

THE HISTORY OF NEWAYGO AND THE OLD DAM INN

First, the basics: The Old Dam Inn is located in the Michigan county named “Newaygo” and in a township called “Brooks” and it is just a few miles north of a city that is also called Newaygo. The exact coordinates of The Inn are shown below:

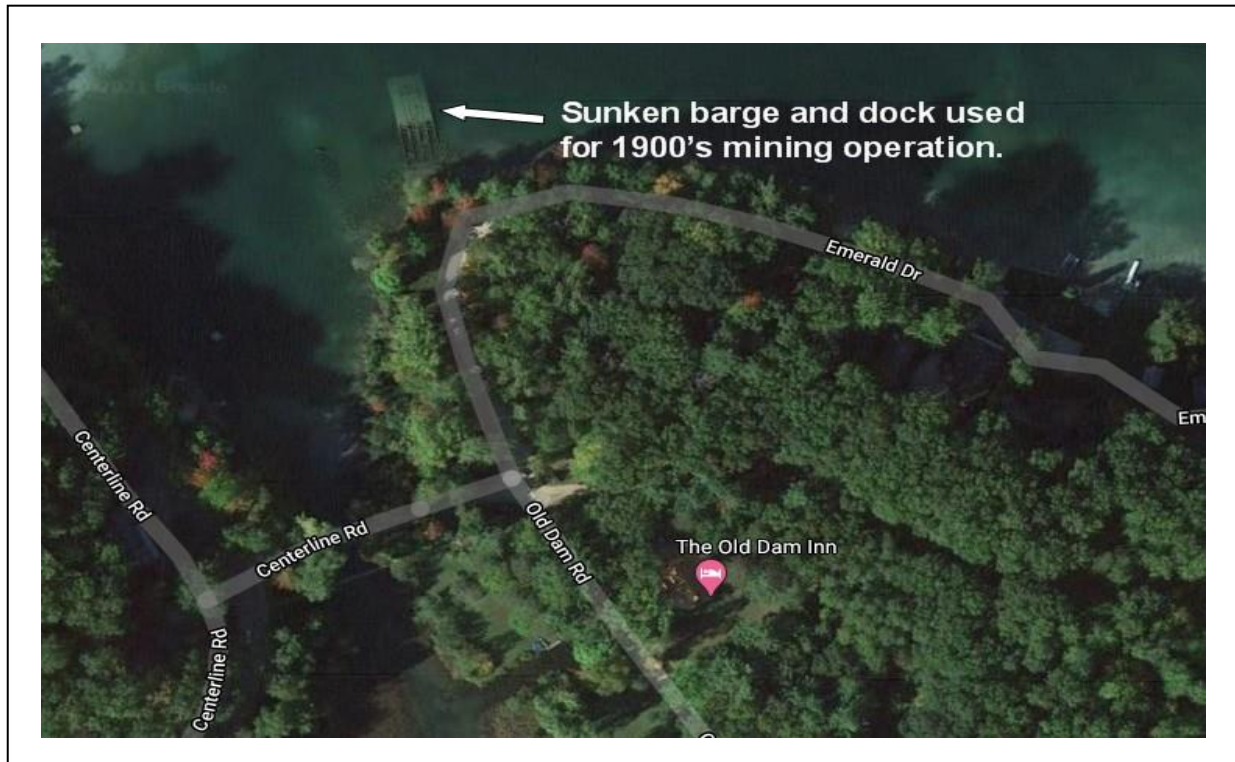


There is some debate about the origin of the word Newaygo, but the most commonly accepted explanation is that it comes from the Native American Chief Nuwagon, a signatory of the [Treaty of Saginaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Saginaw) in 1819 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newaygo, Michigan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newaygo,_Michigan). Others think it comes from the phrase “new way to go.”

About 1,900 people live in the City of Newaygo, which sits on the shores of the Muskegon River <http://www.newaygocity.org/index.php/en/>. In Brooks Township <http://www.brookstownship.org/>, which kind of straddles the east side of the city on the north and south, there are about 3,900 people. Newaygo County has about 48,000 people <http://www.countyofnewaygo.com/>, so you can tell that we are in an area with a lot of space - only about 56 people per square mile. In comparison, Chicago has about 11,538 people per square mile, which means here in Newaygo, we are less dense (just kidding!)

