

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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S-D HISTORY CENTER'S JULY 12 PROGRAM TO VISIT LAKETOWN'S FELT MANSION & ESTATE

JUNE 30, 2017 -- A "field trip" to Laketown Township's Felt Mansion and Estate will highlight the next monthly Saugatuck-Douglas History Center program on Wednesday, July 12. The free, public program convenes at 7 p.m. in the Mansion's newly renovated Carriage House, on-site at 6597 138th St. (west off 65th Street) in Laketown Township, less than 5 miles north of downtown Saugatuck.

Felt Estate Director and SDHC member Patty Meyer will highlight Dorr Felt's emphasis on making "Shore Acres" (the Felt Estate) a working farm and his desire to connect his family with the natural world around them. With Felt family photos and home movies, she will link Felt's story with local history of "The Midwest Riviera", as our area was known in the early 1900s, and how it became a popular "getaway" for escaping the turmoil and heat of nearby cities.

Following the Carriage House presentation, the Mansion and Chapel will be open for guests to explore.

Dorr Felt (1862-1930) was a Chicago inventor and industrialist perhaps best known for inventing the Comptometer, an early mechanical computing device, and the Comptograph, the first printing adding machine. He went on to invent more devices and acquired 46 domestic patents and 25 foreign ones. The *Felt & Tarrant Manufacturing Company* that he co-founded with Robert Tarrant in 1889 remained a major player in the calculator industry until small, electronic calculators blossomed in the mid-1970s.

Swayed by President Teddy Roosevelt's appreciation for rural America and efforts to make country life more attractive to city dwellers, Felt was drawn to the pristine beauty of the West Michigan coastline and in 1915 began purchasing several hundred acres on Lake Michigan in the rolling dunes between Holland and Saugatuck. Naming his estate "Shore Acres Farm", he began construction of the "Big House" in 1925. Completed in 1928, the 12,000+ square foot mansion consists of 25 rooms, including a third-floor ballroom.

The Carriage House, originally built in 1919 to house Dorr Felt's many automobiles, included second-floor living quarters for estate caretakers. With restoration, it has been adapted for use as a cultural center for public/private events with handicap-accessible restrooms, a caterer's kitchen, an event room opening onto a tented outdoor patio, and caretaker quarters repurposed as private spaces where bridal parties may dress and prepare.

Estate Director Meyer is a former educator who graduated from GVSU and the School of Education with a major in English & Literature and a minor in Political Science and History. Her interest in art, history and architecture led her to the Felt Mansion and a new career. For the last 14 years, she has worked with volunteers to restore the Felt Estate, and as director of the Estate, planned and implemented hundreds of events. Patty speaks around the state and country at historic preservation conferences, emphasizing the importance of place in our lives, in our history, and in our learning. She is earning her Master's Degree in Non-profit Administration from the Johnson Center at GVSU...while

busier than ever being grandmother to 10 grandchildren, all ages five and under.

Saugatuck-Douglas History Center's free monthly program series presents entertaining and informative insights into local history and community life. This month's program is sponsored by Holland's Osman Flowers & Firs, and SDHC members Michael and Marianne Giersch.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum and Old School House, or its activities planned for 2017, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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Felt Mansion's 1919 Carriage House, newly renovated as a cultural center for special events, will host SDHC's July 12 free public program.