

## *"If Only The Walls Could Talk"*

# Listen . . . I Can Hear Them Speaking Now



by Denny Esch  
Pigeon Historical Society President

I love reading about the history of Pigeon, its variety of businesses over the years and about the people who made a positive impact in this village and the surrounding area. Often I stop at the Woelke Center to look up some historical fact I have been wondering about and soon I find myself digging into old newspapers, "Woelke" books or just looking at old pictures. The next thing I know two, three or four hours have passed by. But that is not a bad thing . . . Sometime I start daydreaming and think about the daily trains that would

come and go. Families moving to the area, the dirt streets and wood sidewalks, the town filled with people shopping the general stores, the mercantile, the grain elevator and more. As I'm turning the pages in a book I see a picture of the old "PollyAnn" setting on the track by the depot. As I continued to day-dream I turn "Old Ironsides" into a time machine waiting on the track. As the engine was fed, steam would continue to build . . . It was near time to go as I raced to board the old "PollyAnn" . . . to take a trip back into the early 1900's . . .

When one door closed – other doors open. After the closing of Lindas' Basket Case and through a generous donation, the Historical Society now has an opportunity to expand from a Depot Museum full of artifacts with another Museum of Local History. (Including a small gift shop with local and/or Michigan made items and gifts.) Some museums today are going high-tech to which the walls are starting to talk. Just think about walking into

our Depot Museum and looking to the south window and see the coal/wood fired Grand Truck Steam Engine 2116 passing by and the stations agent welcoming you to the depot. With today's technology, getting the the walls to speak and come alive is a reality. Having a photograph of Joseph Schluchter, first village president coming alive and speak or maybe George Black telling you about his store and the other find businesses in town. By taking our historical research collection of printed material and photos, then adding high-tech to it, this Museum of History will come alive and have that "WOW" effect to those who visit. The opportunities today are endless. We are developing a plan and with the help of grants and donations it will become a reality. The Historical Society purpose is to collect and preserve our history as well as provide accessibility to those who wish to study it,

Soon the walls will be talking . . .

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

Denny Esch, President  
Ardra Schaaf, Vice President  
Duane Wurst, Secretary  
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**Six Regular Meetings:**

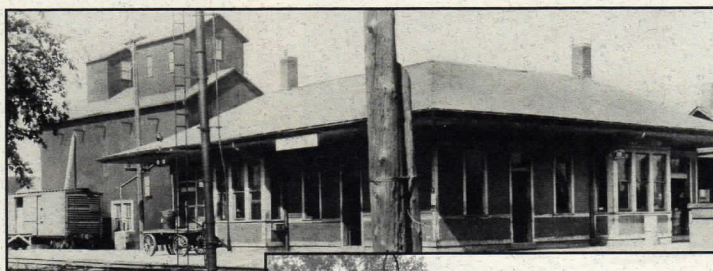
Jan. - Mar. - May - July - Sept. - Oct. - Nov.  
Second Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

**Board Meetings**

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

**Meeting Location**

Woelke Historical Research Center.



## ...Then

Pigeon Depot  
as it was in 1921.

## Now...

Pigeon Depot  
as it looks today.





# Coming Soon

## Main Street Museum and Gift Shop



The above photograph shows Pigeon's west side of Main Street. This image is from sometime in the 1940s. The enlarged section, to the right, shows the IGA Store and *City Quality Store* owned by F. Gascho. The Gascho building was last used by Linda Walsh and Linda Clabuesch for their *Linda's Basket* store. Through generous donations the building will soon be a new Pigeon Museum and a Museum Gift Shop.





Veronica "Fannie" (Jantzi) & Moses Gascho

Barbara Zehr Jantzi was born August 29, 1863 and died in 1963 in Pigeon, at the age of one hundred years, three months and twenty days. She had been married to Michael Jantzi of Canada. He was killed in 1901 in Canada when his garment caught in a shaft and wound him around it. He had just recently purchased the mill before the tragedy. He was buried on the 17th birthday of his eldest daughter Veronica Fannie. (She was the Fannie who came to Pigeon and owned the Gascho Children's Wear). His youngest child, Aaron, was only one year old at the time of his death.

