

**MICHIGAN MAPLE BLOCK COMPANY**

**1420 STANDISH AVENUE**

**PETOSKEY, MICHIGAN**

# The People and History of Michigan Maple Block Company

## 1420 Standish Ave/ Petoskey, Michigan

### A Historic Presence:

#### A look at Michigan Maple Block

As it approaches its 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Michigan Maple Block Co. stands tall, even in a forest of longtime Petoskey businesses.

When the company was founded in 1881, there was plenty of hardwood to be had close at hand for its various operations. Michigan Maple Block was one of a number of businesses taking advantage of the fall of the Bear River to cut its wood.

The actual date of founding may be a bit farther back than that, as in the confusing lines of corporate parentage, a link is made to 1878, when a Mr. Baker and a Mr. Forbes of Kalamazoo founded a woodenware factory in Petoskey. They sold their business, in 1881, to Leonard Bauerle.

There was a connection with Birkett Brothers, another woodenware firm, through a partnership with Bauerle in 1890 after the Bauerle factory burned. In 1892, Fred Bauerle formed a new partnership of Bull, Bauerle and Jones. In 1893, this firm leased power and space at Birkett Brothers factory.

Said the *Petoskey Record* on Jan. 17, 1894, "The enterprising firm of Bull, Bauerle & Jones who had built up quite an extensive business in the old Armstrong plant before it was sold, have now settled on the second floor of the Birkett Brothers factory and are starting up their lathes on orders which have accumulated." No concern in Northern Michigan ever did so much business on a limited capital as Bull, Bauerle & Jones did last year, and given two or three years' time, we expect to see it one of the most important enterprises in Emmet County.

In March of 1895, Bull, Bauerle & Jones added baseball bats to its list of products, and, month latter, wooden exercise bats. Business was so good that by October of 1897 they had moved to the former Snyder plant that had belonged to L.G. Grimes and was located on the Bear River, south of the city. They installed \$12,000 worth of machinery and an electric light plant.

Just before the turn of the century, Mr. Jones, who was certainly the silent partner in the firm, sold out his portion, and Bull & Bauerle continued on alone—briefly. Leonard Bauerle had died in 1897 of Bright's Disease, and in November of 1900, Henry Bull sold out to Bauerle's son Frank, who had had a wood turning business in Chicago. His machinery was bought to Petoskey to add to the stock, and firm was now called Bauerle Brothers

Only three years later, the Bauerle's sold out to Charles H. Broman (Bromann) of Chicago, however. Broman was a man with new ideas, and, with a salesman for the firm since about the turn of the century, Frederick J. Schmitt, he would revolutionize the business.

The firm now be called the Petoskey Block & Manufacturing Co., and would make butchers' blocks, cutting blocks, brush blocks (block handles for brushes), and so on.

From a 1981 company brochure:

"Near the turn of the century, Chicago businessmen Charles H. Broman and Frederick J. Schmitt became interested in the business as a result of their work with the meat-cutting industry.

"Broman and Schmitt had recognized the problems inherent in the then standard meat cutting block, a log section of southern hardwood cutting block could be the answer---

"The new end grain laminated hard maple butcher blocks were enormously successful, easily replacing the sycamore rounds, which tended to split, creating sanitation problems.

The company was incorporated with H. S. Hull as president, L.G. Grimes as vice president and Charles Broman as secretary. It soon built a new sawmill on the company's 13- acre site, investing in timberlands, as well as purchasing cut lumber from local sawmills. By 1903, Schmitt had become the company's majority stockholder.

As for the Bauerles, Fred went to Levering to make ties and shingles, and Frank returned to Chicago.

In May 1906, Petoskey Block was claiming to be the largest firm of its kind, taking production from rough logs to the finished product.

By 1907, Michigan Maple Block employed over 60 employees with a payroll of over \$41, 000.00 annually. They had become "the largest sectional block manufacturer in the United States", according to a 1906 catalog. The butcher block business grew steadily and by 1908 was the company's sole product. The

plant covered 25,000 square feet of floor space. The circulating air dry kilns could handle 15,000 feet of lumber each.

By 1908, Michigan Maple Block was producing butcher blocks, reversible blocks, bench tops, cutting benches, mallet and die blocks and custom cutting boards. Custom blocks were produced for shoe factories, glove factories, envelope factories, and shirt factories. Special boards were constructed for harness factories for cutting the heavy leather in harness collars. And cigar makers were using Michigan Maple Block butcher block for cutting boards.

