

**Spring Edition • 2019**

## "If Only The Walls Could Talk"

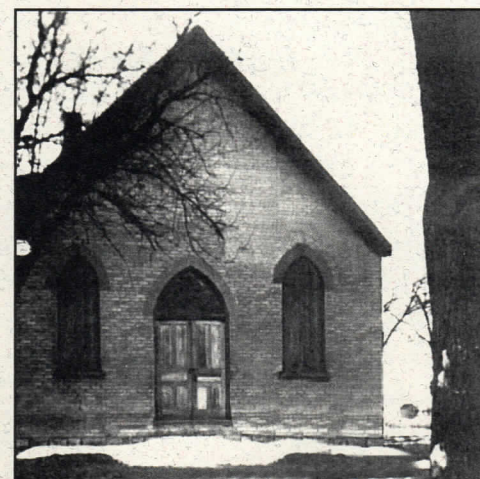


by Denny Esch  
Pigeon Historical Society President

One morning a couple weeks ago I was having coffee with my dad at Country Bay Village. Soon after my arrival, Pastor Orth (Retired Cross Lutheran Pastor) joined us as he sometimes does. You may or may not know, but Pastor Orth has a love for history. More times than not, the conversation around the table full of coffee drinkers turn into some great story telling or questions about some past business or place, the people in the area or other events of the past. This particular day Pastor said he

had heard at one time there was another Lutheran Church located here in Pigeon and wondered if I knew anything about it. (He probably asks this question of me because being quite involved with the Historical Society and I should know all those answers, right??) After several . . . "seems like there was" . . . "you know, I'm not too sure" . . . soon all eyes then turned to me. After a little thought I said, "I really don't know, that answer, but let me see what I can find out." Soon I was on my way to the Woelke Center.

*Woelke Research Center is the official name and I trust that everyone reading this newsletter knows that it is a complete Research Library of Pigeon and the surrounding area, the businesses, the people and more. It is open year around for the public to enjoy. Check [www.pigeonhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.pigeonhistoricalsociety.com) for open days and time.*



The Old New Grace Lutheran Church as it looked in the 1960s before it was removed.

### How the rest of the story ..

When I left County Bay after coffee that morning, I headed right for the Woelke Center. I knew in the thousands of pages and hundreds of books Art Woelke had compiled over the years the

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

Denny Esch, President  
Ardra Schaaf, Vice President  
Paul Schuette, Secretary  
David Eichler, Treasurer

#### ~: Trustees ~:

Jim Leinbach • Steven Schulze  
Duane Wurst • Joyce Kretschmer

#### Six Regular Meetings:

Second Monday of the month

May - July - Sept. -

Oct. - Nov. - Jan. - Mar. 3:30 pm

#### Board Meetings

Fourth Monday of the month

Sept. through March: 3:30 pm

April through August: 6:30 pm

#### Meeting Location

Woelke Historical Research Center.

## Our Webpage Has a New Look!!

For the past several weeks, Society Member Paul Schuette has been upgrading our website. Go to [www.pigeonhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.pigeonhistoricalsociety.com). It has a brand new look and much more information being added to it all the time. If you have missed any of the Recorder Newsletters, here you will find a Newsletter drop-down with all the newsletters we have published. Current events of the Pigeon Area are posted as we get them as well as date and times of activities of the Historical Society. You will not want to miss our Photo Gallery!! We have thousands of scanned pictures, slides, newspaper print and more in the Woelke Research Center and Paul has started the task of putting photos on the webpage for everyone to enjoy. Keep in mind when looking at our New Webpage, we are still under construction and you may find an error somewhere or something not looking quite right, but visit the site often as updates, corrections and new items are added weekly.