Moses Gascho, whose mother's maiden name was Ramseyer, had worked with steam rollers in a knitting mill in Canada and Veronica Fannie Jantzi had worked at the same mill. She was a mender, which meant working with a special needle to catch runs in the knit garments.

"Fannie" Jantzi and Moses Gascho met and married in 1906. Fannie's Mother, Barbara Jantzi, Aaron, Moses, "Fannie" and children, Reuben, Lena and Samuel moved from Canada in December, 1911, to a farm east of Caseville.

The mud roads were laid with logs in some places for passability and the farm was only partially cleared of timber. This was disheartening to Moses Gascho, for as the Ramseys on his mother's side had pursued other types of trade, he, too, wished for some other line of work.

Two more children were born on this farm in Caseville; Marie in 1912 and Nancy in 1914. When Moses lived in his town in Canada, there had been no tracks or train coming through. Perhaps, just knowing of them from a distance, they held an extra fascination for him that gave him the desire to be a trainman. When he moved to Caseville, he had been offered a job on the night run, but the responsibility of young children at home made him refuse at the time. However, he did take a course in Steam Engineering from the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton, Pennsylvania. He also continued to farm. In January 1916, Moses received his Engineer's Certificate but in October of that same year, he passed away. Moses' set of engineering books were in the library of Meldrum Baerwolf of Pigeon.

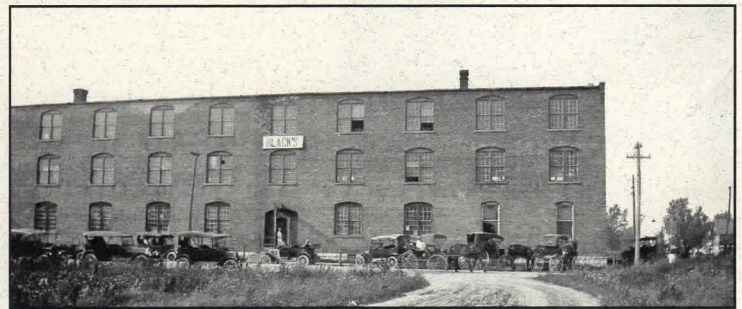
In October 1916, volunteers from the Pigeon River Menonite Church moved the widow and her five children from

## Strength and Courage

the farm to Pigeon. They rented the second floor of Levi Kreh's house and lived there for seven years.

Fannie earned a living for her five children in various ways. She sewed carpet rags at 5 cents a pound and often, she would sew into the wee hours of the morning by the light of a little lamp. (Marie and Nancy have this lamp in their possession and treasure it for the sacrifices their mother made for her children.) Their mother picked beans at home, so she could care for her family. She would drag the heavy bags up and down the stairs. She took in a border, helped clean the school and took in laundry which she scrubbed by hand on a wash board.

A better job was recommended to Fannie—that of working as a clerk in the George V. Black Department store. Nancy, who was three years old and Gerald Black, son of Mr. Black, the same age, often played together. One day they decided to see if they could hear the train coming by putting their cars on the railroad tracks. They were caught before the train came.



Black's General Store

Later, Fannie was promoted to office work and Mrs. Black taught her the essentials of bookkeeping. The wife of a manager at Black's, Mrs. Jay invited the widow and her five hungry children over for Thanksgiving dinner with turkey and all the trimmings. The aroma from that meal actually made the Gascho children ill. They were not used to that much food and Fannie had to take them home, much to the consternation of Mrs. Jay.

After Black's Department Store burned, Fannie worked at Fred Bruech's Grocery Store, about two doors north of the

Gem Theatre (present Library). When Black's reopened in Owendale, all the former clerks traveled there by train and later by car to work. That store also burned. After Mr. Black died, his wife started a dry-goods business in the back of Bruech's Grocery Store, where he also had furniture displayed. She hired Fannie again to work as clerk and buying companion. Later the stock was moved to the south door of the R. S. Wurm Chevrolet salesroom, where Robert Anderson formerly had a radio repair shop.



George Black (left) watches his store burn.

*Continued on page 4*



# The History Of Four Pigeon Women's Retail Store



**Marie Gascho**



**Nancy Gascho**

*Continued from page 1*

When Mrs. Black sold out, Fannie had the option of buying the business. So on October 9, 1929, Fannie Gascho owned the *City Quality Store*. She had nailed kegs with beards across them for her shelves. There was only one aisle and customers often lined up, single file, to the corner of the street by the traffic light. This was serious in inclement weather.