The company's bright future was sidetracked by a 1908 fire that destroyed the plant. With the city's help, it worked out terms to rebuild. At this time, a shrewd Fred Schmitt accepted company stock in lieu of his back pay. In short order, he owned the company.

There was yet another fire in 1912, and the present building was erected.

In 1916, the name "Michigan Maple Block" was adopted, because "Everyone knew where Michigan was, and knew Michigan maple was good wood," according to Schmitt.

From 1916 to 1970, Schmitt obtained several patents for his "Butcher's Chopping Block" and for his technique of laminating, "Wood Welded." The patents Schmitt received in the early 1900's focused on "improvements in sectional wood blocks and cutting boards---to provide a sanitary, durable and efficient butcher's block intended to be used in the cutting up of meat, or other food products containing more or less moisture." He patented "a composite of built up block, made of a series of wooden segments securely fastened together to form a substantially homogenous mass." Subsequent refinements to this, the standard "Wood Welded" Michigan Maple Block, included a variety of tool hangers, disappearing drawers and scrapers---conveniences to the meat cutters.

With such a basic and needed product, and with materials readily available, even the Great Depression of the 1930's did not stop the manufacture of the company's products.

Already the largest industry of its kind in the Midwest, by the 1940' Michigan Maple Block butcher blocks were being used by the food industry and specialized cutting industries across the country. Kroger Grocery and Baking Company, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, the United States Army, and Myriad smaller customers were using the company's products.

The characteristics of laminated maple butcher blocks created unusual demands for their use. Not only is maple very hard, resilient and durable, it is non-conductor of electricity. In the 1940's the top secret Manhattan Project at University of Chicago, where the research for the first atomic bomb was conducted, used Michigan Maple Block Co. custom sized blocks as insulation. In the 1960's, the space industry turned to Michigan Maple Block Co. to fabricate three round blocks to press out the nose cone of the moon rocket. These block, 72" in diameter and 36" deep, weighed over two tons. They are believed to be the largest blocks ever fabricated in the United States. Despite its many uses the basic product has not changed in the 100 years of Michigan Maple Block Co. and its predecessors.

Improved technology, however, has resulted in significant changes in methods of lamination. The introduction of the electronic gluing machine has increased the speed of the laminating process and resulted in a stronger "weld". The factory has undergone a variety of changes. The old 500 h.p. steam engine, which used to be fed all the plant's waste wood to generate electricity, no longer drives the long line shaft to power the machinery. In 1963, the old WHS class Whitcomb gas locomotive, which had hauled loaded flat cars of logs from the railroad to the mills and later, cut timber to stock piles, was replaced, was replaced by a 25,000 pound capacity fork lift truck. The original dry kilns have been replaced with new electronically monitored forced draft kilns, capable of handling 270,000 feet of lumber at a time. Techniques which enhance production and reduce overhead, thus keeping a hold on rising costs, are instituted regularly. Now the wood waste and sawdust are used to heat the plant and dry the lumber

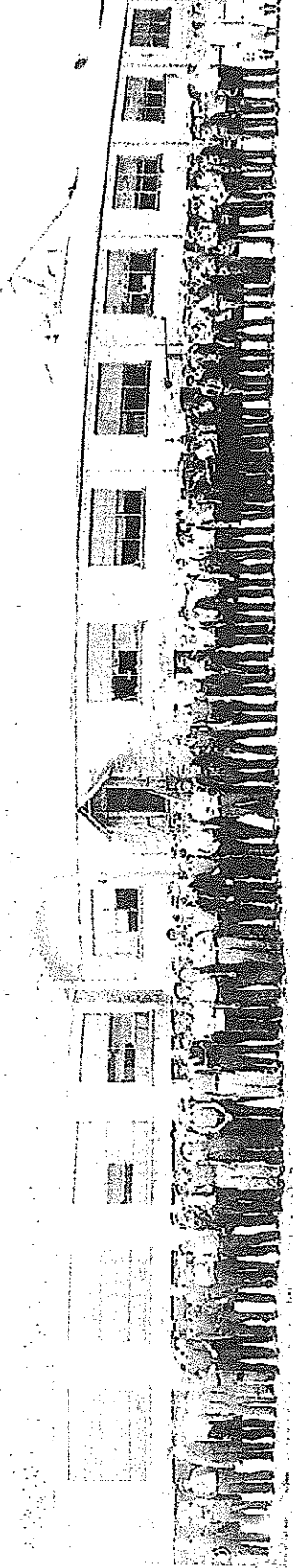
#### Sources:

