

Garden Peninsula Historical Society

By Anne Thousand

The Garden Peninsula juts into Lake Michigan and is on the southern side of the Upper Peninsula. It spans 25 miles from one end to the other. White settlers arrived in the mid 1850s with land grants when members of the Nocquet Indian tribe still lived here. There are many natural harbors on both sides of the Peninsula. The most famous harbor is the Snail Shell Harbor at Fayette now known as the Fayette State Park that features a restored 1870 smelting village. Other towns include Fairport and Garden. Fairport, at the end of the Peninsula, is a fishing port today. Garden is a small village but the surrounding township has many farms, logging work and is the site of many retiree homes.

The Garden Peninsula Historical Society (GPHS) was organized on June 30, 1975 for the purpose of preserving local historical records (village, township, school, cemetery, family histories, etc.) of the Peninsula. At that time, there were five members; today there is over 160 members! GPHS publishes a Newsletter three times each year featuring out activities, society news plus features of interest from the past.

Our historical group has a very active history. Our participation in a 1976 Bicentennial celebration won 1st place with an historical float. We created and sold



45 dozen Bicentennial plates! In 1977, the society sponsored a bus tour of the Door Country Peninsula in Wisconsin and a trip to Washington Island. In 1977-78, a quilt was made and raffled to make funds for the next project. Funds

from the quilt raffle supported a new memorial.

Veteran's Memorial was erected in 1979 in the New Garden Cemetery in memory of all the veterans of the Garden Peninsula.

Yearly up keep involves flowers in the summer and a wreath in December. A time capsule was placed and sealed near the memorial, which contains mementos and artifacts from GPHS members to be opened in 2029.

Since 1976 a yearly diner has been held the third Sunday of September to honor those who turn 80 during the year. This is held in the Community Building and is open to the public. Each honoree is presented with a corsage; honorary membership in the society and a life history of the honoree is read. These files then are placed in our Family History Notebooks. So far two hundred ninety persons have been so honored.

Margaret Coppess spend many years collecting and compiling histories of 400 pioneer families on the Peninsula. Soon other members joined her in collecting data from the seven cemeteries and various other sources. As a results in 1982 the society published a book called Our Heritage, which covers our history from 1940 to 1940. It is a hard cover, 298-page book that includes short family histories, stories of Sac Bay, Fayette, Fairport, Van's Harbor, and Garden and many photos of these areas. GPHS republished it in 1996.

In 1987 the Hennessey School was purchased, transported and



renovated into a museum in the center of town. This 104-year-old one room schoolhouse is open in the summer months for the public with artifacts and other

materials on display. Researchers use our family history notebooks, cemetery and census records, pictures, etc. Requests

are answered year round for historical and genealogy information by volunteers.

There are many ongoing projects. Artifacts and photos are donated, identified and labeled. In 1998, GPHS took part in a Commercial Fishing Exhibit at the Bonifas Art Center in Escanaba and also took part in the Atlas CD project with Michigan State University. In 1999, we loaned our 2 commercial fishing scrapbooks to Western Michigan for a yearlong exhibit at Maritime Museums in Michigan and Wisconsin. In June of 2000, we hosted the Historical Society of Michigan's UP History Conference and presented a program on the Peninsula. From 2000 to 2002, we joined a Library of Congress Project by giving them index to all reference materials in the Museum, which are now available on the Internet at <http://lcweb.ioc.gov/coll/nucmc>. In September of last year, we sponsored a Cemetery Walk at Sac Bay for members. That same month we hosted a UP/MACAA Day for arts and cultural community leaders.

For the past 2 years we have collected funds for a building to construct or find another building so that we can expand our collection. Last May, we were awarded a \$3,000 grant from the Hannahville Indians to upgrade our archival and storage materials.

Our group is comprised of motivated volunteers who value our Garden Peninsula heritage and work hard to preserve and protect it.

Ed. Note: The Garden Peninsula Historical Society is located at State Street M-183, Garden, MI 49835. (906) 644-2165.

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