

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
HISTORY
CENTER

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ORIGINS AND ROUTE OF WEST MICHIGAN PIKE
RECALLED AT JULY 18 SDHC "TUESDAY TALK"

JULY 7, 2017 -- The story of West Michigan's first paved highway linking Chicago and Mackinaw City will highlight the next Saugatuck-Douglas History Center "Tuesday Talk" on July 18, in the Old School House, 130 Center Street, Douglas. The one-hour program begins when the school bell rings at 11 a.m. Public attendance is invited and audience participation is welcomed to enrich the discussion.

Presenter John Geisler will detail the West Michigan Pike's development, covering the names and numbering of the highways that became part of the Pike, along with photos and a history of the resorts served by growing auto tourism invited by the new road. A retired Professor of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University, Geisler has been studying the state's roads and highways for the past 15 years, traveling more than 5,000 miles, visiting museums and historical sites, and interviewing countless people about their experiences living along these highways. He has given more than twenty presentations based on his research throughout South/Central Michigan.

As the automobile emerged early in the twentieth century, but West Michigan roads made long-distance travel slow and difficult, the West Michigan Lakeshore Highway Association was founded in 1911 to promote a continuous, improved roadway that would bring auto tourism from the Chicago area to support the new resort industry that grew up when logging ended in the region. Completed in six years (1916-1922), the West Michigan Pike extended from the Indiana state line to the Straits of Mackinac. It was designated one of the first state trunk lines (M-11) in 1917, as part of the Dixie Highway in 1923, and incorporated into the nation's first federal highway system as US-31 in 1926.

As traffic congestion and road deterioration began impeding travel along the Pike, its founding association's advocacy resulted in US-31 being widened, straightened and realigned in 1929 as a "superhighway", and portions of it became known as the Red Arrow and the Blue Star Memorial Highways. A full-blown tourism industry with lodgings, restaurants and other attractions blossomed along the improved road, underpinning today's flourishing vacation economy.

A summer tradition since 1996, weekly Tuesday Talks present entertaining and informative insights into our community life throughout July and August. This week's Tuesday Talk is sponsored by SDHC members Mark Randall and Chris Saldivar.

While Tuesday Talk admission is free for current SDHC members, non-member guests are encouraged to attend with a donation of five dollars, or to become new members at the Talk. For all, the series' increasing popularity puts limited seating on "first-come, first-served" basis.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old

School House in Douglas, or its activities planned for 2017, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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The West Michigan Pike, promoted to Chicago-area auto vacationers in the 1920s by poster maps like this, to be the topic of July 18 SDHC "Tuesday Talk".