Petoskey News Review, November 10, 2000

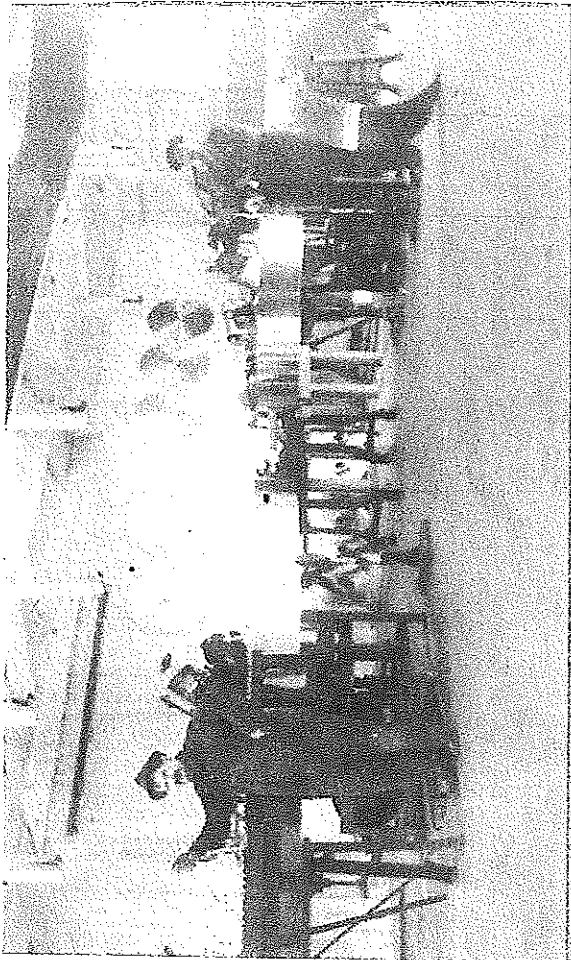
[Http:// www.mapleblock.com/history](http://www.mapleblock.com/history) Oct. 2012

[Http://www.gwood.us](http://www.gwood.us) Greenwood Cemetery Site. Oct. 2012

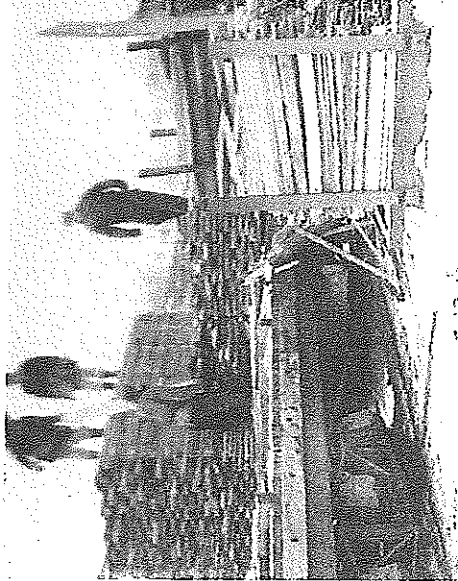
40 West Argosion - Supp. to Kelly News Review 8-11-2005



The Maple Block crew of 1932.



