

Timelines

A newsletter of the
Omena Historical Society
Omena, Michigan

Volume 3

Spring, 2007

No. 1

THE LURE OF THE WHISTLE

Steamships and Their Place in Omena History

Larry Bensley

It is interesting how memories of long ago are often triggered by the mere presence of a sound. The rat-a-tat of a woodpecker on a log, waves crashing against shore on a windy day, or the howl of a coyote at night can bring to mind a time, or an event associated with a place.

Significant to people of Omena in years past were the sounds that split the air as steamships rounded the point, bound for the dock of Omena. Two long blasts, according to Vin Moore, "were part greeting, part alert system that the boat was about to arrive and anybody who was waiting for shipments had better come to the bay." To one of the Bradleys, it meant everyone should drop everything and run.

The family would "pile into the old car and chug-chug-chug down to wait for the ship to tie up at the docks. Nearly everybody relied on the ships to bring something they needed." Another memory of the ship's arrival comes from Mary Louise Vail who remembers being permitted as a child to leave the church and race to the docks to greet the boat when the whistle sounded.



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Yet another cottager from Ingalls Bay, Helen Reed, revealed that when the Missouri arrived about noon in Omena it signaled the end of the church service. Whoever the minister, it was impossible for him to keep his congregation in the pews. It was not only the children who impatiently anticipated the sound of the whistle.

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OHS Timelines

is the official publication of the Omena Historical Society, authorized by its Board of Directors and published twice yearly.

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Timelines Mission Statement: Our purpose is to showcase Omena's past as we chronicle the present, with an understanding that today's news becomes tomorrow's history.

A Message from the President

This summer should prove to be an enjoyable and exciting time for the Omena Historical Society. The program committee, chaired by Kathy Miller, will be working on programs for your enjoyment at the annual meeting and the traditional "Walk Down Memory Lane," as well as two or more programs of historical interest to be held during the year. Jim Miller, new editor of Timelines, and his committee have worked diligently to produce this interesting and attractive newsletter for our members and others. Jim also continues to create the attractive note cards that have proven to be very popular and has worked on updating the website. Bruce Balas has offered to help organize and acquire books for the OHS library, and his efforts will be appreciated.

The Putnam-Cloud Tower House survived the winter and has been open on Saturdays. With Nana Kennedy's strong leadership in organizing docents, we have managed to have someone there for the hours it has been open. Thanks, Nana and docents, for volunteering your time. Visitors have been sparse but those who do stop in are overwhelmed by the progress. The exhibit cases are full, but we are always seeking additional artifacts that tell the history of this unique place. We are eager for you to see what has been added during the winter. In addition, Mary Stanton, with the assistance of Sally Viskochil and Marsha Buehler, is planning a special exhibit this summer of the paintings of Emily Nash Smith. An Opening Reception will be held on June 29, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

The Putnam-Cloud Tower House is not only a museum and the home of OHS, but also a venue for small group meetings. Since fall it has served this purpose with several organizations choosing to meet at the house. These include the Omena Women's Club which met for a lovely Christmas luncheon, the Board of Leelanau Community Township Foundation, a foundation that awarded a nice grant to help with the restoration, and Manitou Trail Questers, another organization that has contributed generously. In addition, during March, the Leelanau Chamber of Commerce held an open house at the wine tasting room across the street. Attendees were invited to stop in and visit the museum. In April, the Northwest Lower Michigan Network of Historical Society and Museums asked if OHS would host their meeting. Of course we quickly agreed. Several museums and historical societies were represented and we gave them a tour of the Putnam-Cloud Tower House followed by a light supper and meeting at Sunset Lodge. Dave and Linda Jacobs, owners of Sunset Lodge, graciously offered to open their recreation building for this event. Those who attended the above meetings thoroughly enjoyed their visit. Our new home is certainly beginning to be used and will surely become more popular as time passes.

Please make an effort to stop in this summer and look around. Suggestions you may have are welcome and of course, we are always looking for volunteers. If you are interested just contact any board member or myself. Before I close, I want to again thank all those who help keep OHS a vibrant and growing society through volunteering, contributing artifacts and donating financially. Also many thanks to the officers and board for their commitment to the Omena Historical Society.