# **HEAVY WIND STORM FRIDAY PIGEON AND SURROUNDING COUNTRY SUFFERS**

Pigeon Progress March 28, 1913

This community was visited by one of the worst wind storms in history on Friday. The storm struck here about 10:30 in the morning and continued for about four hours. At about noon it gained its greatest velocity. In nearly every town and township of the county the storm left its marks. Chimneys, windows, signs, windmills, and barns were blown down. Roofs were torn from buildings, pedestrians were swept from their feet and driven to shelter from the wind blasts. Sam Leinbach, a local mail carrier, while traveling east near the Hayes Church, was blown into the Pigeon River along with his horse, buggy, and the mail.

No accurate estimate of the property damage done by the storm will ever be obtainable for the individual items in the list of losses run into the hundreds and range in amount of damage from \$400.00 or \$500.00 to losses almost too small to be considered. On account of telephone trouble the Progress has not been able to get as accurate a report of the storm as it would have wished.

The list of damages includes the following:

About one quarter of the roof of the Pigeon Novelty Factory was blown off. Damage: \$500.00.

Part of the roof of Deibel Hall was blown away.

Damage: \$150.00.

Williams Brothers pickle station was blown down. Damage: Between \$300.00 and \$400.00

Damage to the Pigeon Telephone Company, while not as large as was expected, will be quite an item. Excellent construction no doubt saved Mr. Campbell from a large loss.

Farmer's losses were as follows:

Ed. Pedler, part of a roof of a barn was blown away. Damage: \$200.00.

Henry Muentener, a large barn a complete wreck. Damage: \$1,500.00.

Louis Dubs, roof blown off the barn. Damage: \$200.00.

Noah Geiger, house damaged.

George Cleaver near Caseville, barn completely wrecked and machinery damaged. Loss: \$3,500.00.

Jene Watterworth, Chandler Township, barn destroyed. Loss: \$200.00.

George Henry near Caseville, roof of barn wrecked. Loss: \$300.00.

Jacob Wurtz, damage to barn. Loss: \$200.00.

Frank Wolf, barn blown down. Damage: \$900.00.

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## **“If Only The Walls Could Talk”**

From Page 1

answer should not be too hard to find. As I entered the Library of Books, I stood back and let my eyes scan all the white three ring binders. There on the bottom shelf were three, three inch, three ring binders labeled “Area Churches”. I opened Volume one and in the index, it read, “Grace Lutheran Church - Pigeon Book 2 - Section 15.” There it was even with more information then I was hoping to find

The Abstract Title of Property on two lots of the north-east corner of Campbell and Merrick St. of the Gould Addition. The Lutheran Greader - Germande Society, of Pigeon, by Leonard F. and Matilda Ederlein was deeded the property on February 25, 1904. The consideration was \$100. After the property was acquired, Evangelical Lutheran Grace Church contracted John Dietzel of Pigeon who was instrumental in erecting a simple design building

of white sand brick and some decoration in the form of brick cap for the doors and windows. Originally there was a bell tower but removed after a few years. Perhaps the sand brick didn't hold up too well. There is no record of what the interior was like but I would guess it was plain and simple. The records do show that a small group of former members of St John Lutheran Church of Berne started a new congregation and affiliated itself the Missouri Synod and Michigan District. Pastor William Schumacher of the St Johns Church in Kilmanagh provided pastoral care from 1903 to 1909. Life of the Grace Lutheran congregation was short lived and disbanded after no more than 12 years. When the Pigeon High School burned in 1916 they used the abandoned building for a time as well as a Pentecostal group. Sometime later that church closed and then use by the Coop Elevator and Walter Clabuesch Electric for storage. In the early 1970 the building was demolished to make room for a neighbors garage.



# Michigan Ave. Mennonite Church

History Compiled by MARIE RUBY

Early history by LUANNE BECHLER and J. C. WENGER

The first Mennonites that settled in Huron County were Mr. and Mrs. William Bechtel from Ontario, Canada. On December 1, 1888, the Peter Ropp family, also from Ontario, moved to Huron County near Bay Port. These early families used wagons and sometimes teams of oxen as they traveled the River Road or trails through the woods.

