

know where or what this is, it is a strangely bent Red Oak tree located between the westbound and eastbound sections of I-96 on Airline Road heading south into Fruitport. When the highway was built, the Michigan Department of Transportation sup-



**An old picture of the oak tree,** "One of the earliest known photographs of the Bent Oak Tree, date unknown. From the Collection of the Lakeshore Museum Center."

posedly left this tree alone. Legend has it that this tree was bent by Indians and used as a trail marker heading to the trading posts in Grand Rapids. This story has a few problems. Firstly, while Indians did live and trade in the Fruitport area, their presence was very much depleted by the signing of the Treaty of Washington in 1836. This treaty was the formal ceding of most of the state of Michigan to the United States by the Native tribes.



**Current tree photo** "Photo courtesy of the Fruitport Historical Society"

By using approximate dating methods, the oak tree in question is roughly 160 years old. This is a working number calculated from multiplying the trees diameter and the growth factor for that species of tree. Many environmental factors could impact this number and change it in either direction. The branch that extends out is smaller and is approximately 100 years old. Assuming the age is correct, that would place the initial growth year of the tree in 1857 and the branch in 1917. These years tell us some things. First, the initial date for the main tree trunk was twenty one years after the land was ceded to the United States government. In that era, when more and more white settlers moved in, the natives quickly moved out. Michigan became a state on January 26, 1837, and by 1860 nearly 750,000 residents were calling themselves Michiganders. The second date, if correct for the branch, puts it way out of the question that it was done by Indians. In 1917 the world was engulfed in World War I and the native presence in Michigan was almost completely assimilated to western culture.

Second, as a matter of respect for the native peoples of the America's, they were very precise. With a small background in archaeology, I have seen some beautiful and amazing things that were designed and built by native peoples. They were accurate and precise. In regards to the tree, the branch points almost directly east, with an azimuth of about 93 degrees. If a traveler were to follow the direction of the tree branch, it would take them to Rockford, not Grand Rapids. This is about fifteen miles north of their supposed destination. If the tree was bent by Indians, I don't think their target destination was Grand Rapids. If our tree was just one of many that pointed towards Grand Rapids, the others are long gone.

Now, this is what we do know. Fruitport and the rest of West Michigan was home to loads of Native Americans. When the first settlers came into the Fruitport area, which was officially in 1841, they more than likely still encountered some natives. But they were on the decline and were heading north, west or were beginning to assimilate into western culture. Some historical evidence does exist that might give a reasonable explanation about the tree. Some older residents agree that the tree was bent by school children as a joke. I have seen more than one account of this. I will name this myth 'plausible' because the date range of the main tree could have seen its fair share of Indians, but it is highly unlikely  
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## Who, What, When, Where?...Pickands Junction

By Jamie Thompson and Jodie Schmidt

Most area residents have not heard of Pickands Junction, a rail line station from days gone by.

Pickands Junction was nothing more than a stop at an intersection of the Chicago & West Michigan Railway (C&WM). It's name holds an interesting history of its own however, and its junction on the railway played an important part in Fruitport's history.

Located approximately 1.5 miles northwest of Fruitport, Pickands Junction (also shown on maps as Pickand and Pickland) sprang up in 1891 at the intersection of the C&WM main line and a C&WM freight line. Known as the C&WM Freight Main, this 4 mile connector rail line ran between Pickands Junction and Kirks, a location one mile north of Ferrysburg. A small passenger depot was located at Pickands Junction, but most importantly, the freight main supplied the Spring Lake Iron Company until its closure in 1912.

Pickands Junction was named after Major Henry Sparks Pickands, a general manager of the Spring Lake Iron Company. Born in Delaware in 1834, he moved to Ohio as a young boy with his family, and later moved to Cleveland, working as a cabinet maker for a few years. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Henry enlisted in the Ohio Infantry and saw active service for the remainder of the war. He had a high reputation for his bravery and leadership skills in the infantry. Shortly after the war ended, he found himself in Michigan's Lake Superior region working as the manager of the Munising and Bay Furnaces, making charcoal pig iron. It was that position in Munising that eventually brought Henry Sparks Pickands to Fruitport.

Construction of the Spring Lake Iron Company's blast furnaces began in 1879 under the personal supervision of Henry Sparks Pickands, with operations starting in March of 1880. The company continued to operate under the general management of Henry Spark Pickands in its early years. H.S. Pickands also managed another charcoal furnace in Bangor Michigan at the same time he was managing the Spring Lake Iron Company. Heavily involved in the pig iron trade for most of his life, he even had

a ship named after him. The H.S. Pickands bulk freighter launched in Grand Haven, Michigan in October 1884.

The furnaces employed up to 125 local men and produced up to 40 tons of pig iron each day. Charcoal kilns located north of Fruitport in New Era were also owned by the Spring Lake Iron Company and employed 200 men from the outlying area. Charcoal from these kilns would make its way down the freight main at Pickands Junction to the blast furnaces, along with other supplies shipped in on the C&WM railway.

Around the turn of the century the blast furnaces of the 1880s and 1890s were gradually replaced by more efficient coke furnaces, and in 1912 the Spring Lake Iron Company would close its doors and cease operation entirely.

