum. Considering that women could not vote and there were large families of children under the voting age of 21, it can be assumed that almost all of the male residents were registered.

Most of the voters in Pigeon at that time were Republican. All of those sent to the legislature in Lansing from here belonged to that party. John J. Murdoch represented the area as member of the House of Representative from 1899 to 1903. George Dunn spent eight years in the House; 1952-1960. The Senator for our district, Alvin J. DeGrow of Pigeon, finished the term of retiring Senator Beadle in 1968. He was reelected for three additional four-year terms, retiring in 1982.

Governor Fred M. Warner was not a native of this region but owned a large tract of farm land nearby. He owned and operated a creamery in Pigeon for many years and was very active in village life. He was considered a son of the community.

Although a staunch Democrat, John J. Campbell, a most respected community leader, was often elected to various posts by a large majority of Republicans as well as Democrats.

Still, the majority of Pigeon voters are Republican, but the margin of separation is growing smaller. Democrats frequently win seats on the Village Council.

Early rumblings of the issue of prohibition were heard in Huron County before a vote was taken on April 5, 1909 to decide whether the county went “dry” or remained “wet”. A decided majority of Winsor Township voters went to the polls that day. Of the 433 votes cast, 258 voted “wet”. Understandably, Sebewaing, with a brewery in the town, voted wet by a larger margin

**PIGEON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
P.O. Box 523 • Pigeon, Michigan 48755  
**989-453-3242**

Denny Esch, President  
Ardra Schaaf, Vice President  
Duane Wurst, Secretary  
David Eichler, Treasurer

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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**

Woecke Historical Research Center.

**Help!** The historical Society must replace the furnace in the Arthur Woecke Research building before winter. We have money in our coffers, but not enough. In the future we also must install heat in the Depot Museum and complete many maintenance projects that have been put off for too long. If you can, please make a donation today! Call **989-453-3242** today.

# The Search For My Grandfathers

By Duane Wurst

I have always been interested in my family history, but the information available was sketchy. My mother shared her family history as best she could, but Dad never talked about his past. I knew that my Great Grandfather was buried in Sebewaing, and he served in the civil war, but that was it.

Then I joined the Pigeon Historical Society and became familiar with the wealth of information in the Arthur Woelke Research building. WOW! I found Grandfather's write-up in several files. There was information available that was new to me.

"George Friederick Wurst was born July 14, 1823 in Stuggart Germany and died December 28, 1905 in Fairhaven Township, Huron County, Michigan. He arrived at the Lutheran Mission in Sebewaing in the spring of 1858. He was a friend of Julius Tietz. When Julius heard that his sister's husband had been killed in a logging accident in Germany, leaving her with two children and just when they were planning to go to America, he asked Friederick if he would consider marrying her. They called that a Mail Order Bride. So when Friedericke, Thersia, Maria Dorothea Titz came to America they were married a year later. He was drafted and joined the 15th Michigan regiment in Arkansas Tennessee in 1864."

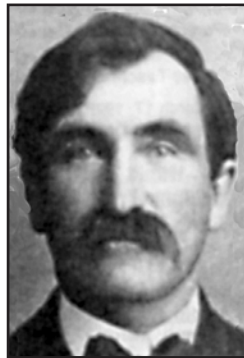
I needed to know more. Where did he live? Putting together the history took time and effort. I could have used an online program to do the searches, and I still may, but for this effort I used the Pigeon Historical Research building and the internet. I found a great deal on a free web site called [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). There I found the names of Great Grandfather's children; all girls except my Grandfather, George Frederick Wurst. Grandpa died in 1949. Dad and Grandpa lived in Berne with my Aunt Amanda. They were the youngest of the family, but the only two to stay with Grandfather.

When my Grandmother, Friedericke Bergman Wurst, died in 1916, Grandfather's children were taken from him to live with relatives and neighbors. He kidnapped his daughter Amanda and his young son, Adolph, and with his sister's help, raised them in Berne.

But the question of where Great Grandfather Wurst



George Friederick Wurst  
7/14/1823 - 12/28/1905



George Frederick Wurst  
11/23/1867 - 11/7, 1949



Adolph Frederick Wurst  
3/9/1915 - 10/15/1981

lived in Sebewaing still eluded me. I knew had a 140 acre homestead in 1858 and built a log cabin on it. The 1860 census reported that Great Grandfather and Grandmother Wurst, along with eight others, were living in his one room log cabin. Imagine, ten people in a small cabin.

Using the Arthur Woelke Research material, I found the 1890 Huron County plat map. I searched every property around Sebewaing, nothing. I searched in Fairhaven township, nothing. Finally I found that in Winsor township, Great Grandfather lived less than a quarter mile from downtown Kilmanagh. The 1904 plat map showed that, at the end of their lives, he and Great Grandmother were living two miles from Kilmanagh. Wow! My family is from Kilmanagh.