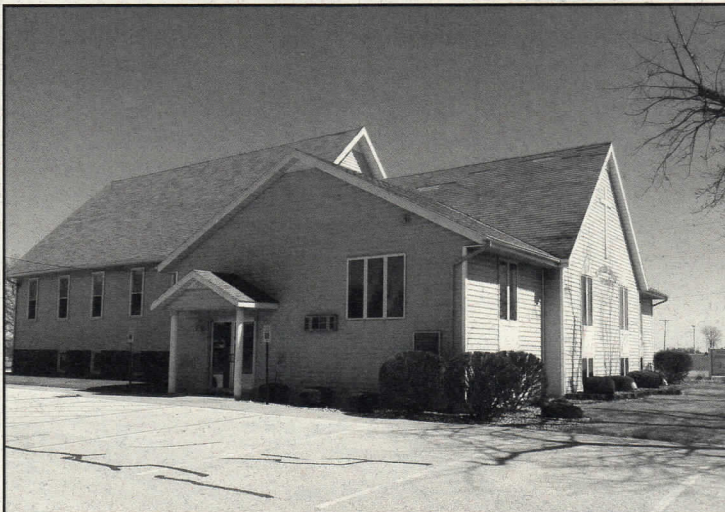
Even though transportation was primitive, they wanted a church service. The first meeting was held in the William Bechtel home on Jan. 18, 1890.

It was not until 1894 that a church was organized at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Oesch. As they continued to meet in homes, they realized their need of a church building. The frame for the Berne meeting house was raised on Saturday, May 8, 1897. The lot and building cost \$400. Berne members raised \$100, Canadian Mennonites raised \$200, and Indiana Mennonites were requested to raise the final \$100. The local church at this time was a part of the Ontario Conference.

The meeting house was formally opened on June 20, 1897. Communion services were held by Bishop Amos Cressman of Ontario on July 4, 1897. The next day the congregation ordained Peter Ropp as preacher and Menno Weidman as deacon.

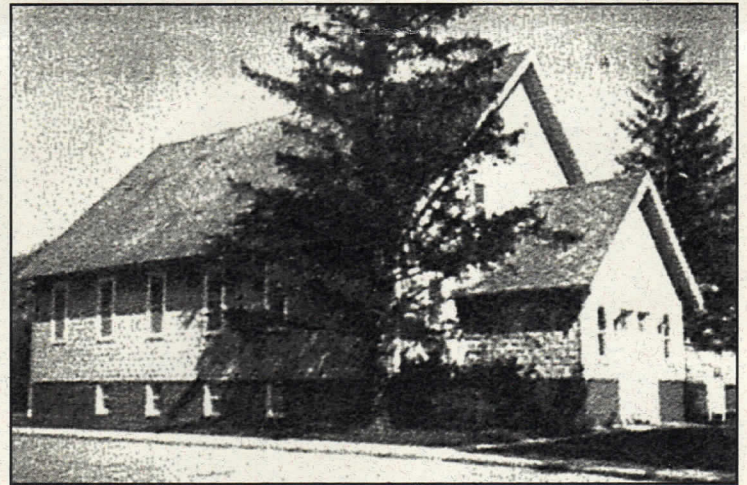
In 1917 Peter Ropp and family moved to Imlay City and started churches in Imlay City and Detroit. Alfred Weidman was then ordained minister of the Berne Church. In 1926 Samuel Miller and his family moved in from Indiana and he was installed as pastor. Samuel Miller was pastor in 1934 when the Berne congregation moved to the new church in Pigeon where he served a few more years.

*The Pigeon Historical Society congratulates the Pigeon Mennonites on their wonderful history. Like Pigeon itself, they started in Berne 125 years ago and helped build a greater community.*



Above: 1887-1934 What was once the Berne Mennonite Church building is still standing. It has been used as a place to extract honey, a rabbitry and later bought back by the Pigeon Mennonite Church for use as a fellowship hall.