Joey Bensley

During the era of the Lake Michigan steamship lines, from the late 1800s to the Great Depression, the Great Lakes served as a center of transportation for people and cargo. Tourists on their way to a summer vacation in Omena were brought into port along with cargo, including horses, a necessity to many of the farmers in the area. All were either unloaded at the Anderson dock, pilings of which are still visible today, the Resort, or at the Barth Docks. As the ships reversed their engines and headed away from the village, their holds were filled with crates of berries, fruit and potatoes, as well as lumber and cordwood. These products were destined for other Lake



The Puritan arrives in Omena

Michigan ports and the city of Chicago. Needless to say, passengers were also aboard as they returned to their places of employment or permanent residence.

According to Larry and Lucille Wakefield's book, *Sail and Rail*, as well as *Omena A Place In Time* by Amanda Holmes, several steamship companies provided passenger and cargo service to and from Omena. Without major roads and railways, the steamers were a crucial mode of transportation. Some of the steamers that plied the waters of Grand Traverse Bay and regularly docked in Omena were the Missouri, the Puritan and the Manitou. The latter was the pride of the Northern Michigan Steamship Line. Another smaller ship, the Chequamegon appeared on the scene in 1907.

The recently formed Traverse Bay Transportation Company had purchased it. About 101 feet long and with a capacity for approximately 500 passengers, it was considered one of the finest steamers of that size on the Lakes. The upper deck had a ladies' cabin fitted out in antique oak, as was the cabin for the men on the lower deck. A spacious dining saloon was available for passengers forward on the ship. The Chequamegon began a daily run from Traverse City at 8:00 a.m., with a stop in Omena as well as other ports, then returned to Traverse City at 7:00 in the evening. The Wakefields relate in *Sail and Rail*, that "her only serious mishap occurred near North-

port on August 16, 1909. Her cook, Bert Silver, lost his balance, fell overboard and drowned while heaving a bucket of slops into the water."

The completion of the Northport to Newaygo road (known today as M 22 or West Bay Shore Drive) and the arrival of train service in 1903 provided alternate ways to reach Omena. The need for steamships began to decline. By 1930, steamers and the sounds of their whistles had faded into Omena's history.

Today, it is hard to imagine a bustling waterfront in our peaceful Omena. Passengers would arrive with their many belongings and with young ones excitedly in tow. The horses and buggies would be waiting nearby, ready to whisk them off to one of the seven resorts or cottages along the shores of Omena. Farmers with their teams and wagons filled with produce for delivery to far off ports no doubt chatted with one another as they waited their turn to unload. What a traffic jam it must have been! Although relatively short, the era of the steamships was a glorious and exciting time for the tiny village of Omena.

Wouldn't it be fun to slip back in years and experience this amazing place as it was in the 1890s and early 1900s? Fortunately, by preserving and re-telling our history, we are afforded a brief glimpse into what must have been a magical time in Omena's past. And even today the sound of a ship's whistle might help us visualize the way it was on our beautiful bays long ago.

History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquity.
(Cicero, 106 BC-43AD)

BENSLEYS RECEIVE AWARD FROM OHS Joan Blount

On the evening of the annual Omena Holiday Serenade Concert in the Omena Presbyterian Church, Dale Blount honored Joan and Loren Bensley by presenting them with a beautifully framed photograph (by Jim Miller) of them seated in the restored surrey in the Putnam-Cloud Tower House. This was presented in recognition of the Bensleys' significant contributions to the OHS, as well as the community of Omena, and their tireless efforts over many years to preserve the historical record and "flavor" of our unique community. Omena would not be the quaint "place in time" it is today without their remarkable service. It is the expressed wish of the OHS Executive Board that this portrait of "Joey" and "Larry," with its commemorative plaque, be put on permanent display in the Putnam-Cloud Tower House.

A SCARY DAY WITH "MR. PEEPERS"

Trudy Baumberger Lewis and
Carol Baumberger Hagen
as told to Bob Lewis

Trudy's friend, Wally Cox, was born in Detroit in 1924. When Wally was 10, his family moved to Evanston, Illinois, where they were living when he and his sister returned to the Baumberger farm for summertime visits. When the family was together in Omena, they lived in the house on Omena Point Road now owned by Jan and Dusty McDonald.

Trudy remembers:

One summer day, when I was about four, two friends came out to the farm: Wally (eight) and his sister Eleanor (ten). I knew that Eleanor would want to play dolls, so I went instead with Wally to the barn. He wanted to hunt for the kittens born to our barn cat, up in the hay. We climbed the ladder into the haymow and looked up there for a while, but couldn't find any kittens. Then Wally pulled out a package of matches, and said, "Watch what I can do!" He lit a match, dropped it in the hay and then spit on it to put it out. This trick worked two or three times, but then catastrophe struck: his spit didn't put it out!! I can still picture the flash of fire reaching up to the ceiling of the barn. It is the stuff of nightmares for me to this day.