Without the facilities made available by the Pigeon Historical Society I may have never found Great Grandfather. And if we don't preserve the information now available, will our ancestors be able to find and discover who we were?

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Two hunters had been out several hours when panic overtook, one. "We're lost. What shall we do?" "Keep your shirt on," said his friend. "Shoot an extra deer and the game warden will be here in a minute, and a half!"

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## Family Photos Part Of Community's Heritage

The Pigeon Historical Society has a large collection of historical postcards and photographs. Many of these images have been enlarged, and are on display in the Depot Museum and the Arthur J. Woelke Historical Research Center. We are always on the look-out for other pictures that are not in our collection. It is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, and we are in search of those images.

If you have family photographs which show something that you would consider of interest to the community, please contact a board member. We will be holding scanning events again this summer.

We are always looking for old photographs, negatives or slides. If you have any old boxes or albums of pictures, don't throw them away until we are given the opportunity to view them for potential inclusion into our collection.

Call the museum at: 989-453-3242, Duane Wurst at 989-545-5240, or any board member for more information.





# Finding Our History In Huron County Cemeteries

By Arthur J. Woelke

All people who find interest in a given historical event, person, or place are aware, perhaps unconsciously, that they're focusing on the dead. History is for the living, of course, but in order to have history, those in the past who were alive had to record their existence and experiences either by writing, pictures, or words. Life teaches us that we're here for the shortest of time and then we too will be ...."history."

Most of us have faith that our souls will be preserved in heaven. However, our earthly bodies have to go somewhere as well. Some folks desire to be cremated and others interred in a formal setting. Thus, the concept of group burial or cemeteries was conceived. For many years churches have provided a resting place for their members, often right on church property. For others not affiliated with a church or out of family desire were buried in a township or county cemetery. Still others may have been buried on family-owned land.

Many of us request a cemetery burial continuing the tradition of formal internment, and our county hosts a total of seventy-nine state registered cemeteries. A list of these locations is found below. It's not a complete list and certainly not every, single death has been accurately recorded in them especially those who are buried on family farms or whose bodies have been lost. However, we living have some degree of responsibility to preserve in our minds the places where

the people we have known or those we never knew have been laid to rest.

Assembly of God Church - Sebawaing, Bingham Township Lutheran - Ubyly, Blessed Virgin Mary - Ubyly, Caseville Township - Caseville, Chandler Township - Elkton, Colfax - Bad Axe, Cross Lutheran - Pigeon, Fairhaven Township (new bay port cemetery) - Bay Port, First Methodist Memorial - Pigeon, Forest Bay - Harbor Beach, Gore Township - Port Hope, Grand Lawn-Pigeon, Grant Township - Gagetown, Holy Family - Sebawaing, Holy Trinity German Catholic (Most Holy Trinity) - Ubyly, Hubbard Memorial - Huron City, Immanuel Lutheran (Zion Lutheran) - Huron City, Immanuel Lutheran - Sebawaing, Iselar (Zion - Saint Peter's Lutheran) Huron County, Lake View- Port Hope, Linkville (Saint Paul Lutheran) - Linkville, Ludington - Harbor Beach, Lutheran (Bingham Township Lutheran) - Ubyly, Marquardt Port Hope, McKay - Elkton, McTaggart - Sheridan Township, Memorail-Sebawaing, Memorial Park - Sebawaing, Michigan Avenue Mennonite - Pigeon, New River - PortAustin, New Salem - Sebawaing, Northlawn - Sebawaing, Old Bay Port - Bay Port, Old Saint John Lutheran - Sebawaing, Old Saint John's - Ubyly, Oliver Township - Elkton, Our Lady Of Lake Huron - Harbor Beach, Pigeon River Mennonite - Pigeon, Port Austin Township - Port Austin, Port Crescent - Port Crescent, Port Hope - Port Hope, Riverside - Elkton, Rock Falls - Harbor Beach, Sacred Heart - Bad Axe, Saint An-

thony - Harbor Beach, Saint Columbkille - Ubyly, Saint Edward's - Kinde, Saint Felix - Pinnebog, Saint Francis Borgia - Pigeon, Saint John The Evangelist (Saint John The Evangelist Church) - Ubyly, Saint John's Lutheran - Sebawaing, Saint John's Lutheran - Pigeon, Saint Joseph - Rapson, Saint Mary's Catholic - Parisville, Saint Mary's Catholic - Kinde, Saint Mary's of Czestochowa - Kinde, Saint Michael - Port Austin, Saint Paul Lutheran - Linkville, Saint Peters - Kinde, Saint Roch - Caseville, Saints Peter and Paul-Ruth, Sebawaing Assembly of God (Silverlawn) - Sebawaing, Smith's Corners - Ubyly, Soultown (McKay) - Elkton, Tyre - Huron City, Valley - Ubyly, Verona Township - Verona, Warren Family Plot - Port Crescent, White Rock - Huron City, Williamson (Grant Township) Gagetown, Zion (Zion - Saint Peter Lutheran) Huron County.