James Wurst used the building for storage in connection with his tiling business. the building is still standing but is in need of repairs if were to be moved or saved.



Above: 1934-1992 An article in the 1934 Pigeon Progress noted the dedication of this building as follows: "Dedication services of the new building will be held Sunday afternoon Dec. 20, at 2:00. Dedication sermon will be delivered by Reverend Oscar Burkholder, Breslau, Ontario. Everyone is welcome to attend these services. After this date the congregation will be known as the Pigeon Mennonite Church instead of Berne Mennonite.

Left: 1992- After 58 years of virtually no exterior change, Michigan Avenue Mennonite Church is experiencing a major building project. The groundbreaking ceremony for the addition was conducted on Fathers Day, June 21, 1992. Construction began July 20, 1992 with Community Builders as contractor.

A dedication service is being planned for sometime in April, 1993.



# Orr's Drug Store - 100 Years In Pigeon



Orr's Celebrates 80 years on Pigeon's Main Street

Newsweekley Tuesday February 9- 1999

By Carrie Mayworm Staff Writer  
Pigeon

Area residents who were around in 1919 when Robert H. Orr opened Orr's Drug Store Inc. in downtown Pigeon, may remember a barrel full of peanuts which customers helped themselves to while strolling the aisles.

"I don't think he ever made a penny on them," Orr's grandson Fred Orr laughed. Fred doesn't intend to make any money on the peanuts either when he brings them back in celebration of the store's 80th Anniversary.

Although the location of Orr's Drug Store has changed several times over the years, one thing has remained constant: the Orr name over the front door. The first Orr's location was in an area where the drive-through of Mutual Savings bank is currently located. Back then it was Sutton's Drug Store. Robert H. Orr ran the store when Sutton went to war. When the veteran returned, he told Orr to make an offer on the business. Orr did and his name stills remains on the entrance sign.

In those early days, there was an assortment of goods on the store's shelves. A hot special was a free Missouri cob-pipe with the purchase of a 15¢ tin of White and Black Tobacco. Items also were kept in stock for area farmers, including formaldehyde.

"Back then every farmer had a few chickens or pigs," Fred Orr said. "We had a fair veterinary department here. As farming changed, that type of (merchandise) changed too."

In the 1930s, Orr's Drug Store moved to the location of the present day Huron Business Products. It was in the mid-50s when it moved again to its current location on S. Main Street. When Robert retired, John Orr took over for his father. Robert passed away in 1967, however, the generational link continued when Fred came on board in 1975. Generation after generation, the customers keep coming back.

"I think what makes us different is we've kept up with-the pace of things. But, a lot of things



Photo top left: The building was first Campbells, and later Sutton's Drug Store. Robert H. Orr purchased this business from Sutton after WWI

Photo Center Left: In the 1930s Orr's Drug Store moved to the building south of the railroad.

Photo Bottom Left: Orrs moved between Gascho's store and the. The IGA and Orr's traded buildings. Lenoard Nieble operated his grocery on the corner.



# Orr's Drug Store - 100 Years In Pigeon

haven't changed like caring about the customers and having the right products at the right time," Fred said. "We're concerned about each customer. It's more than just listening to the cash register."