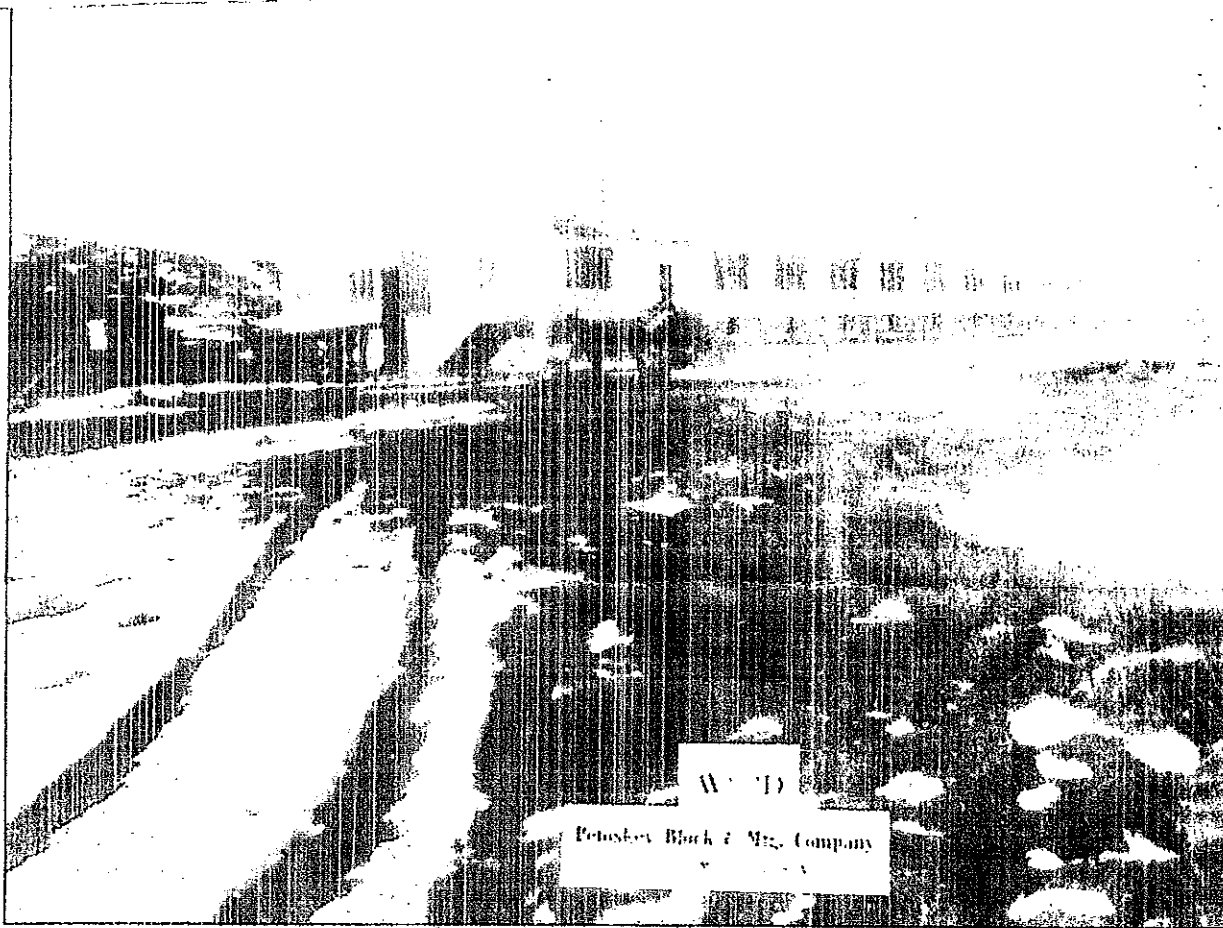
sharpening room. Notice the size of the band saw blade.



unload hard maple lumber off of a railroad car.

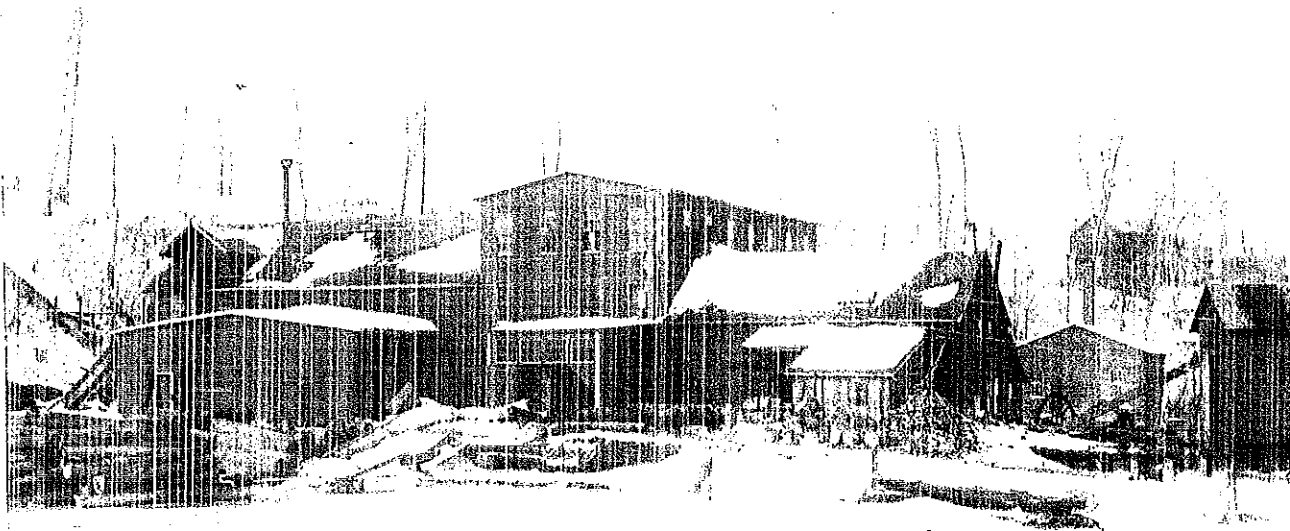
# MICHIGAN MAPLE BLOCK COMPANY

PETOSKEY, MICHIGAN 49770 U.S.A.



