

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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S-D HISTORY CENTER APPLAUDS 2017 AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN 2018

The Saugatuck-Douglas History Center is celebrating a successful 2017 and looking ahead to new opportunities for 2018.

This year marked the 150th anniversary of the stately Old School House on Center Street across from the library in Douglas. To commemorate the occasion, a series of programs, a new exhibit, and special events were held on the property, which in addition to the school house building comprises a 1-acre public garden and outdoor shipwreck exhibit. The Old School House preserves the oldest union school building standing in Michigan, which was state of the art when it opened to educate local students just after the American Civil War.

In an effort to better serve the Saugatuck-Douglas community, a number of special events were held on the Old School House grounds, including a summer Douglas Social, a fundraiser benefit and Family Fun Day, geared completely toward local families with activities, games, and more. Partnerships with Ox-Bow and Outdoor Discovery Center helped to broaden the experience to include aspects of science and art. 34 children were also enrolled in the week-long summer Root Camp in June, for kids ages 6-11.

The Old School House is also home to the History Center's archive of historical documents, photographs and objects. In 2018, the History Center will be moving these items to a newly-outfitted archive storage and research space, on the second floor of the Old School House building to expand our capacity and provide room for researchers to use our facilities. The History Center fields well over 100 research questions each year, many relating to genealogy questions and the history of local homes and other structures. We will also be growing our oral history collection through a 2018 community partnership with Grand Valley State University.

--- Museum Visitation Increased ---

2017 also marked the first year of SDHC's new 2-year exhibition at the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum at Mt. Baldhead, "Cold War | Hot Towns," chronicling life in the villages during the tumultuous 1950s-1970s. First-hand accounts of wild music festivals, motorcycle gangs on the backstreets of Douglas, college parties in downtown Saugatuck and more are presented around a structure representing the Mt. Baldhead radar tower -- which was built to search the skies for Soviet bombers at the height of the Cold War scare.

Designed to be immersive and dynamic by combining photographs, newspaper articles and artifacts, this exhibition boosted Museum visitation 14% above the prior year's, bringing visitors from at least 33 different states and six foreign countries. Volunteer docents engaging with these visitors helped them better understand their surroundings and why this is a special place, often also suggesting other local attractions and restaurants.

"We look forward to growing as a community resource and inspiring local history in 2018," says SDHC Executive Director Nathan Nietering. "In addition to our archives expansion project, we plan to host two Douglas Socials, expand our relationships with local schools, and offer even more exhibits at the Old School House facility. The Museum's Cold War exhibit will get some touch-ups and benefit from even more stories and photos of the era."

"We can't thank the greater Saugatuck-Douglas community enough for their support of local history," he adds. Whether you're a History Center member or not-yet, a resident or a tourist, we believe something from our past will inspire you. History isn't just learning about the past, it's about connecting the past with current events and what we experience today."

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The Old School House in downtown Douglas celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2017.