

PYC History 1976 – Present

By Marilyn Steiner
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Sources include old yearbooks, scrapbooks, and conversations with Jeanne Pettingill

The year 1976, the Pentwater Yacht Club celebrated the 200th birthday of our nation with a Family Steak Fry. Everyone brought their own steak to grill on the trough grill in the parking lot. Francis Mills was the Commodore. It was the custom to have a dance every Saturday night with a live band. Many of those parties did not start until 9:30 or 10 pm and ended at 2:00 am. Thursday night dinners prepared by members before the Band Concert in the Park had been well established.

During that time two formal parties were held each summer. The Commodore's Ball and the Brass Hat Ball. Women wore their finest long dresses and men donned white dinner jackets with bow ties. Live bands were from Grand Rapids and Muskegon. Sailing was a big part of Yacht Club life and there were two fleets: Lightning Fleet 340 and Sunfish Fleet 218. There was a special Race Week in August each year.

In 1977 the PYC was open seven days a week for the first time. Many parties were hosted including a toga party that was popular at that time. There were two Sunfish Fleets, one for adults and one for juniors. In the 70's there were 51 Junior Members, 14 – 18 years old, registered at the Club. The juniors had their own Board and Flag Officers and organized their own parties.

In 1980 racing on Lake Michigan was started and the first Off Shore Fleet was organized. Members hosted a Venetian Parade of decorated boats. Fisherman contests were held to see who caught the largest fish. Jeanne Pettingill became the first woman Commodore in 1986. The Hart dam broke after several days of heavy rain and Pentwater Lake rose to the highest level ever recorded. The PYC deck had to be raised. There seemed to be fewer Saturday night dances because the times were changing and the big bands were not as popular as before.

In the 90's much reconstruction of the Club House was done. New windows and doors, steel sea walls, and a large deck was constructed mostly by members. New docks were built and members were able to rent slips for the season. Gene and Barb Davidson were the "angels" who donated money to build the Jr. Room for the youth of the club to have their own space for activities. Linda Watson was the Club manager for several years and served her delicious Friday night buffets. On Friday nights you could barely squeeze up to the bar to order a drink. Thursday night dinners continued to be a favorite with the members. Bridge Club and Euchre were thriving. The Commodore's Ball was changed to the Flag Officers Party to be more politically correct and the dress became more casual.

The Back from the Mac Party was started by Janet Webber hosting racing boats that were returning from the Chicago to Mackinac Race. Many large sailing vessels rafted

off our front deck and partied into the night. Sailors from other clubs enjoyed the hospitality and music of the event. This party has continued each year and became our largest fund raiser.

The Wooden Boat Show was started in 1999 by Jack Patterson and Marilyn Steiner. Several members displayed their antique wooden boats. It has grown into one of the largest wooden boat shows in Michigan with over 40 participants. Many guests come from all over Michigan to view the beautiful boats, to vote for their favorite entry and to watch the parade following the awards ceremony.

New Year's Eve 2000 was a memorable party. Members were dressed in their finest; we had a live band and eagerly awaited the ticking time clock to greet the new millennium. We were told that all the computers, banks and power grids would fail because the computers could not handle the new date of 2000. At the stroke of midnight, the PYC went dark and we all were awestruck. The worst had happened! Then someone noticed that there were lights on across the lake. Jack Patterson had pulled the power switch on the building to shut everything down. A few short minutes later, the lights came back on and the dancing continued, and the memorable prank was enjoyed by all.

Many members started to refurbish Ensign class boats. In a few short years there were up to twenty Ensign sailboats and they became Fleet 70 and raced every Wednesday evening and Saturday mornings. The women took over the Sunfish and sailed every Tuesday afternoon, after having lunch, of course. Sailing became the thing to do at the PYC.

Barb & Gene Davidson founded the Jr. Sailing Program that was located at the PYC by donating several prams and sunfish to teach children 8 and up to sail. PYC members assisted with the program and over 200 sailors a year completed the classes. Eventually they outgrew our space moved to their own location at the public boat launch on Lake Street. Many future PYC members have already caught the bug to sail.

The demographics of Pentwater has changed. Fewer families have moved to Pentwater, but many retirees have returned or discovered Pentwater. PYC membership swelled to 550 and many people waited on a wait list for a year before they were able to join. The PYC is the hub of summer fun in Pentwater.

After paying off the mortgage and celebrating, once again the Club House was in need of repairs after learning that the building was not stable. In 2007 the supports were reinforced and tie backs were installed to keep the front sea wall from migrating toward the lake. In 2008 the sea walls were replaced on the north and south sides of the Club. The Flower committee planted a beautiful garden and filled the flower boxes with flowers. Many members wanted to spiff up the club with new chairs, new acoustics, etc. but once again projects were delayed because of the necessary expenses.

We continue to enjoy the charm of the old Club House, the history and traditions of 75 years of PYC activities and the spectacular view of the channel and Lake Michigan. The lovely blue Adirondack chairs on the deck offer the best view in town. We can sit and enjoy the friendship of each other and the magnificent place that we spend the summers. We are fortunate to be PYC members. Happy 75th Anniversary!