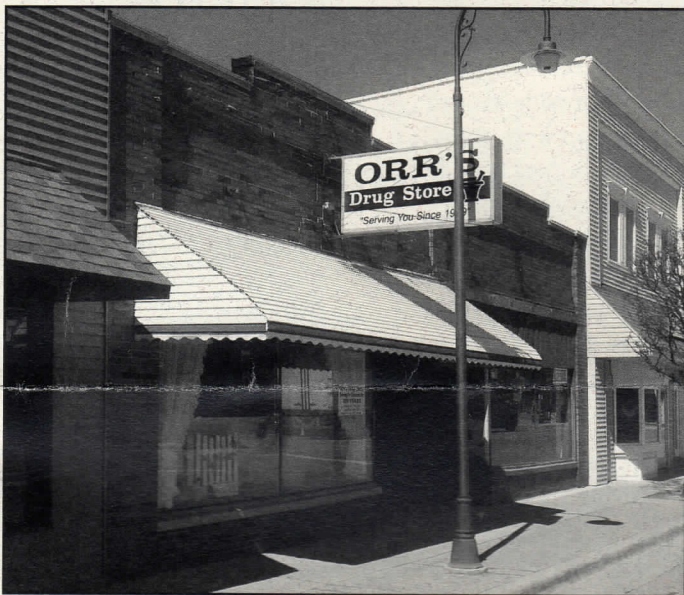
As Orr's celebrates its 80th birthday during the week of Feb. 15-20, customers can expect refreshments, specials on gift items and prize drawings, including a retired piece from Buyers' Choice and signed by the artist. And of course, the peanuts.

Fred Orr, 47, doesn't know what the future holds for Orr's Drug Store, but he's certain he knows how it got this far.

"We treat people fair. We've always tried to make a profit, but we've never gouged anyone. We've treated customers how we'd like to be treated," he said. "I'd love to see it turn 100!"

## Happy 100th Anniversary

And may your business continue for many more.



Robert Orr (Left) stands at a counter in Orr's Drug Store with store Clerk, Schiller Kleinschmidt (right) in about 1920. Kleinschmidt spoke German at a time when it was very important to have a German speaking clerk at the store, Fred Orr said. (Photo from the Orr Family collection.)



AFTER MORE THAN 32 YEARS of drug service in Pigeon, Robert H. Orr, right, announced that he has sold half-interest in his store to his son, John, who was graduated from Wayne University in June, 1949. The senior partner, a native of Cass City, arrived in Pigeon in the fall of 1917, when he became manager of the William Sutton Drug Store. In February, 1919, Mr. Orr purchased the store, and has operated it in the intervening 31 years. Mr. and Mrs. John Orr are residing in Pigeon, and they have an infant daughter, Frances. Pigeon Progress - February 10, 1950

Photo Top Left; Current Orr's Drug Store on Main Street, Pigeon. The building next to Orr's is the New Berne Junction museum and gift shop, opening soon.

Photo Left: Fred Orr, the third generation of pharmacists and owner, was photographed in 1999, during Orr's 80th anniversary. If you would like to see how great Fred looks today, you'll just have to stop in and see him, he's there to help you with your pharmacy needs.



# Miss. A. P. Parker

When the March winds begin to blow, our thoughts turn to spring. And women of course begin to shop for their Easter bonnets. Today, however, women do, not become quite as enthusiastic about purchasing a hat as 'in yesteryear. Now, the trend seems to be leaning towards omitting hats to dignified affairs such as weddings and funerals. In years past, this would have been considered a terrible breach of apparel etiquette.

Yes, in yesteryear, millinery' shops were considered a very important place of business. Even the town general stores sold hats competing with the millinery shops. In those days, women couldn't runs to the city in an hours time as we can today. So it was up to the local stores to supply the latest in wearing apparel.

Sixty-five years ago, on Main Street oi Pigeon, Michigan, stood a millinery shop owned by Mrs. George (Jessie) Shaw. Today, it is where Leonard Neibel -has his grocery store. in that long ago time, a young girl of 15 began her apprenticeship with Mrs. Shaw. Her name was Alice Decker, who in later years had married Alired

Sturm. Alice was considering going into the dress making business, but a friend advised her that she would be able to create more hats than she would be able to make dresses in that same per- iod of time. By age 21, Alice took over the shop and the title, "Alice Decker's Millinery Shop" was displayed on the store front.