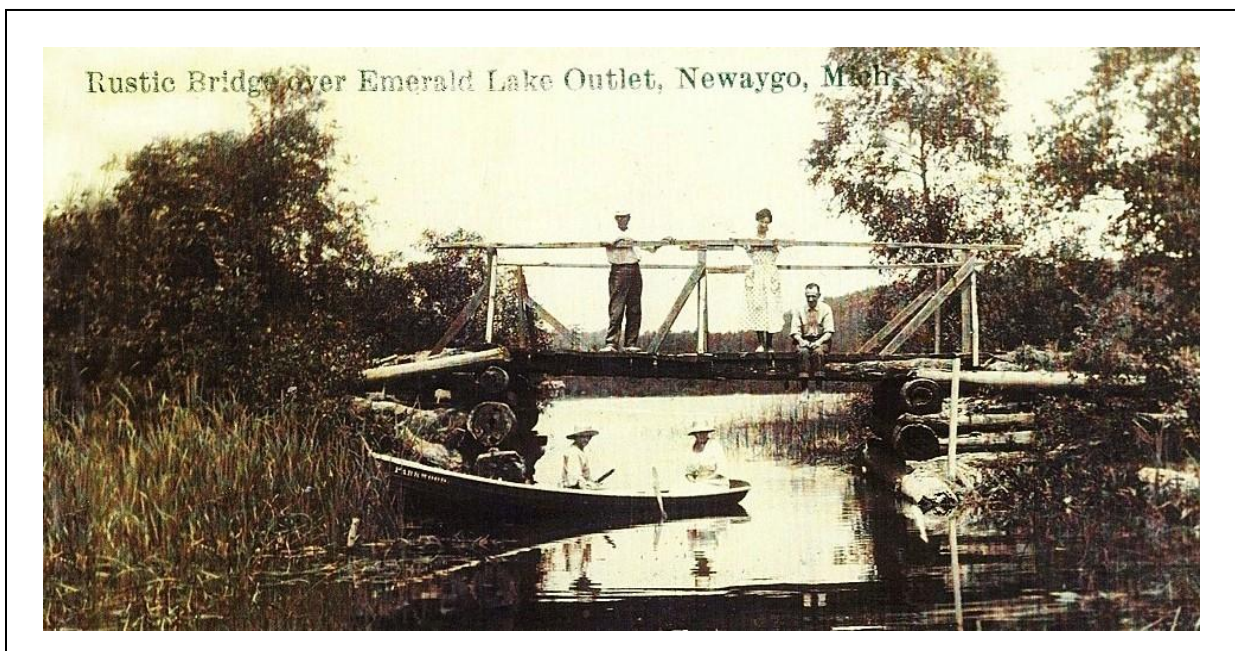
The Newaygo area is also home to many Amish families that manage farms and other local businesses like sawmills, grocery stores and tack shops. If you travel west of The Inn, toward the City of Fremont (Baby Food Capital of the World and headquarters of the Gerber Baby Food Company), you may see horse-drawn Amish buggies. Please be respectful of these good neighbors and slow down when passing them in your “horseless” carriages.

Old Dam Road itself was once a railroad track on which locomotives transported the marl from the lake to the City of Newaygo, where the Portland Cement factory sat on the Muskegon River. Just a few hundred feet from The Old Dam Inn you can see the old dock and sunken barge that were used by the “Mud Hen” locomotive to haul the marl to Old Dam Road.



And when you cross the Muskegon River bridge just north of the City of Newaygo you will see a chute on the west side of the bridge where water is spewing out – this is the Penoyer Creek’s discharge into the river and is the site of the former cement factory.