In 1930, depression time, Fannie borrowed money and bought land. Norman Schaaf contracted to build her new store across the street, and on June 16, 1931 it was ready for occupation. When she opened, merchandise was still in the packing crates so business had to be conducted by rummaging around in the boxes.

Fannie's daughters Marie and Nancy continued operating the store, concentrating on children's and women's clothing. The store thrived in Pigeon until the sisters decided to

retire in 1978. They found another woman who had the dream of operating her own retail store. Linda (Niebel) McGathy learned from her father, Leonard Niebel, who operated a grocery store for many years on the same block.

Linda McGathy purchased the building from the Gacho's and continued the store as *Little People's World*. The store was in operation from 1978 to 1983 when Linda rented the building to John Walsh for his accounting business. John worked from this building for fifteen years.

Linda Walsh - along with Linda Claubesch - opened their *Lindas' Basket Case* store and offered gifts and greeting cards until their retirement in 2018.

The Pigeon Historical Society intends to keep a gift shop in the building along with a community museum highlighting the history of our community and area pioneers and residents.

## Little People's World Opening

The newly-opened *Little People's World* store in Pigeon is having its Grand opening this weekend and owner Linda McGathy is shown (right) looking over some of the children's wear sizes through size 14, offered. Health-Tex and Buster Brown children's clothes are features, as are Mini-World dresses and other styles.

Gift items are being added to the former Gascho's Store, including jewelry and umbrellas.

*From Pigeon Progress Advance - May 25, 1978*



Linda McGathy and Linda Clabuesch opened *Lindas' Basket Case* (left) in 1998. The two women operated the store until 2018, when they decided to retire. The store will soon become a new museum and museum gift shop.





# 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 have a scanner in the Research Center and can scan photographs and negatives.

We are always looking for old photographs, negatives or slides, and old postcards like the one shown here. 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 or Steve Schulze can help scan your photographs, slides and negatives. Before you throw away grandma's photo album, let us see it. There may be an unknown treasure lurking behind those family images.**