We ran for the chute down to the cow barn and didn't pause for the ladder, but just jumped ten feet down into the hay on the barn floor and ran! I ran into the house; my mother took one look at me and immediately knew something was dreadfully wrong. Wally didn't head for the house, but ran toward town instead.

Dad had to adapt the machine shed in the grove to make another barn for the cows. With the help of his neighbors, he built another haymow above it and added a lean-to horse stable on one side. He later moved a house from town to the farm to use for a shop and for storage – an old house that would otherwise have been torn down. He never built a new barn.

Carol remembers:

One year when we were kids, Eleanor and Wally Cox lived at our house all summer. Their mother, Eleanor Atkinson Cox, was from Omena and was a friend of our mother from Northport High School. She was a writer and paid our mother to care for "little Eleanor" and Wally while she went to Chicago. All I remember is that Eleanor

spent a lot of time sewing dresses by hand - I guess for Trudy. I thought they wouldn't hold together at all.

One day, a year after they had spent the summer with us, Eleanor and Wally were visiting again at our farm. It happened that one of our barn cats had new kittens and had hidden them in the haymow.

I was by the well when Trudy and Wally, who had been looking for the kittens, came running out of the barn screaming that it was on fire. When I looked inside, the whole haymow above the cow stables was ablaze. I tried to untie the horses, but they were pulling back so hard I couldn't untie them. One horse broke his rope and got out, but two horses were burned up in the fire, along with several young calves and, of course, the kittens. Luckily the cows were all out in the pasture. The fire truck came, as well as lots of people from the neighborhood and town, but there was nothing anyone could do except to try to keep the flames from spreading to the house and farm outbuildings. The house was undamaged, but the barn with its haymow just filled with the winter's worth of hay, were all lost in the fire. The buggy shed was so close

to the barn that it, too, burned.

NOTES OF INTEREST

Wally Cox: In Evanston, Wally was a neighbor of the young Marlon Brando, and the two boys began a life-long friendship. After college, Wally followed Brando into the entertainment industry. His popularity as "Mr. Peepers" on television led to a successful career in movies and television, winning him

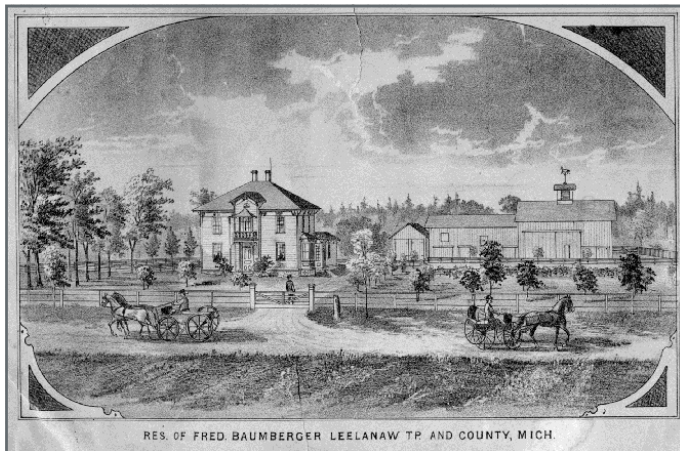


two Emmy awards, one as Best Comedian of 1953 and one as Best Male Star of a Regular Series in 1954.

He visited Omena at least once as an adult, in 1945, with his bride, Marilyn Gennaro. In 1961, Simon & Schuster published "My Life as a Small Boy" by Wally Cox, a memoir in which he devotes Chapter 8 to his memory of a special winter in Omena. A copy of his book is in the PCTH Library. He was just 49 years old when he died in 1973.

Eleanor Blake Atkinson Cox Pratt, Wally's mother, lived for a while in Omena and attended Northport High School. She became friendly there with Trudy's mother,

Daisy Nelson, who lived in Northport. She published at least three books under her pseudonym, Eleanor Blake: "The Jade Green Cats" (1931), "Seedtime and Harvest" (1935) and "Death Down East" (1942).



Trudy Lewis provided us with a copy of this fine old steel engraving of the Baumberger farm on Peterson Park Rd.

