



Information Contacts:

Jim Schmiechen
(269) 857-5605
james.schmiechen@gmail.com

John Peters
(269) 857-2967
jppubrel@aol.com

**NEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM EXHIBIT
CELEBRATES AREA'S DUNELAND TREASURE**

MAY 17, 2013 -- This year's all-new exhibition at the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society Museum, opening for the season on Memorial Day weekend, Sunday, May 26, Noon to 4pm, offers a multifaceted look at the Kalamazoo River duneland and its archeological, historical, environmental, social and recreational significance, in contrasting tales of change and permanence. The Museum occupies the historic Saugatuck Pumphouse at 735 Park Street, in a scenic garden setting along the west shore of the Kalamazoo River at Mt. Baldhead Park, a short walk north from the Saugatuck Chain Ferry landing. Admission and nearby parking are free.

Titled "Dunelands: Footprints on the Sand", the exhibition will celebrate our piece of the world's largest freshwater dunes system in the world, according to Museum Curator Dr. James Schmiechen. "It's a marvelous collaboration of restless beaches, rolling forests and ravines, hidden streams, ponds and marshland habitats," he says. "This exhibition tells of how they came to be, how human activity has changed them and how people have changed in response to them, while giving special attention to historic sites scattered across the area and how history has set the stage for today's vibrant local community."

Researched and written by Schmiechen, and designed by Society volunteers Judy Hillman and Sally Winthers, the exhibition pulls together an array of photographs, artifacts and stories, set before a sweeping 50 x 10ft. mural dunescape captured by local photographer James Cook, intended to visually transport the viewer outdoors.

Informative wall panels weave text and graphics together to view the dunes from three different perspectives: *The Preservationist's Notebook* surveys 12 nearby "critical dune" sites with an eye toward "best use" protection of the natural environment while allowing appropriate public access; *The Photographer's Notebook* presents aerial views of local shoreline geography by Chicago photographer Bill Werme, documenting changes resulting from both natural and human causes; *The Archeologist & Historian's Notebook*, recalls the late 1800s "lumber rush" that disregarded nature, creating millionaires but sentencing the village of Singapore to its ultimate burial by shifting dunes.

Another series of wall panels presents a compilation of photos taken along dune trails, accompanied by hiker quotes revealing personal impressions and expressing thoughts inspired by their duneland experiences.

Centerpiece of the exhibition is a simulated "Dunelands Trail", marked by trail-stop signposts showing and describing a variety of sites encountered on an imagined hike through the dunes, including: Dune

Rides; Goshorn Lake & Dune; New Harbor & Basin; Old Harbor & Lighthouse; Fishtown; Oxbow Art School & Lagoon; Pier Cove; The Oval; Mt. Baldhead; and Lake Shore Chapel.

Hovering above it all is "Beachcomber's Folly" a whimsical-while-thought-provoking hanging sculpture by Saugatuck artist Ted Reyda. The colorful composition was meticulously assembled from thousands of items that were washed up on local beaches and collected by Reyda over more than 20 years. Below, Reyda transforms other types of manmade flotsam into spherical standing artworks. In their own playful way, all serve to raise serious questions about human carelessness regarding our environment and disregard for protecting nature's gifts. Museum guests will find themselves silently drawn to interact with Reyda's art by identifying its components...sometimes obvious, sometimes not.

Augmenting the Historical Society's exhibits is a video display created by the Saugatuck High School students of art teacher Christa Wise, inspired by the work of British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy, known for combining natural materials such as twigs, stone, thorns, mud and pinecones into temporary *in-situ* constructions that weather the elements and return to nature.

After watching "Rivers and Tides", a 2001 documentary featuring Goldsworthy at work, the class set out to Oval Beach and the dunes to create site-specific sculpture and land-art using whatever they found. Their short video, in the style of "Rivers and Tides", documents the students' efforts to follow in Goldsworthy's footsteps, in the process discovering (in the words of one student) "how difficult it is to even begin to approach the quality of his work".

--- Award-Winning Books Highlighted ---

Continuing the Society's tradition of offering books created to accompany exhibits past and present, the Museum's south gallery gift shop this year highlights two of its most popular award winners -- *The Village Table: A Delicious History of Food in the Saugatuck-Douglas Area*; and *Off The Record...the unpublished photographs of Bill Simmons*.