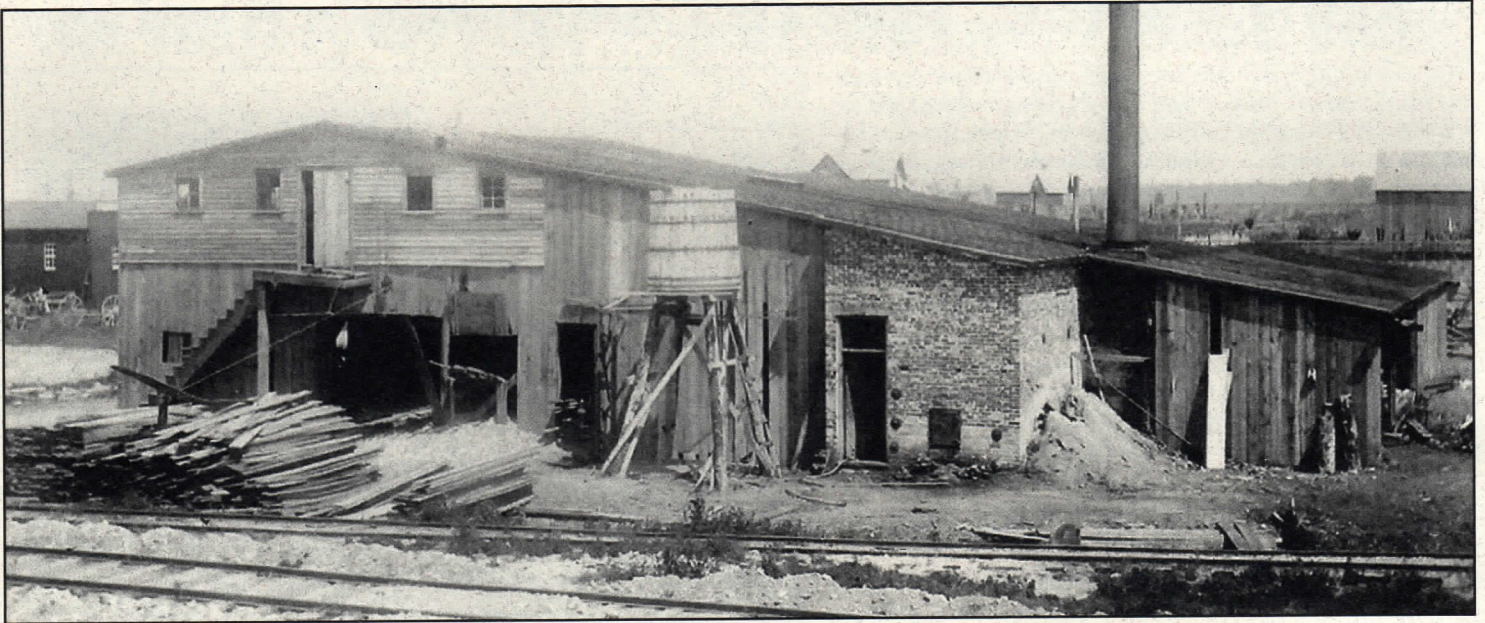


We love this image of an Oliver 70 tractor cutting grain. The driver is Mr. Licht and the image is from a family member.



The 1933 Pigeon Jubilee parade featured many old cars. This image is special because it has a rare image of one of the most iconic places in Pigeon... The Gem Theater! Many old timers remember the theater and their amazing popcorn. "Almost as good as the popcorn the Pigeon Historical Society sells at the Pigeon Farmers Market!"





## THE DIEBEL PLANING AND SHINGLE MILL

The Diebel Planing and Shingle Mill, (above) was built in the field between Michigan Avenue, The RR track and Frank Street, about 1891. It was Destroyed by fire around 1902 and rebuilt in 1905. At that time a cement block building was erected in front of it, which became the Diebel Auto Company, (below) owned and operated by John and his son Frank. After Frank's death, the building was sold to the Co-Op elevator in 1961, demolished, and the current Co-Op elevator office was built, facing Michigan Avenue.

(Right) During the 1953 Diamond Jubilee Parade, this photograph of Eleanora Eicher was taken. Eleanora is riding on a 1900 Knox Auto, owned by Frank Diebel.







John Walker at the reins and Mortician William A. Schriber  
 Photograph by Freeland and dates to late 1800s / early 1900s

## Pigeon Lanes Restaurant

Get Your Reservations  
 In Early For Holiday Banquets

### FRIDAY – PERCH DINNERS

All You Can Eat.....**\$1.50**

Smorgasbord 4:30 – 9:00

### SUNDAY SPECIAL

Roast Turkey and Dressing....**\$1.50**

or Southern Fried Chicken

Smorgasbord 11:30 - 7 :00

*Pigeon Progress Advance - Nov. 12, 1964*

## How Open For Business . . .

## J. & B. Heating Appliance

At 23 S. Main Street

Pigeon

*(Old Post Office Building)*

Bryant Furnaces and Water Heaters

Monogram, Wall and Space Heaters

Magic Chef and Tappan Ranges

Hamilton Clothes Dryers

*20 lb. Propane Gas Cylinders*

*Pigeon Progress Advance - Nov. 12, 1964*



# Genealogy Club In Pigeon

Grandmother used to tell us stories of her family when we were young. We listened with intense interest but never wrote anything down. Now, as we grow older, we wish he could remember who Aunt Millie married. What was Uncle Pat's wife's name? If only we could find our history. Where do we start? Do we have to pay for information on the internet?

Whether you are a novice at genealogy or a seasoned professional, we welcome you to join our genealogy club. The club meets in the Woelke Research Building the third Thursday each month, at 6:30 p.m. If you are interested in joining, stop into the Woelke Building. There is no charge. We do have internet, so bring your laptop or tablet. We have access to genealogy software and will help you fill in the blanks on your family tree.

**No computer? We now have extra laptops for our Genealogy Group!**

## Pigeon Historical Society

59 S. Main St. / P. O. Box 523, Pigeon, MI 48755

989-453-3242 (Leave Message)

Visit our Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/124844244905031/members/>



A comfortable setting filled with images, artifacts and friendly Historical Members who are eager to help you discover your family and community's past. Visit today! Join our Genealogy Group, or become a Historical Member. You are always welcome at your museum and research center. If you would like to become a volunteer, please call today!