

WHAT A WONDERFUL WELTER of household detail in this 1950 photograph! Mother in a huge Hoover apron, a “coverall” that cries out for rickrack trim. She’s ready for the camera, hair coiled into the glamorous, movie-star rolls of her younger days. That watch: the tiny, dainty Longines model, held in place by a narrow black elastic band—the good watch that every girl used to get for confirmation or high-school graduation. It’s special.

So’s dinner. A bouquet of flowers from the backyard; two sets of fancy salt and pepper shakers with silver-plated tops; the good china, with a real gravy boat; a nice, well-ironed bridge cloth laid edgewise on the table. I’d be willing to bet that the tabletop and the pads of plastic upholstery on the chairs are red. Modern dinette sets with chairs of chromed tubing usually came with plastic cushions in “Canasta Red,” in honor of the latest fad in card games.

Red was a welcome change from the drab khakis of the war years. The stripes on the cloth are probably red, too, along with the flowers on the tumblers at each place. Sometimes, the gas station gave glasses like those away with a purchase; Welch’s grape jelly, cheese spread, and

even cottage cheese came in brightly decorated glasses, too. These are filled with milk, and everybody seems to have it: Mom, who hasn’t had a minute to sit down yet, Sis, Dad, and the boys. Ads in the ’50s called them that, as if they were our national family.

It’s probably spring or early summer. Short sleeves are the order of the day. Nobody’s visibly wilting from the heat, even in the kitchen, and the flowers and the peas on the plates are further signs of the season. The mother-in-law’s tongue on the what-not cabinet behind the table is flourishing. Everyone is tucking into dinner with a hearty appetite. Mashed potatoes, peas, meat. Milk. Coffee for six (five plus somebody we can’t see sitting to the right), even though the main course is still on the table. Is this an ethnic thing? A rural one? Hot coffee and all that milk. Warm weather. Maybe the radio in the background is playing softly. No talking at this table, but a happy, contented-looking family. And a very nice dinner indeed.

—KARAL ANN MARLING

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*The Koenig family at dinner, 1950*





DENIS GARDNER PHOTOGRAPHS

*Fillmore County's Bernard H. Pietenpol, his workshop and garage, and a Sky Scout, now in the Fillmore County Historical Center.*



MINNESOTA CLAIMS HISTORY'S most famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh. It can also claim aviation pioneer Bernard H. Pietenpol, born in 1901 in Spring Valley, a small community in southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County. Like many who matured during the formative years of powered flight, Pietenpol was determined to take wing. In 1921 he erected a small, wood-frame workshop and garage just off Highway 5 in the heart of Cherry Grove, a hamlet about a dozen miles southeast of his birthplace. Here he would design and construct airplanes over the next several decades.

Pietenpol's first machine was ready for flight in 1923. Since aircraft engines were costly, he adapted the less-expensive Ford Model T motor for his biplane. Having little flight training, Pietenpol proved *almost* a natural pilot. Unfortunately, he could never land without damaging his airplane. After destroying the

machine altogether, he opted for further training.

By 1929 Pietenpol had built a second biplane and a monoplane, a two-seater with a Ford Model A engine he christened the "Air Camper." In 1930, after reading in *Modern Mechanics and Inventions* that automobile engines would not work in airplanes, Pietenpol and a friend flew two Air Campers from Cherry Grove to the Twin Cities. The magazine's editor was thrilled and reported the story to his readers. Suddenly famous, Pietenpol was inundated with requests for plans of the plane. With help from a neighbor, he produced drawings costing \$7.50 a set. Pietenpol later designed a single-seat aircraft with a Ford Model T motor that he named the "Sky Scout." It became immensely popular as well.

In 1984, after designing and building more than 20 airplanes in his workshop, the "father of the

homebuilt aircraft movement in the United States" died. His memory endures through the International Pietenpol Association and the many Pietenpol airplanes found at aircraft shows across the country. His legacy also survives in his Cherry Grove workshop, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

—DENIS GARDNER

*Denis Gardner, a frequent contributor to this feature, is author of the newly published Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places.*

Sources: Robert M. Frame III, "Pietenpol, Bernard H., Workshop and Garage," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Feb. 1981, State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society; Noel E. Allard and Gerald N. Sandvick, *Minnesota Aviation History, 1857-1945* (Chaska, MN: MAHB Publishing, 1993), 115-16; Bernard H. Pietenpol, "Plans for the Pietenpol Sky Scout," *Modern Mechanics and Inventions*, Apr. 1931, p. 124.



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