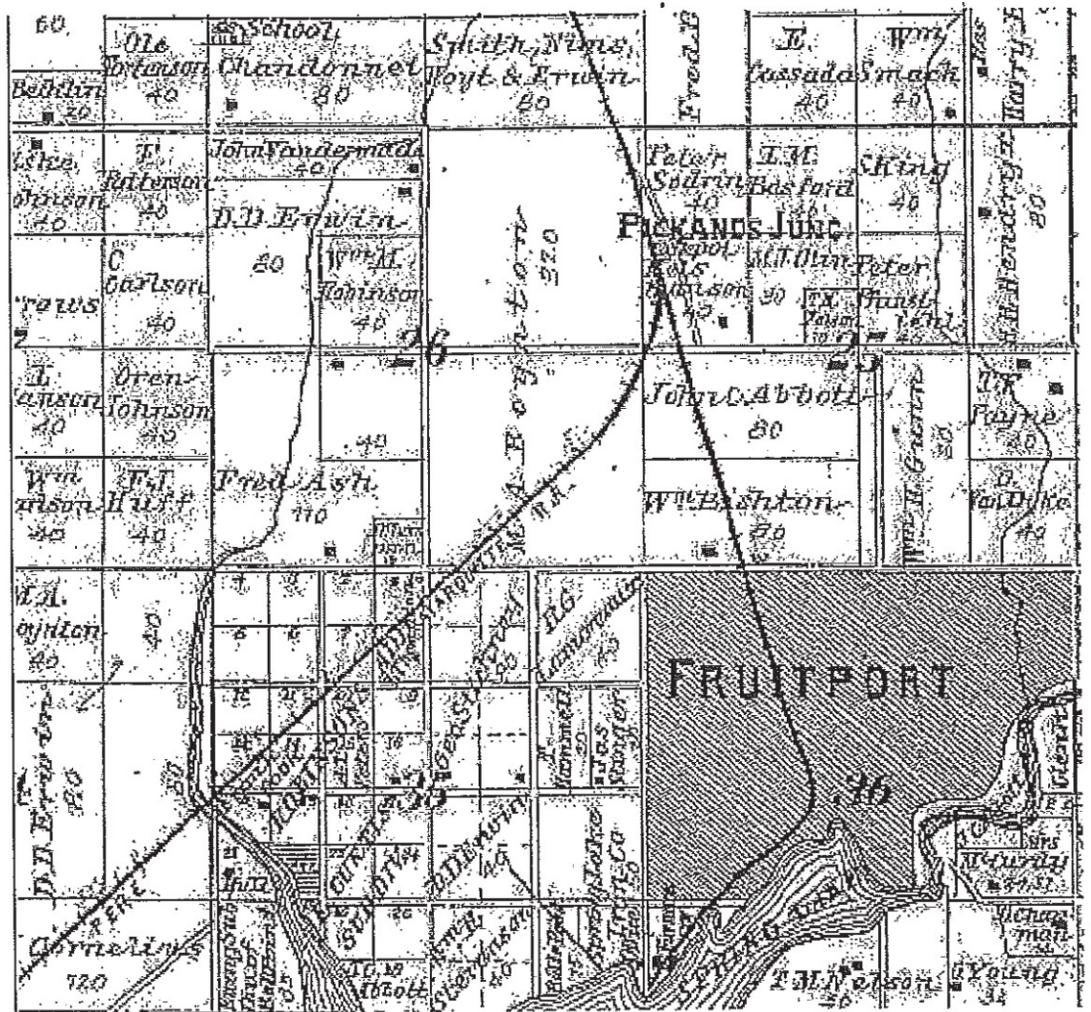
Pickands Junction did receive life after the Spring Lake Iron Company however, when it was used as a stop for the well known Grand Rapids, Grand Haven, and Muskegon Railway (GRGH&M). This electric Interurban rail ran from 1902 until 1928. Routes ran between Grand Rapids, Grand Haven and Muskegon, as well as Spring Lake.

The Interurban was a direct route from Grand Rapids to Fruitport's popular Pomona Pavillion. The Pavillion's dance hall and live entertainment on the shore of Spring Lake brought crowds from near and far.

The GRGH&M used Pickands Junction in route to Muskegon. At this location the tracks met and crossed the Pere Marquette Railroad line, utilizing a raised rail line to cross the tracks.

One can only imagine that Pickands Junction was a "busy" little junction in its heyday. It can still be found on maps as late as 1949, but little is known about the actual passenger depot building or other structures that may have been at the junction. No known photographs exist of Pickands Junction.

If anyone has any information regarding Pickands Junction, please contact the Fruitport Historical Society at [fruitporthistory@gmail.com](mailto:fruitporthistory@gmail.com), through our Facebook page, or by dropping information off at the Fruitport District Library.



1900 Fruitport Township Map showing Fruitport and Pickands Junction

that it was bent by them or used as a trail marker.

These 'myths' are fun to talk about and certainly give our little town some character. Whether or not they are true is hard to say. While we have the historical process of researching and presenting evidence, it will continue to be the mission of the Fruitport Historical Society to learn as much about the past as we can and preserve it for future generations. If you have another 'myth' you'd like mentioned in the future, contact the Fruitport Historical Society. We can be reached online at [www.fruitporthistory.com](http://www.fruitporthistory.com) and on Facebook.

Note from the Editor: I like believing the myth that the tree pointed the way for the Indians. Brian, are you sure about this?



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