COURTESY PHOTO/LITTLE TRAVERSE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**This earlier version of the Michigan Maple Block Co. plant may have been one from just after the turn of the century. Considering the flammable nature of its product, it is no surprise that the company was plagued with fires in 1890, 1908 and 1912.**



Berkett Woodenware Factory (1890's), now the Michigan Maple Block Company.

Full name of FRANK BAUER Date of death Sept 17 1937

Place of death Clarks Ave Sex Male Color White  
 Single, married, widowed or divorced Married  
 If married, age at (first) marriage \_\_\_\_\_ years  
 Parent of 15 children, of whom 11 are living. Birthplace (State or country) Germany  
 Occupation Turner  
 Name of father \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace of father (State or country) Germany  
 Maiden name of mother \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace of mother (State or country) Germany  
 Proposed date of burial or reinterment Sept 18 1937  
 Proposed place of burial Greenwood  
 Signature of undertaker C. H. Henke Address of undertaker Pellissippi, Mich

**Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.**  
 I hereby certify that I attended deceased from Sept 17 to Sept 17  
 that I last saw him alive on Sept 17 that he died on Sept 17  
 about 3:00 o'clock P.M. and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the CAUSE OF DEATH was as hereunder written:  
 Disease causing death Myocardial Infarction  
 Immediate cause of death Coronary Thrombosis  
 Contributory causes or complications if any Hypertension  
 Post mortem None  
 In case of a violent death state (1) nature of injury and whether accidental, natural or homicidal (2) state, sex, age, stature of the body and the immediate cause of death (3) contributory causes or complications (4) temperature, A.S. whether autopsy was performed, etc.  
 Witness by hand this Sept 17 1937  
 Signature of physician J. J. ...  
 Health officer or coroner C. H. Henke

## Mrs. F. J. Schmitt, 90, Dies After Long Illness

Services will be held Saturday at 2 p.m. from the Stone Funeral Home for Mrs. Fred J. Schmitt, sr., 90, who died Thursday at Little Traverse Hospital after an illness of several years. Rev. T. F. Gabler will officiate.

The former Minnie Sturmer was born in Chicago on February 15, 1849. She was married to the late Fred J. Schmitt on April 28, 1888 in rites at Chicago and the couple moved to Petoskey in 1905. Mr. Schmitt was hired as a salesman for the Michigan Maple Block Co. and became owner several years later. He preceded her in death in 1946.

Mrs. Schmitt was a member of Beulah Chapter 83, Order of Eastern Star and Queen Esther Shrine of the White Shrine of Jerusalem. Survivors include a son, Arthur J. Schmitt of Milwaukee, Wis.; two daughters, Mrs. Lucy (Mildred) Sergent of Miami, Fla. and Mrs. Alfred (Beatrice) Dau of Petoskey; a niece, Mrs. Raymond F. (Edna) Neyman of Petoskey; nine grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren; two sons preceded her in death, Melville in 1907 and Fred, Jr. in 1957.

The family has suggested that those wishing to honor the memory of Mrs. Schmitt may do so in the form of a contribution to the Memorial Fund of Emmanuel United Church of Christ, Petoskey. The body is at the Stone Funeral Home, where friends may call.

Petoskey Eye News  
8-5-1960

## Former Resident Passes In Chicago

News of the death of Fred Bauerle in Chicago this morning was received today. Funeral services will be held at the Hauke Undertaking Parlors Sunday afternoon at 3:30 o'clock with Rev. D. S. Doan in charge. Private burial services will take place in Greenwood cemetery Monday.

Mr. Bauerle was an old-time resident of this city, coming here with the family many years ago. With his father and brothers he started the Hauke woodenware factory on Bear river, using part of the power furnished by the Hauke Milling Co. Later they moved to the old Porann factory where they continued to operate. The large home erected by the couple, Mr. Bauerle still stands on Clarion road. About 38 years ago Mr. Bauerle left here and for 14 years operated a similar business at Pellissippi, from there he went to Kalkaska where for the next 14 years he continued in the same business. For the past 11 years he with his brothers Frank, George and William, have operated a factory in Chicago.

In addition to the widow, formerly Miss Ann Petric whom he married here during his residence, he leaves three sisters and four brothers, many of whom will come here for the funeral services.