FROM OUR EDITOR

Jim Miller

If nothing else, I've learned that in a society filled with organizations that survive on the work of volunteers and the generosity of people, one must be careful where one sits at social functions. Case in point: I sat next to Bob Lewis one morning at an OBS (Omena Breakfast Society) breakfast. His easy approach disarmed me, and the next thing I knew, I was the new editor of Timelines. Bob Lewis, as previous editor, did a fine job getting Timelines off the ground. He and Trudy are a great team, and we continue to rely on The Bob & Trudy Lewis Team for their support and special talents.

As Timelines documents our past and reports on the present, we are in effect recording the history of Omena for future generations to enjoy. To do that, we will continue to make adjustments to Timelines. You will see changes in the layout and content. For example, in this issue we are showcasing a new front page banner. We may showcase others in the next couple of issues to offer a variety of possibilities before making a permanent decision. We will include more photographs, some of which are very old. What they lack in quality, they more than make up for in the story they tell about Omena's history.

Another new feature is Milestones, which will chronicle important recent events. You will find an Omena Trivia Contest with exciting prizes. You will also hear from our Genial Genealogist and, in forthcoming issues, will enjoy personality Profiles of outstanding Omenans.

We are soliciting input from our readers. We need your feedback and suggestions to keep Timelines interesting and informative, and we encourage you to send comments, stories, story ideas and other material relating to Omena's past to omenajim@yahoo.com. The subject line of your email must include the letters "OHS." All items submitted will be carefully considered. Please understand that accepted stories will be edited to meet our needs for the issues in which they will appear. If your item is substantially altered or combined with another, you will not have a "byline," but you will be credited for your contribution.

Thanks for your support. We are determined to meet (and hopefully exceed) your expectations.

OMENA HISTORICAL COLLECTION LIBRARY

Bruce Balas

The library at the Omena Historical Society is a lovely, sunny second floor room with a great view of Omena Bay. The Society would like to encourage all Omena residents and their visitors to make use of this new facility. The collection of books there is intended to serve two purposes. The first is to allow anyone interested in the area and its history to browse through the collection while enjoying the view. The second purpose is to provide historical references for more serious investigation and research. For the time being, it won't be a lending library, but rather a reading and research room.

Because of space limitations, the collection will presently be limited to materials that include something about the history of Omena and about well known people who are, in some way, associated with Omena's past. Examples might include Civil War General B. H. Grierson or television star Wally Cox, both of whom lived in Omena at some point in their lives. You may know of other Omena "notables." The collection will not be limited to books, but can include diaries, magazines, old editions of the Omena Traverse Yacht Club Breeze, etc.

At present, our collection is modest, but steadily growing. We hope to add to the collection this summer, as the membership returns to our fair shores and sets eye on those materials that would fit the description we are looking for. If you have such items and would be willing to donate them, please call Bruce Balas at 386-7935. He will be glad to collect the materials from you. Rest assured that your contribution will be catalogued and carefully preserved for the use of Omena residents forever. Also, your contribution will be recognized in an appropriate way in the library. With your help, we will have an excellent and useful historical collection library.

THE GENIAL GENEALOGIST

Dear G. G.: Annette Deibel claims she is related to three former Omena Postmasters. Is she just bragging? I'm skeptical.

Dear Skeptical: Believe it! Annette has a lot of relatives she can brag about, including the three postmasters whose names below are highlighted and preceded by asterisks.

Our brief search for Annette Anderson Deibel's Omena roots began with her great grandfather, *John Anderson's emigration from Sweden with his second wife in the 1860s. Left behind was his son by his first wife. This son, twelve year old *Andrew F. Anderson, made the journey to America alone in 1868, landing in New York, then traveling to relatives in Illinois where he remained for several years.

Young Maret Bahle, Annette's grandmother, was

became acquainted with the Bahle family, then came to Omena and built his own general store (the building now occupied by Tamarack Gallery). In the same year he married Esten and Maret Bahle's daughter, Maret.

