

History of the Pentwater Yacht Club

The Pentwater Yacht Club was originally a large, drab wooden structure unfinished on the inside. It was the warehouse and office for large passenger boats and freighters traveling between Pentwater and other Lake Michigan ports. “The Dock”, as it was known, served well into the 30’s as a shipping center for all of Northern Oceana County and Southern Mason County.

Farmers brought their fruit and other perishables by horse and wagon to “The Dock” for shipment to Chicago, Milwaukee and other large cities. Local mills shipped lumber and furniture manufactured in Pentwater. Fishermen packed their harvest of fresh fish from Lake Michigan in barrels to be carried to outside markets, and local businessmen received merchandise via the warehouse at “The Dock”. Passenger service was excellent from early spring until late autumn, and many visitors came and went by steamship from the facility. Locals remember basketball games played on its floor with the “long” shot traveling between the rafters.

In the spring of 1935 “The Dock” graduated to become the Pentwater Yacht Club (PYC). According to newspaper clippings, the club initially boasted 42 members and by 1936 it had grown to 150 members. It then had the largest membership of any club in the West Michigan Yachting Association.

During the years after WW II, the PYC was a popular place to be. The membership had increased to about 250 and activities including dinners and dances. Basic dinner fare was served in the dining room with the best view of the sunset available down the channel. Saturday night dances were the rage and these sold out events were the “place to be” on warm summer evenings. The bar was also open at this time and was a warm friendly place to collect in the evenings. Not to be left out, the youth of the club put on their own dance on Friday evening. During this time water skiing became popular. PYC had an outstanding water ski team and pictures of them are on the walls of the club. Members with sailboats raced on Pentwater Lake.

In the 1960’s sailboat racing popularity increased as a fleet of Lightnings completed on Pentwater Lake and Lake Michigan. In the early 1970’s, the youth of the club took to the water in Sunfish, and many of today’s sailors cut their nautical teeth on these boats. As many as 32 boats competed in races, and many local regattas were sponsored for competition on the lake. Thursday night dinners which had been part of the club calendar since the beginning of the club now formed the social backbone. Volunteers formed committees and put their favorite recipes on display for the membership to sample. This became by far the most popular night at PYC, and even now Thursday will find more than 100+ members spending their evening dining, and getting to know each other before the Pentwater Civic Band concert.

The Adirondack chairs have been a part of the PYC since the 1950's (or earlier) when about a dozen were placed on the deck to view the sunset. Members replaced them after the renovation of club in the late 1990's when volunteers constructed the present line of "blue chairs" to replace the old ones. The appearance of these chairs as you entered the harbor lead to visiting sailors referring to the PYC as the "Blue Chair Lounge".

Since early in the history of the club, volunteers have been responsible for many projects and repairs. As the lake level raise and lower, the wooden deck was adjusted by them to the new level of the big lake. The kitchen and rest rooms were renovated professionally in the early 1980's to meet the needs of the membership and shortly after that the steel sea wall was approved by the DNR for construction to stabilize the club foundations. At that time the interior was renovated and a new deck and youth room was constructed by PYC volunteers. The marina was also updated with new docks and slips for PYC boats. Volunteers still gather at the club spring and fall to tackle maintenance items and preparing the PYC for winter. Visitors to the club now see not only a modern club facility but a physical plant that will serve the area for many years to come.

Local sailboat races and competitive sailing in the Great Lakes became popular again in the 1990's and the turn of the century. A highly competitive Ensign Fleet, #70, which races on Pentwater Lake was successfully organized. Sunfish Fleet, #218, has increased its numbers, and a small fleet of offshore racers are racing under LMPHRF and have won flags for their finishes in major races such as the Queen's Cup and the Chicago Mackinac.

Indeed, the old warehouse could not possibly recognize itself in this modern building which today serves the membership and brings pleasure to the PYC boaters who sail Pentwater Lake and out the channel into Lake Michigan.