Petoskey Eye News  
8-26-1937

# Alfred J. Dau Rites Monday

Services for Alfred J. Dau, 80, a pioneer businessman here, who died early today at Lockwood-MacDonald Hospital after a long illness, will be at 11 a.m. Monday from the First Presbyterian Church. Burial will follow in Greenwood Cemetery.

Mr. Dau was chairman of the board of Michigan Maple Block Co., chairman of the board of Bally Block Co., Bally, Pa., a founder and developer of Burt Lake Shores and Indian Point and operated the Petoskey Housefurnished Co. from 1927 to 1964 when it was sold to Gately's.

He was a past Lieutenant governor and Petoskey club president of Kiwanis and was the founder of the Kiwanis White Elephant Sale, an annual charitable fund raising event started in the 1920's. He was a member of the Masons, Knights Templar, Elks, Presbyterian Church and was a charter member of the Petoskey Bay View Country Club.

Mr. Dau was born Oct. 25, 1888 in Sonderborg, Denmark, and left as a young man for England, then went to South Africa. In 1912 he came to New York, then moved to San Francisco, then Chicago and lived briefly in Milwaukee prior to moving here in 1925.

He was a salesman for Michigan Maple Block Co. when he lived in Chicago. He was married to Beatrice Schmitt April 23, 1926 in San Francisco.

In 1927 he purchased the controlling interest of John Shields and Watson Snyder in the Petoskey Housefurnishing Co. which was established in 1919. In 1938 the business outgrew the Mit-

chell-st. location and he built a new store on Bay View rd. and pioneered business moving from the downtown main street.

He sold the store in 1944 and devoted his time to the two block companies.

Surviving are his wife, Beatrice; three sons, John J. of Pottstown, Pa.; Alfred J. of Atherton, Calif.; Robert J. of Kenilworth, Ill.; a brother, Johan in Denmark; a sister, Mrs. Marie Brtk, in Denmark and seven grandchildren.

The body is at the Stone Funeral Home. The family has suggested that those wishing to honor the memory of Mr. Dau may make a contribution in his name to the Emmet Cancer Society.



Alfred J. Dau

PETOSKEY FOR NEWS 11-14-1968

## Beatrice Matilda Dau services set

A memorial service for former Petoskey resident Beatrice Matilda Dau, 96, will be held at 11:30 a.m. Tuesday, July 14, at the First Pres-

byterian Church in Petoskey. The Rev. Milton Walls will officiate. Mrs. Dau died April 17, 1992, in Portola Valley, Calif.

# Elizabeth Keely Dau

Elizabeth Keely Dau, wife of John J. Dau, died peacefully in her Rosedale Drive, Pottstown, Pa., home on July 31, 2006.

Born in 1919 in Reading, Pa., she was the daughter of William Brendlinger Keely and Edna Gabel Keely of Boyertown, Pa. Ancestors on both sides of her family were early founders of what is now eastern Berks and western Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Dau attended school in Boyertown, Pa., and graduated from the Mary Lyon School in Pottstown, Pa., and from Vassar College.

She was a veteran of World War II, serving in the United States Navy.

She assisted her father in the management of the family business, Colebrookdale Lumber Company, founded in the 1720s.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by her two daughters, Barbara Dau Southwell, wife of David P. Southwell, of Concord, Mass., and Ann Dau Conway, wife of Elliot S. Conway, of Locust Valley, N.Y.; and by five grandchildren and

two stepgrandchildren. She was predeceased by her parents and two sisters, Barbara Keely Pirson and Esther Keely Wimmer.

Mrs. Dau was a member of the Maestro's Circle of the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Brookside Country Club and the Bay View Association, where she maintained a summer residence for more than 40 years.

She was also a sustaining member of the Junior League of Reading, Pa.

She patronized many local and national charities, particularly educational institutions.

An active tennis player into her 70s, she also enjoyed reading and traveling which took her to many places in the world.

A funeral service and burial will be held on Thursday, Aug. 3, in Pennsylvania. A memorial service is planned for 11:45 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 8, at Evelyn Hall in Bay View.

In lieu of flowers, a contribution may be made to the Bay View Association Recreation Club, P.O. Box 1628, Bay View, Mich. 49770.

John J. "Jack" Dau, 85, businessman, sailor, chairman and majority shareholder of Bally Block Company and Michigan Maple Block Company, died on Dec. 28, 2011, after a lengthy fight against emphysema.

Born in the old Petoskey Hospital on Lower Lake



Street on April 17, 1926, he was the son of Alfred J.