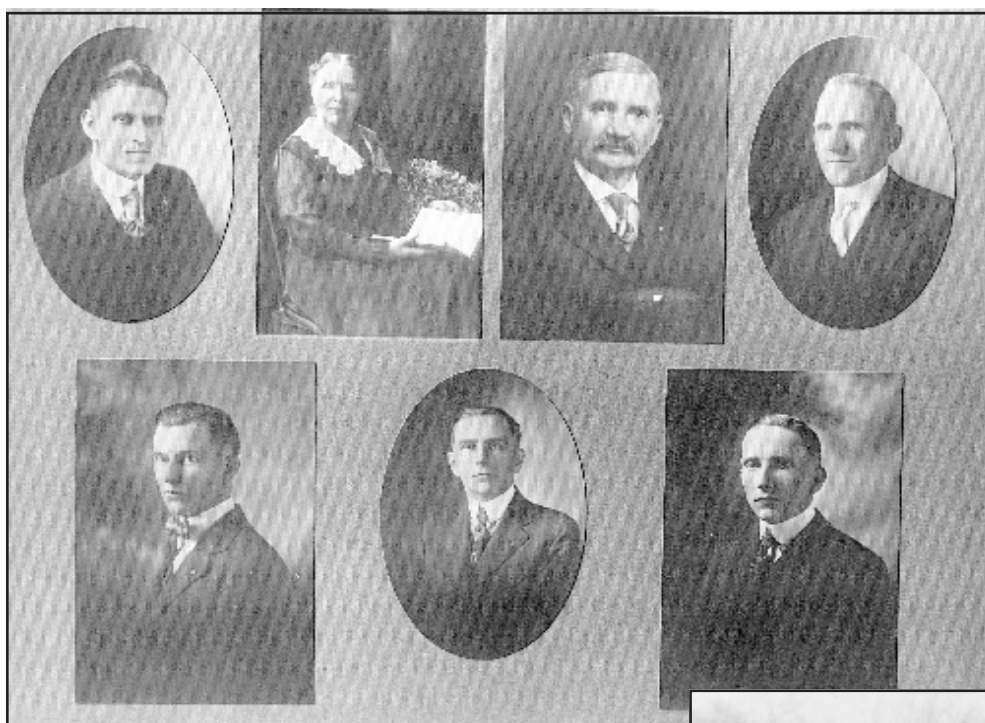
Andrew F. and Maret's five sons were Annette's father, Oscar, plus her uncles *Louis, George, Frank and Carl. For several years the family lived in an apartment above the store. All engaged in business in the area and had an important impact on the Omena community. Oscar and his wife, Florence, had two children, Annette and Andrew.

The long-ago joining of the Andersons and Bahles continues to provide this northern portion of the peninsula an abundance of outstanding citizens. Numbered among them are not only Omena's own Andersons and Deibels and the Suttons Bay Bahles, but Garthes, Bastas, Fredericksons, Hagens and various other Andersons and Bahles.

Disclaimer: The writer of this column is more "genial" than "genealogist." The column is not the result of painstaking research, but is information provided by

Portraits at left are of the A. F. Anderson family. Top row: Oscar, Maret, Andrew F. and Frank. Bottom row: George, Louis and Carl.

Pictured below: Annette Anderson Deibel and her mother, Florence Presley Anderson (1943)



thirteen years old in 1870, when she and her siblings sailed from Norway to America with their parents, Esten and Maret Bahle. Suttons Bay, Michigan became their new home.

By 1979, Annettes's grandfather, Andrew F. Anderson, had left Illinois to come to Leelanau County. His father, John, had established a mercantile business in Omena, but Andrew still did not join forces with his father.

He worked in Suttons Bay for four years, where he



A VISION FULFILLED

Ed Oberndorf

Vernon Keye, John Kimball, and Dan Bradley must be smiling from the place above. These gentlemen were part of the small nucleus of six Omena residents who met three times a year in the early eighties to launch the concept of a future Omena Historical Society. Little did they realize that someday OHS would develop into an organization of over 250 family members and ultimately would have its own headquarters in a 130 year old farmhouse located in historic downtown Omena.

On June 28, 1994, the first formal meeting was held at the Firehouse where OHS has conducted their meetings over the past twelve years. With the outstanding dedication of our Boards during those years, the Omena Historical Society has been most active with annual Down Memory Lane events. One of our major achievements was the publication of the award winning Omena A Place in Time, written by Amanda Holmes and edited by Dale and Joan Blount.

Lastly, with the unselfish and extraordinary support of the Omena community and its friends, the Putnam-Cloud Tower House evolved and is now our permanent home. It has been an exciting voyage for all of us, fulfilling a vision born twenty-five years ago!

WINDOWS PCTH

by Joan Blount

If you're wondering about the authenticity of our historical PCT House, you need go no farther than Larry and Joey Bensley and their determination to "do it right."

