

# PINCONNING TOWNSHIP



**Pinconning Township**  
**Organized February 28, 1873**

**Historical Society of Bay County**  
**Research**  
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A century before the Revolutionary War of 1776, the Indians of the North, having met in council on Mackinac Island made war against the Sauk's of the fertile Saginaw River Valley. A fierce hand of Chippewa Warriors followed the trail along the shoreline through the dense pine forests to the main Sauk village on the Saginaw River. Their surprise attack resulted in the famous "Skull Island Massacre", and in the Sauk being driven from the territory.

After the historic event, the Chippewas were afterward the principal tribe in the region.

Pinconning Township's rich native history is evidenced, even by its name, O-pin-nic-con-ing, "the place of wild potatoes."

A large Chippewa village was established at the mouth of the Pinconning River which had a cemetery and a substantial log mission nearby. This mission was the first church in Pinconning Township. It may originally have been part of an attempt to Christianize the natives by the Jesuit Engleran, who had established missions throughout the Saginaw region in 1686. Another sizable settlement was at the mouth of the White Feather Creek in Pinconning Township.

On March 27, 1851, Ka-Bah- To-Quay, O-Bah-Ke-No-Quay, and Ke-May-Ke-Be-O-Quay became the first landowners of record when they paid \$100 to Jabez and Sarah Sutherland of Saginaw for 80 acres, the northwest corner of which would now be Pinconning and Airport roads.

Louis Pelkey came to the mouth of the Pinconning River in 1851 to hunt and fish and become its first permanent white resident. He was present at the organizational meeting of the Township held in the Etten, Kaiser, and Company Warehouse in 1873 and was elected Pinconning's first Treasurer. At that meeting Pioneer Joseph U. Meech was elected Pinconning's first Supervisor.

Pelkey became Justice of the Peace in 1874, served as Supervisor in 1876, 77, 78, and 82. He later also served as Township Clerk and Librarian! In 1883 he provided the new Township with its first hotel, the Michigan House. He recalled that when he came here there were three white men working in the area: two on the White Feather Creek, lumbering, (Gulliver, and James Loomis who later sold his holdings to the White Feather Lumber Company of Pinconning) Lewis Chapel was operating a small water mill at the mouth of the Pinconning River.

In 1869 another pioneer, Fred Grainger Stark came to the area and found the Indian village and mission at the mouth of the Pinconning. He hunted and fished for a few years and then moved to the village and became its first blacksmith.

A devastating forest fire swept through the Township in 1871 blackening everything in its wake. Neither this, nor the economic panic that gripped Bay County in 1872, deterred Mr. George H. Van Etten of Bay City and Mr. Frederick A. Kaiser of Kawkawlin from organizing Vanetten, Kaiser, and Company in acquiring 1600 acres of land near the western boundary of Bay County

to lumber they began building their sawmill on the Pinconning River in February of that year and finished it the same fall.

Innovative in their planning, they also built an eleven milelong tram railway of graded planks, with hard Maple rails. It traveled from the new sawmill on the east end to the lumber camp later Kaiser Ville, on the West. It was entirely on the counties land. The cost was \$22,000.00

At the mill site the company platted 100 acres either side of the railroad track into village lots naming the streets after County and family members. They established a general store and post office the first postmaster was EB Knight.

The largest load of logs ever pulled by a single team of horses came from the Van and Kaiser and Company camp on February 24, 1883. Two horses weighing 2,816 pounds and driven by black Tom Burns hauled 57 tons of logs 1 1/4 miles to the railway by this time the railroad had been extended east to the Bay, and to also join the Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw Railroad. This railroad under the name change of Glencoe, Pinconning and Lakeshore Railway was to become the first logging railroad in the state.

Three large trestles had been built out over Saginaw Bay at the foot of Pinconning Rd. Here the logs that were not cut and planned in Pinconning's mills were dropped into the Bay, rafted and towed, to the Mills of Bay City. In 1886 there were 14 separate Mills in Pinconning producing shingles, staves and boards, while hoops and baskets were handmade by the local Indian villagers.

Pinconning school district #1 had already been established on the bay shore when Sol G. Maloney came here to marry miss Martha Summerfield and went to teach in 1890. The school was known as the Indian school, and he taught there 12 years. He later became Township Clerk, Supervisor, and Mayor of the City of Pinconning.

Pinconning School District #2 was built in the village of Pinconning at a cost of \$6000. It had room for 400 students and the first teacher there was T.S. Joslin.

The business community of Pinconning showed courage and resilience when fire destroyed nearly all the buildings facing the railroad tracks in 1883. Most were under insured or not insured at all, but new and old businesses managed to rebuild. That year also saw the publishing of the first newspaper, the Pinconning Times.

Bay County forests had been depleted in 50 years (not the hundred predicted by the lumberman). Businessmen looked for new enterprises, in Bay City Entrepreneur, William Reed went into the commercial production of cheese in Pinconning in 1911. He was followed by an enthusiastic cheese maker from Wisconsin, Ben Horne, and Swiss born, Paul Hitz. Joe Turnell was a producer, and the Haplin Creamery was eventually sold to the Kraft Food Company. They bought their rich cream from the surrounding family farms and Pinconning Cheese became a nationally renowned product.

A new cash crop for Pinconning's farms was the cheap coffee substitute Chickory. The Frank Chickory Company was one of the largest in the country and had a plant here on Michigan Central Railroad just South of the Pinconning River. It was a valuable commodity until 1936 and still grows wild; It's blue flowers brightening the fields throughout the Township.

Pinconning's first Rural Mail Carrier was Williams Summerfield in 1900. His wife Cora Ellsworth Summerfield gave birth to Pinconning's most illustrious son, on March 17, 1899, Arthur Ellsworth Summerfield, who became Postmaster General of the United States. He served with distinction for eight years from 1953 to 1961 under President Dwight D Eisenhower.