Dau and Beatrice Schmitt Dau and the grandson of Frederick and Minnie Schmitt, longtime residents of Petoskey and prominent Petoskey businessmen.

Mr. Dau moved to Pennsylvania in 1950 but maintained a cottage in Bay View until his death. In Pennsylvania, he served on the boards of National Penn Bancshares, National Penn Investors Trust Company, and Boyertown Burial Casket Company, and chaired the board of the Wyndcroft School. Mr. Dau was an American decorative arts expert, a winning sailor and devoted family man.

Blessed with a sharp intellect and gregarious personality, Mr. Dau displayed a talent for business early in life. During the depth of the Depression when he was only 10 years old, he had amassed profits of more than \$200 from selling stray golf balls collected from his grandfather's Miami garden to golfers in Northern Michigan. He ran a pop stand out the back of his father's Mitchell Street House Furnishing Company and helped with deliveries — not a problem since he got his driver's license at age 14.

Mr. Dau enlisted in the Navy upon graduation from Petoskey High School in 1944 and became a gunner, operating a 40mm bow gun on a landing assault ship, LSM-288. Prior to deployment in the Pacific, Mr. Dau's right thumb was severed in a towing accident, and he was honorably discharged, receiving two medals.

After receiving a BS in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan in 1950, Mr. Dau assumed management of Bally Block Company. In



Dau

1962, he acquired Michigan Maple Block Company, creating the largest butcher block manufacturing company in the United States. More

than 60 years later, at the time of his death, Mr. Dau was still actively engaged in company and board affairs.

In the 1960s, Mr. Dau began a life-long love affair with yacht racing. For more than 40 years, his J109 Merengue or its predecessors sailed in nearly all the races organized by the Little Traverse Yacht Club, including the UGotta Regatta, frequently winning trophies. In July, Merengue placed first in its section of the Chicago to Mackinac Island Race. Mr. Dau gave crew positions to generations of young sailors. As a result, many of today's top sailors, both in Little Traverse Bay and other Lake Michigan ports, got their start on his boat. Mr. Dau believed in investing in the youth of Northern Michigan. Donations from him and his late wife saved Bay View's waterfront rec building from collapsing and allowed it to be restored and updated.

Mr. Dau's other great passion was antiques and design. His Pennsylvania home, completed in 1959, is an example of leading mid-century modern architecture, landscaping and interior design. Later, he turned his sharp eye toward the 18th and 19th centuries and became an expert on American decorative arts from that era.

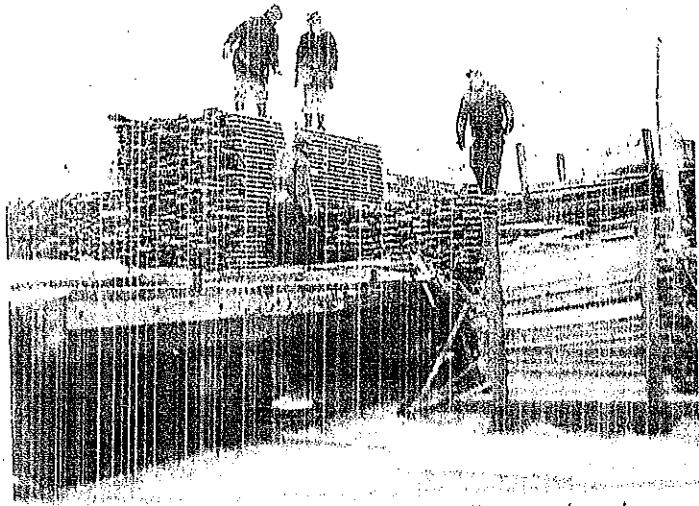
Mr. Dau was predeceased by his wife of 54 years, the former Elizabeth Keely, of Boyertown, Penn., and is survived by his daughters, Barbara Southwell of Concord, Mass., and Ann Conway of Locust Valley, N.Y.; and by five grandchildren and two stepgrandchildren.

A memorial service took place on Saturday, Dec. 31, in Pennsylvania, and one is planned for Bay View during summer 2012.