Visiting a grave site or attending an interment places one directly in the path of history. The people whose names are on the tombstones were once part of an active and productive existence. Some of the names on the tombstones are perhaps very familiar to us. Other names may not be but they too require a look and a thought as to what they once were in life. For some, a visit such as this may be uncomfortable and seem macabre. But be certain that life once was for those resting as it is for us now. While at the cemetery, take some time to reflect on these folks and, if you are able, respect what they were as living humans.

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## School Burnings: Planned or Coincidence?

From the Arthur J. Woelke Collection

During the latter part of 1932 and the early months of 1933 there was a concerted effort to consolidate the Kilmanagh, Snell, Ridge and Quarry schools into the Bay Port District.

About 3:30 O'clock Friday morning Mar. 3, 1933, the Pigeon Fire Department was called to a fire at the Snell School in Winsor Township. En-route to the school the firemen could see flames from a burning Winsor Township barn and the Ridge School in Fairhaven Township. Incidentally, this was the same day FDR's first term inauguration took place. About two weeks earlier the nearby Kilmanagh School burned to the ground and within a few weeks the Quarry School was discovered to be

on fire but the blaze was extinguished by neighbors before much damage was done. The State Fire Marshal was called by Sheriff John Graham to investigate. It was the Marshal's opinion that all of the fires were the work of arsonists.

The consolidation proposal was not widely accepted and many local residents thought that destroying the schools was an attempt to hurry consolidation. Each school district, however, found temporary quarters to finish the school year and in each district voters decided to rebuild rather than consolidate.

No arrests were ever made and the true cause of the fires is still a mystery but the question remains, were the burnings a coincidence or planned?

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## A Kid Growing Up On Saginaw Bay

### Rescue In The Rush Lake Quicksand

Part 10 in a series by Jim Leinbach

This beautiful Sunday found the boys paddling and poling their way west on the waters of Rush Lake under a warm summer sun. They knew the best spots for catching large bullheads and bass but so did some others who, in the distance, had anchored their own rowboats in that general area. On the north shore some kids were trying their luck fishing and occasionally the boys could see a cane pole being lifted with a wiggling bullhead or bluegill dangling from the end of their black line.

As they approached the "hole" as it was called, our featured youth spotted two boys at the far end of the lake trying to make their way through the rushes toward the south shore. He pointed these kids out to his crew in the boat and mentioned that this area had no defined path and those guys had better be

careful that they don't get stuck in the mud in there. If a fisherman left the north side sand bar on foot and ventured out along the edge of the lake they had better know where to step. The entire edge of Rush Lake other than the sand bar, the island, or the wooded north end had inherent dangers. It was notorious for having a marl bottom otherwise known as quicksand and trying to negotiate a trail around the lake was never recommended. It was rumored that in the past many a fishermen and duck hunter had never returned from an outing on Rush Lake. The crew reached the "hole" and tossed their cement block anchor overboard. The anchor's twenty-foot clothesline rope hung taut over the bow for this area was deep and bottomless but the cement block sort-of stabilized their drifting craft so over it went anyway.

See Quicksand - Page 4

# Winsor Township - "Citadel of Christianity"

Within the boundaries of Huron County's Winsor Township of thirty-six square miles there were fifteen Christian churches in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Seven denominations were represented among these churches. There were Baptist (1), Catholic (1), Evangelical (4), Lutheran (5), Mennonite-Amish (1), Methodist Episcopal and Presbyterian (1). Most of the congregations had origins earlier than 1900 but the highest number were between 1900 and 1910.

The earliest church in the township was the Evangelical Church in Kilmanagh which was organized in 1865. St. John's Lutheran Church in Kilmanagh followed in 1891.

Then came St. John's Lutheran Church of Berne in 1878; Evangelical Church, Windsor, 1889; Cross Lutheran Church, Pigeon, 1891; St. Francis Borgia Catholic Church, Pi-

geon, 1893; English Methodist Episcopal, Pigeon, 1894; St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Linkville, 1894; First Presbyterian Church, Pigeon, 1894; Evangelical Church Pigeon, 1899; German M.E. Church, Pigeon, 1899; Evangelical Church, Linkville, 1900; Free Will Baptist Church, Snell's Corner, 1900; Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pigeon, 1903 and The Pigeon River Mennonite Church, Pigeon, 1904.

The German Methodist Episcopal Church was first organized outside Winsor Township in 1874 and the Evangelical Church also outside the township, in 1891. St. John's Kilmanagh in 1876.