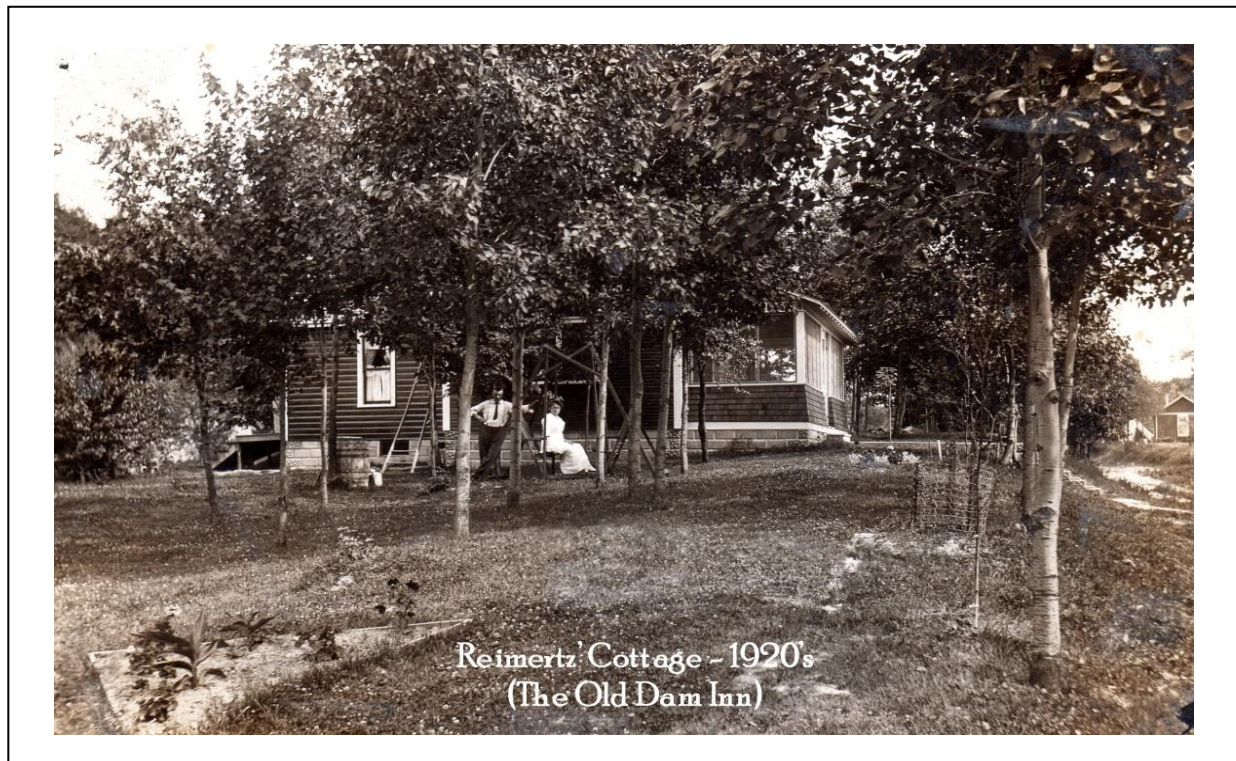
Across the road from the sunken barge is the site of the former Parkwood Hotel, which housed the workers that mined the marl for the Portland Cement Company. Walking along Emerald Lake Drive you can still see the old concrete steps on the right, which lead to where the hotel was once located. Shown below is a photograph of the old Penoyer Creek/Emerald Lake Bridge, with some of guests that were staying at the hotel over 100 years ago.



HISTORY OF THE OLD DAM INN

The Old Dam Inn was a private home when it was built around 1915 - a few years after the white pine logging and the cement businesses ceased production. As with many areas of Michigan, pine lumbering in Newaygo was a main source of building materials for the big cities, including Chicago and Emerald Lake was a major source of the “marl” used for making Portland cement. For more than you ever wanted to know about marl, see this 1905 State of Michigan report: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/Vol_VIII_Part3_Aopt_309825_7.pdf

As far as we can determine, the house was originally owned by the Reimert family and then sold in 1943 to the Crismyers and then it was owned by the well-known aviator and photo-journalist, Dick Black and his family from the 1950's until the current owners purchased it in 2009. Dick Black had a storied career, which included flying cargo to Cuba after World War II, rescuing stranded explorers in northern Ontario and joining Mort Neff on the Michigan Outdoors TV show from the 1950's to the 1970's. During these times Black became a good friend of the famous novelist Ernest Hemingway and once actually saved the author's life (as told to us by Dick Black's granddaughter). Many of his maps and aeronautical artifacts are carefully preserved in the Map Room at The Old Dam Inn.



Penoyer Creek is named after the Penoyer brothers, from Chicago, who bought a great deal of land in this area in the 1830's and then set-up a sawmill on the creek near the Muskegon River. They purchased the lands for about \$1.25 per acre.

The Penoyer Creek is connected to four lakes (Emerald and Sylvan to the east and Pickerel and Kimball to the west). Where The Inn is located is known as the “Penoyer Creek Channel.” This waterway leads to the Muskegon River and the City of Newaygo. During the lumbering era the creek was tried as a route to feed logs down to the river, but with little success. Just off-shore, at the downstream edge of The Old Dam Inn property line there is still a “dead-head” log sitting in the shallow water as evidence of this effort.