



NEWS From
Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society
P.O. Box 617, Douglas, Michigan 49406-0617

Information Contacts:

Jim Schmiechen
(269) 857-5605 / 414-9199
james.schmiechen@cmich.edu

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

DOUGLAS WINS PRESERVE AMERICA MATCHING GRANT FOR OLD SCHOOL HOUSE "BACK-IN-TIME" GARDEN WALK

A Federal Preserve American grant for \$23,265, payable as matched dollar-for-dollar by local donations, has been awarded to the Village of the City of Douglas on behalf of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society's Old School House (OSH) Project, as funding to help develop the "Back-In-Time" garden pathway planned for this historic building's 1.16-acre grounds.

This nationwide program, initiated in 2003 by First Lady Laura Bush, has since designated more than 600 Preserve America Communities across all 50 states and one U.S. Territory. It recognizes communities that protect and celebrate their heritage, use their historic assets for economic development and local revitalization, and encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs. Both Douglas and Saugatuck won designation in 2004 along with eligibility for Preserve America grants.

The winning grant proposal was prepared by Dr. James Schmiechen -- a historian at Central Michigan University and the Historical Society's Museum Chair -- assisted by Fred Schmidt and Mary Voss, also Society volunteers, reflecting plans being developed by the OSH Project landscape committee.

"This grant gives us more than money," Schmiechen observes. "It also gives us National affirmation that what our Historical Society, Schools, Library and entire community are doing with the Old School House is a significant and worthwhile addition to our educational infrastructure. We hope this will inspire more contributors to help us fully meet the grant's matching potential."

Grounds planning envisions the "Back-In-Time" pathway as a trail winding through the partially wooded schoolyard overlooking the Saugatuck-Douglas harbor, visiting diverse plantings and "story stops" telling about important aspects of local environment and history. Modeled after the Historical Society's popular "outdoor learning stations" around its Pump House Museum at Mt. Baldhead Park, the OSH pathway will feature custom-designed story boards and interactive/interpretive experiences at each of six "stops":

Story #1 -- "Peaches for All America" features a small orchard based on a 1901 Douglas orchard layout, showing our early fruit shipping docks and telling about the area as the earliest center for commercial peach growing in America.

Story #2 -- "History of Schoolyard Games" offers a play/documentation/reenactment area for experiencing childhood games ranging back to Civil War times.

Story #3 -- "Saving Lives On The Great Lakes" highlights the Society's rare, restored 1860s-vintage ironclad lifesaving boat *Galleynipper*, telling of the battle against shipwreck and storm a century ago.

Story #4 -- "Building and Designing America's Model Public School" views the National Registered Douglas Union School as an artifact, examining its development in terms of the architectural and construction practices of 1866 and that era's watershed Union School movement.

Story #5 -- "A Michigan Sand Dune Becomes Famous" tells how in 1888 Saugatuck's great sand dune (now Mt. Baldhead) became one of Michigan's most famous lakeshore spaces -- as seen from the Old School House yard.

Story #6 -- "The Rhododendron Garden: A New Experiment" looks back in time to when famous American landscape architects O.C. Simonds and Charlie Mann lived here and reinvented the landscape.

--- Trail Continues Indoors ---

The "Back-In-Time" trail then will continue inside The Old School House with three more stops, featuring school lockers as "time capsules" of items evoking school life in different periods, an electronic tour through more than 100 "historic house photo-stories" depicting earlier village lifestyles, and a look at how famous artists and photographers from the Art Institute of Chicago and elsewhere turned this area into one of America's great art colonies.

Having purchased the Douglas-Union School late in 2006, using a large grant matching a successful initial fund-raising campaign, the Historical Society began refurbishing work early in 2007 aimed at preserving and converting the building into a unique new Heritage Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools. In its coming new life, The Old School House promises a community resource where children and adults alike can explore the area's genealogy, history, culture, ecology and architecture through recreational activities, educational programs, special events and access to the Society's growing archive of local artifacts, photos, records and newspapers.

Combining its indoor and outdoor attractions, the Center also is expected to enhance the area's destination appeal in the growing heritage tourism industry.

More information about the Old School House Project is available on-line at the Society's newly redesigned web site www.sdhistoricalsociety.org, including floor plans, a photo diary of work done to date and an archive of news documenting its development.

With approximately \$350,000 still needed to fully fund the Project, and targeting this summer for an opening date, the Historical Society urges more area businesses and residents to contribute toward matching the Preserve America grant and enabling the earliest possible completion of this distinctive community asset. Contributions may be sent to The School House Project, Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, PO Box 617, Douglas, MI 49406.

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