

# SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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## MYSTERY OF LOST NORTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT AIRED IN S-D HISTORY CENTER'S MAY 9 PROGRAM

APRIL 27, 2018 -- Efforts to solve the 68-year-old mystery of an airliner's disappearance over Lake Michigan will highlight Saugatuck-Douglas History Center's next free monthly program on Wednesday, May 9, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the Old School House, 130 Center Street, Douglas. Public attendance is invited and audience participation is welcomed.

Presenter Valerie van Heest, president of Holland-based Michigan Shipwreck Research Association, tells the tale of Northwest Airlines Flight 2501, a DC-4 with 58 souls on board that left New York's LaGuardia Airport on June 23, 1950, bound for Minneapolis, only to vanish somewhere west of Benton Harbor. Telltale debris floated up, but the wreckage was never found and the cause of the accident was never determined.

"Black-box" flight recorders were not yet in use in 1950 and the recovery of wreckage from waters as deep as 350 feet would have been difficult if not impossible at that time. More than a half century later, van Heest and fellow author/explorer Clive Cussler of NUMA (National Underwater Marine Agency) teamed up to attempt to solve the mystery. While the wreck still remains elusive, Van Heest will share how an unexpected meeting with a victim's son prompted a search of a different kind, one that would be more illuminating about probable causes than submerged sections of twisted aluminum.

Herself an award-winning author, underwater explorer and inductee in the Women Divers' Hall of Fame, van Heest has spearheaded the discovery of 20 shipwrecks and has directed the archeological documentation of over 50 shipwrecks, interpreting them with site drawings, articles, documentary films, and over 500 public lectures. She has authored six nonfiction books including *Fatal Crossing, the story of Flight 2501*, appeared on episodes of National Geographic, Science, Travel, and History Channels' television series and been interviewed for over 250 print, television, and radio news stories. Through her firm Lafferty, van Heest & Associates, she also curates and designs museum exhibits.

The Historical Society of Michigan honored her with a State History Award in 2007 for her efforts in preserving and promoting Michigan's maritime history and in 2017 the Association for Great Lakes Maritime History recognized her thirty years of work with the Joyce C. Hayward award for Historical Interpretation.

The 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 SDHC members Judy Oberholtzer, Mike Mattern and Bill Hess.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, or its activities planned for 2018, visit [www.MySDHistory.org](http://www.MySDHistory.org).

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*Artist's conception envisions final moments of Northwest Airlines Flight 2501,  
topic of May 9 SDHC public program.*