At their beginnings the congregations were small and first met in homes. Gradually frame churches were built and almost all of them were later replaced with brick buildings.

Many of the churches' members were of German descent and came through the eastern states or Canada. Most of the German Lutherans immi-

grated directly from Germany.

Less than three miles separated three of the Evangelical churches from a sister church in the southern part of the township.

As membership dropped and transportation became easier, six of the churches closed - nine survive.

Other nearby churches are Hayes Methodist episcopate 1910. Hayes Presbyterian Church, 1894, Mennonite Church, Berne, 1887, and the German M. E. Church, Candler, 1910.

From:  
The Arthur J. Woelke Collection.



The English M. E. Church and parsonage



The German M. E. Church and parsonage

## NOTICE!

All natives, citizens, denizens or subjects of the German Empire or of, the Imperial German government being males of the age of 14 years and up, who are within, the United States, and not actually neutralized as an American citizens, are required to register as alien enemies.

The time set for such registration is the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th days of February, 1918 inclusive, from 6 a.m. - 8 p.m. on each of said days The registrant must supply four unmounted photographs of himself, not larger than 3 x 3 inches in size on thin paper with a light background. Each photograph must be signed by the applicant across the face thereof so as not to obscure the features.

In non-urban areas where a registrant's place of residence is so located that he receives his mail from two post offices the registrant may elect which post office district he is to register in, but he must immediately notify the other post office of his selection. The registration shall in a city be deemed to be the police precinct or police district embraced within the local post office district.

Pigeon Progress  
February 1, 1918

## Quicksand from page 3

Lines and poles were rigged and right away fat, black and brown bullheads were being hoisted onboard. The boys wading through the rushes to the west were quickly forgotten.

An hour or two passed under the afternoon sun and the stringer of fish hanging off the side of the boat had become almost too heavy to hoist up. The guys were having a marvelous time and were looking forward to building a fire and pan frying the sweet flesh of the freshly caught bullheads. Suddenly, off in the distance, the happy, excited yelling of children was replaced with a sound that had a much more menacing tone. The boys looked up toward this change in sound and witnessed a group of adults running west and south through the rushes hollering loudly. A couple of rowboats began heading in the direction of the noise and the boys, at first startled and bewildered by this eruption, quickly determined that something had gone terribly wrong on shore. Not wanting to miss out on what was developing, the boys sprang into action. Quickly the anchor was pulled onboard along with the fish stringer. The makeshift paddles and poles were snatched up and, like Olympians, the kids began propelling themselves toward the mayhem.

Approaching the western edge of the lake they witnessed grown men thrashing and splashing wildly through the cattails heading toward something the kids in the boat couldn't yet discern. Tragically, some of the running men were already bogged down by the quicksand and were clawing frantically at the weeds and cattails trying to free themselves and resume the chase. The women following behind them were yelling and floundering about similar to the men. In seconds the entire shoreline had exploded into chaos and the young crew was determined to find out what was going on.

In the distance the boys heard a sound that rose above the bellowing of the adults. The noise resembled a baby fawn in distress; a squealing, bawling sound that rose up and down on the breeze. The boys commented that the adults wouldn't be running through the marsh toward a trapped fawn or some other animal, that wouldn't happen. Then, almost simultaneously, they remembered the two kids they saw earlier trying to break through the rushes

heading south with their fishing poles. At once it became clear to them what had happened. Those two kids had gotten stuck in the quicksand and were now in very serious trouble. Our boys knew that normal quicksand usually does not fully consume a human so that he or she drowns. But here, in this area, the "quicksand" is much finer and has no stable capabilities. It's a marl quicksand with virtually no measurable bottom until one's body hit bedrock. Centuries of roots and brush tangles filled the edge of the lake and our crew knew that if you became trapped in the muck and/or snagged in the roots in this spot, your chances of survival were definitely slim.

The crew paddled mightily in the direction of the crying sound. If a person who was stuck could still scream out then they knew that the victim's head was still above the surface and expedience getting to that sound was their main goal. Adding to the possibility of someone yet unseen being stuck were the three or more adults and two of the women who had succumbed to the muck and roots in their effort to rescue the kids. They too had become victims of the lake's treachery and abruptly the crew had to turn their attention to them. The guys knew that if these people were to survive then they had to be assisted immediately before any other rescue attempts could be made. Chaos was turning into horror and the boys dug their paddles deep and drove hard toward the floundering adults.

*Next: Death and salvation*

## We'd love to see you on our Team!

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 rights)

**Life Membership:** \$120.00 (active voting member with lifetime privileges)

**Supporting Membership:** \$15.00 (non-active supporting member)

**Business Membership:** \$20.00 or more (contributing member non-voting)

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**Everyone is welcome to attend our meetings. Be our guest and become a member!**