The Village Table, authored by Society volunteers Kit Lane and Stacy Honson with graphic design by Sally Winthers, won a 2012 Leadership In History Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). It celebrates the Saugatuck-Douglas area by exploring its food: what the settlers found, what was fished, what was gathered and grown, what each wave of newcomers brought, what the restaurants served to visitors, and what we eat today. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the food scene and concludes with a selection of menus and recipes that favor locally-available ingredients.

Cues for the recipes came from history, and some less-palatable historical dishes, like the infamously dry Johnnycake (a cornmeal flatbread), are served up with a modern twist such as delicious cornbread French toast. Local restaurants and businesses contributed the recipes in chapter seven "On the Menu." The final chapter "Cooking Local" presents a wide range of family favorites from Historical Society members. This 144-page book, richly illustrated in color with lay-flat binding, also features separate historical and culinary indexes.

Off The Record, written by James Schmiechen with help from Society volunteers Kit Lane and Jack Sheridan, and designed by Ken Carls, received a Historical Society of Michigan Award of Merit in 2001. It offers a fascinating pictorial history of Saugatuck in the '40s and '50s seen through the eyes and camera of an insatiable photographer whose skills ran the gamut from art photography to photojournalism. Simmons (1891-1966), worked for The Chicago Evening Post and Time-Life, Inc., later was editor of The Commercial Record for 10 years in mid-century. He left a collection of some 3000 unpublished photos, mostly negatives, shot in and around Saugatuck from 1941 to 1961.

SDHS received the long-lost collection in 1998, and discovered that its images witness the changing geography of the waterfront and village streetscape while connecting us with life in the mid-1900s in an unusual way. Unlike most photographers, Simmons was not interested in getting people to pose,

preferring to catch them off-guard, being themselves, in conversation, at play, absorbed in thought or responding to events around them. As a result, his work shows how ordinary people interacted with each other, the village they lived in and the land they lived on.

The 157 photos selected for this book represent many hours of research and writing by many SDHS volunteers, as well as the townspeople they interviewed, plus extensive efforts in printing old negatives, digitizing photos, and pulling it all together into book form.

--- Interactive Map Tells Stories ---

The south gallery also features the Society's popular "SuperMap" -- a 6-foot high, 12-foot wide illustrated color wall map of the Saugatuck-Douglas area with an interactive computer display to provide a virtual tour through these historic villages, highlighting significant people, places and events of both past and present. Map artwork, created by Holland artist-cartographer Mark Cook based on Historical Society research, recalls the entertaining illustration/poster maps of the 1940-50 era, combining street layouts with stylized sketches and notes.

The map offers Museum visitors an engaging way to soak up the story of the Saugatuck-Douglas area. As many as 70 map-highlighted references are keyed by number to let visitors select and learn about sites of interest by calling up information, narratives and images using several video/interactive touch-screen terminals near the map. The screens also offer topical "interactive programs" such as *History of Hotels/Boarding Houses*; *History of Boatbuilding and Boat Builders*; *Buildings and Architecture*; *Artists and Painting*; *Local Biographies*; *History of Saugatuck-Douglas Schools*; *13 Tales of the Villages* and *A Video History of Saugatuck and Douglas*.

In addition, the terminals allow public access to the Historical Society's digitized archives of historical photos, pages of *The Commercial Record* dating back to 1868, the Saugatuck-Douglas Building Survey and more.

Founded in 1992, the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society Pumphouse Museum is open daily Noon to 4pm from May 29 through August, then Saturdays/Sundays in September and October. Admission and parking are free. Tel: (269) 857-7900. See more information about the Historical Society, its Museum and its Old School House Discovery Center at www.sdhistoricalociety.org.

#



Saugatuck artist Ted Reyda puts finishing touch on hanging sculpture "Beachcomber's Folly"



Dunescape photo mural is hung like wallpaper by Theresa Agius (lower foreground) and Michael Zelenka (upper foreground), of Fennville's Agius/Zelenka Decorating, with help of SDHS volunteer Vic Bella (background).