Faced with the problem of a few broken panes in the original windows, Larry and Joey combed the salvage yards in the area for discarded windows containing panes that would closely match the originals. Looking for the old wavy glass that is so characteristic of vintage homes, they finally tracked down enough usable panes and had them re-cut and inserted as needed.

They were also faced with the task of replacing entire windows missing from the north side of the house. These they finally found in a salvage yard in Kalamazoo!

To complete the authentic appearance, Larry and Joey salvaged original window latches from Les and Debbie Disch's house on Omena Heights. They were perfect for the PCTH window restoration! Thank you, Larry and Joey for the "upgrade" of Windows PCTH.

S.O.S.! SAVE OUR SURREY!

Joan Blount

In the last issue of Timelines you read Dale Blount's article about the "Surrey With the Fringe on Top," referring to Don Shapton's beautifully restored surrey currently residing in the main meeting room of the Putnam-Cloud-Tower House. You may recall that the surrey once transported Sunset Lodge guests from the docks on Omena Bay to the Lodge and is now on loan to OHS pending the Board's approval to purchase it. Many are hoping that one day this symbol of the period when Omena was being settled and evolving as a vibrant resort community will reside in the museum on a more permanent basis. Watch for a possible fundraiser in the future. If you would support such a program, please let your Board know. That "fine old girl" could well become a part of the Omena Historical Society's permanent collection!

MILESTONES

DECEASED: Lt. Colonel Alan W. Read; b. March 22, 1928 - d. November 28, 2006; U.S. Army, retired. After a twenty-two year Army career that began in 1945, in 1967 he found a second career with the Federal Aviation Agency, eventually becoming its Director of Security. He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Charlotte Smiley Read, two sons and a daughter. He was a long time summer resident of Omena.

DECEASED: Colonel Craig S. Smith; b. June 26, 1930 - d. January 26, 2007; U.S. Marine Corps, retired; During his twenty-eight year military career, he received several honors for valor in the Korean and Vietnam wars. His second career was as a consultant for eight years to two U.S. corporations in Saudi Arabia. He was divorced from Holly Renz Smith, with whom he had two sons and a daughter who survive him. After final retirement in 1991, he became a year-around resident of Omena, living in his long-time summer home on Omena Heights.

NEW BUSINESS OPENED: The Leelanau Wine Cellars Tasting Room; October 15, 2006 in the newly refurbished and expanded building formerly known as the Harbor Bar. Mike Jacobson is the owner; Tony Letch, manager.

AWARD BESTOWED by Michigan United Conservation Clubs: Exceptional Outdoor Woman of the Year, to Omena resident Kay Charter, founder and Executive Director of Saving Birds Through Habitat.

PLEASE BE OUR GUEST!

By Nana Kennedy

Fifteen newly trained docents are ready and eager to be your hosts at the Omena Historical Society's museum, located in the newly restored Putnam-Cloud Tower House. Since January, they have served one or two days a week, welcoming visitors and eager to share this amazing OHS "vision fulfilled."

Michael Biskupski
Joan Blount
Marsha Buehler
Be Fuertges
Hester Hull
Nana Kennedy
Robert Krist
Julie Krist

Gail Lang
Gertrude Lewis
Kathy Miller
Suzanne Mulligan
Judy Pohlod
Charlotte Read
Carol Towne

They want to explore with their visitors the rich history of the house and the people who lived in it, stories of their friends and neighbors and other early settlers. They would like to show you, your family and friends the fascinating artifacts generous friends have donated. Most of all, they hope everyone will enjoy this wonderful addition to our community.

The Putnam-Cloud Tower House will be open two afternoons a week, throughout May and June: Thursdays and Saturdays from 1:00 to 4:00. As response and attendance increases, they hope to add a third day in July and August – or more if necessary.

If you are interested in becoming a docent, please contact Nana Kennedy (386-7539), and she will be glad to include you in all docent fun and challenges. No experience needed – just your enthusiasm!

PCT HOUSE CARETAKER PROGRAM IS UP AND RUNNING

KEEP YOUR EYE OUT FOR YOUR NEXT
TIMELINES. THE NOVEMBER ISSUE WILL
BRING YOU AN UP-TO-DATE REPORT ON
THE CARETAKER PROGRAM INITIATED LAST
FALL TO PROVIDE FUNDS FOR
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Omena Historical Society

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they will understand the magic that is Omena.

