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COGHLIN GIFT INSURES THAT  
THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE GARDEN WILL GROW

MAR. 25, 2011 --The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society has announced receiving a major gift from Saugatuck residents Thelma and the late Fitz Coghlin. Already well-known for generously investing in their community, the Coghlin's have donated \$150,000 in support of the Society's project to create themed gardens and a "Back-In-Time Pathway" at its Old School House History Center in downtown Douglas. Their gift enhances \$22,000 in recent private donations from area citizens and completes fulfillment of fund-matching requirements for the Society to access a \$25,000 federal Museums for America grant, providing a total funding of \$197,000 for the garden project.

According to Historical Society President Harold Thieda, the new donations and grant will enable work to proceed immediately toward completion of plans to develop the 1.16-acre grounds surrounding the Old School House, which were publicly announced last April and begun the following summer. "The garden project promises an exciting new addition to our area's already remarkable inventory of cultural and educational assets," Thieda said. "We are grateful and fortunate to live in an extraordinary place where so many dedicated citizens step up to become stakeholders in insuring the community's quality of life now and into the future."

The garden project consists of creating a series of topical "learning areas" that explore various facets of our area's history, featuring a peach orchard, a Mt. Baldhead viewing station, children's garden and schoolyard games, and a rhododendron garden, among others. The crown jewel will be a permanent exhibit, "Rowing Them Home: Shipwrecks and Lifesaving on the Great Lakes," which will showcase the Society's rare restored Francis Lifesaving Boat while giving visitors a unique window into Lake Michigan maritime history and the unsung heroes who rescued sailors from shipwrecks.

The Society acquired the Old School House in 2006 with a major gift from the Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation along with matching private gifts and the generosity of Nancy Budd. After extensive interior renovation and as a complement to the well-established Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum in Saugatuck, the building was re-opened in 2010 as The Old School House History Center. Now the site of regular Society monthly meetings, the summer "Tuesday Talks" series, and special events, it houses the Society's archives, Technology Center, offices, meeting spaces, and local history and genealogy research facilities, as well as a gallery for the display of artworks from the Society's collection and a planned community Visitor Center and gift shop.

Built in 1866, The Old School House is listed on both the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Places. It is one of the oldest multi-classroom school buildings in Michigan and considered one of the finest examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century school architecture in America.

Funded by donations and grants, the Society has been able to make a nearly \$1.5 million investment in the Old School House, giving it new life as a community resource where children and adults alike can explore the area's history, culture, ecology and architecture. The Center will expand our area's educational infrastructure with informative programs, recreational activities, special events and access to the Historical Society's unique archive of local artifacts, photos, records and newspapers. As such, the Center also is expected to enhance the area's destination appeal in the growing heritage tourism industry.

The Society will honor the Coghlin's and acknowledge their gifts to the Old School House Center as part of the Society's community wide 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration to be held at the Center on Sunday, May 15. For more information about that event, about becoming a member of the Society or about the Old School House History Center and the Garden Project, visit [www.sdhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sdhistoricalsociety.org) or phone (269) 857-5751.

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