WHEN THE PIGEONS CAME TO PETOSKEY

By Hadley Flynn

When I had a field trip to the Little Traverse Historical Society, I saw a stuffed passenger pigeon. Also, I have gone may times to the Crooked Lake fishing hatchery where there is a historical marker telling the story of the last nesting of the passenger pigeon before it was extinct.

The pigeons were similar to a morning dove, but larger. They were 16 inches in length. They had a dark blue head, back and shoulders. Their neck was golden-brown and a rusty chest and white belly. They had a thin neck and long tail feathers.

One time there were three to five billion passenger pigeons alive that soared the skies. They lived in mixed wood forests. They liked to nest in the trees and could easily find food. They ate nuts, seeds, acorns and berries.

Passenger pigeons had a large nesting area near Petoskey. They flew in large flocks looking for food. Once they ate all the food in that area they would move to a new place to find more food. Farmers hated passenger pigeons. The birds ate the food in farmers' fields. They could eat a field of wheat in a few hours. They killed off a lot of crops too. Farmers started to shoot the pigeons to keep them away from their crops.

Then people started to hunt the pigeons for meat. Michigan had a lot of passenger pigeons. People started to come to Michigan to hunt them.

One of the last big nesting's was in Petoskey. By 1870, in big city markets they got $2.00 a dozen for the pigeons. There were no laws about the number of
pigeons a hunter could kill or how they were killed. All of these things lead to the big hunt in Petoskey. In 1872, 50,000 pigeons were killed per day. This rate of hunting went on for five months in and around Petoskey. By the end of the 1800s almost all of the passenger pigeons had been killed.

The last passenger pigeon named Martha died in 1914 at the Cincinnati Zoo, alone. I have been to the Cincinnati Zoo and saw the memorial to the passenger pigeon. That's how I learned about the passenger pigeons in Petoskey.