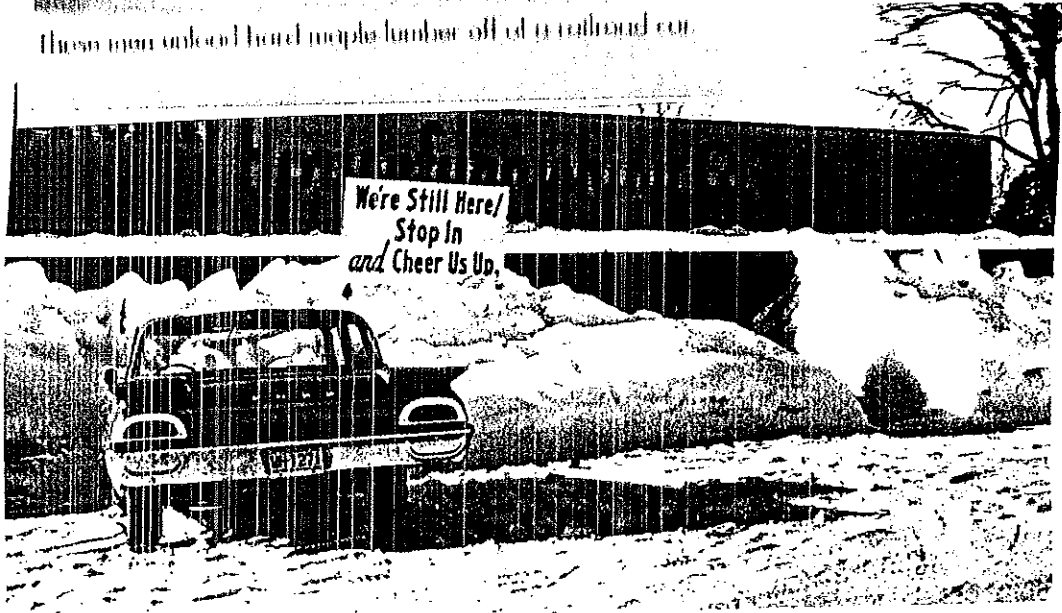
In lieu of flowers, the family asks donations be made to Bay View Association.

WED. 1-4-2012





These men unload and re-load lumber off of a railroad car.



After a long blizzard, this business still has a sense of humor, March 1962.

# After 60 years

## Anne Shepherd, 78, retires from career as Michigan Maple Block bookkeeper

Ryan Bentley

(231) 439-9342 - rbentley@petoskeynews.com

When asked what Anne Shepherd has brought to her 60-year career at Michigan Maple block, company general manager Fred Polhemus describes her as a dedicated employee, one who's often been the first to show up for work at the Petoskey plant in the morning.

"She's just been a special person," he said.

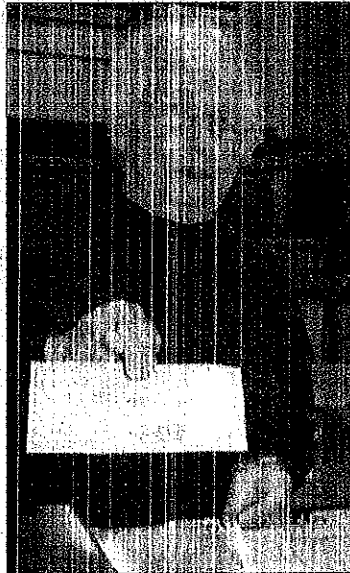
Polhemus noted that retiring bookkeeping and payroll employee Shepherd is unique, too, in a statistical sense.

Based on various workforce statistics he retrieved and extrapolated, Polhemus noted that about 5 million Americans retire yearly.

About 200,000 of them are 78 — Shepherd's age — or older. But only about five of those retirees have spent as long as Shepherd has in the same company and in the same job — making Shepherd approximately one in 1 million.

Past and present co-workers, family and friends joined Shepherd Friday at the wood products company to celebrate her retirement.

"I never thought I'd be in this



RYAN BENTLEY/NEWS-REVIEW

### Retiring Michigan Maple

Block bookkeeping and payroll staff member Anne Shepherd displays a check-writing device that the Petoskey company used to produce paychecks decades ago.

place this long," Shepherd said. "But they've been good years.

"(The company) has been aw-

fully good to me."

For years, Shepherd couldn't make up her mind when to wind down her career.

"I was always satisfied here, so why retire?" she said.

After her husband, Edward, died a couple of years ago, Shepherd said she found the social contacts at work to be helpful for her.

But now, Shepherd said she's ready to begin spending more time with family members.

Polhemus and Shepherd noted that bookkeeping and payroll work have gone through considerable technological change during Shepherd's tenure.

In the 1950s, the company paid its employees in cash. In more recent decades the process of generating paychecks, like many other tasks involved in Shepherd's job, have become computerized.

Shepherd, a Harbor Springs resident, has three children and six grandchildren.

Along with seeing more of her family, Shepherd plans to spend more time on hobbies such as travel in her retirement.

Follow @ryan\_bentley on Twitter.