I would have loved shopping in her store, for I am partial to broad brimmed hats, which at that time were considered very much in style. The Price of hats was really a surprise to me... They ranged from '\$2.00 to \$18.00 and surprisingly, local women were willing to pay top prices for a Decker original. Of course, hats in those days were not worn once or twice and then put on a shelf as so often we do today. MY, no; The women even wore their hats in the church choir. What a spectacular sight that must have been. The rich velvets, extravagant beavers, broad brimmed With large, colorful ostrich -feathers pluming into the air. Some hats had braided horse hair as part or the trimming. Some had the buckrami covered with



## New Spring Show- ing of Millinery

will be ready for inspection  
on Saturday, March 24th. A  
visit by the Ladies of Pigeon  
and vicinity on or after that  
date will be appreciated.

**Miss A. P. Decher**  
(Successor to Mrs. Shaw)





# Millinery

crepe and decorated with colorful flowers, The broad brims Provided plenty of room to use great imagination.

Many women must have envied Miss P. Decker her business status. She would make two trips a year to Detroit to the wholesale house where she accumulated new ideas and brought back colorful materials to make her originals. One year, she even made a trip to 1970 The Pigeon Progress Mary Leipprandt.

Chicago and in those days that was considered an exciting, romantic thing, meeting people in the business world and the world of style and fashion. Today, if someone were to wear immediately shove it back into the furthest corner of my closet and let the moths take over, But 60 -years ago, if a woman saw another wearing a hat that she admired very much, she would ask Miss Decker to copy it for her.

Picture number one is Main Street of Pigeon and on the left of it is the edge of Miss Decker's Millinery shop. The automobiles are about 1920 models and were becoming quite plentiful at this time,

Picture number two shows Miss Decker standing in her Shop. with a display of some of her originals. s

In pictures number three and four Miss Decker is modeling, D very smartly, spring, and winter Ensembles. Naturally, the hats are her originals.' "(The small, a hat identical to mine, I would imagine the child is a friend.) "Mrs. Sturm said she was especially proud of the winter coat as it was the first one that she helped Pay for with her own" money. Today, at age 75, Mrs. Alfred A Sturm still retains her keen eye for a good looking, stylish hat. Note: I was interested in the

length of the coats in the pictures, About 60 years have passed and by Autumn 1970, our fashion designers are telling us that this will be the stylish length to wear again. by Mary Leipprandt

*Mary Leipprandt - Pigeon Progress 1970*  
*This story was gathered and submitted by Jean Sturm.*  
*Thanks Jean your volunteer work is appreciated.*



Lorraine Perry's mother was Alice Decker. Lorraine is seen here wearing her mother's hat.

## STRUCK BY A TRAIN

### August Rathke and Family Meet with Accident

What might have been a very serious accident occurred in Pigeon on Christmas morning.

Mr. and Mrs. August Rathke and three children were the occupants of a surrey drawn by one horse and were on their way to church. When passing over the crossing of the P.O. & N. Railway at the Leipprandt Brothers Elevator, the rig was struck by a freight train coming from the north.

The occupants were thrown out and the surrey was completely wrecked. Mrs. Rathke was injured though fortunately not seriously. Mr. Rathke and the children received slight injuries.

To those who witnessed the accident it seemed a miracle how any of the occupants of the rig escaped without more serious injury.

*Pigeon Progress January 3, 1913*

## Vendors Wanted

The Pigeon Historical Society manages the Pigeon Farmers' Market. The market is held every Friday from 9-2, from May through October.

Vendors are welcome to apply. There is a small rental charge during the June, July, and August market. Other months are free of charge.

See you in May, 2019.  
Call 989-545-5240 or  
visit our web site: [www.pigeonfarmersmarket.com](http://www.pigeonfarmersmarket.com)

**SEE YOU AT  
THE MARKET!**





# 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/>

## **Woelke Research Center is Open Year Around**

### **Every Friday**

**10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.**

### **June through August**

**Thursday and Friday 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.**

**Saturdays 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.**



**Stop in – You may be surprised of what you discover!!**