The Saugatuck-Douglas History Center preserves local history and inspires learning to inform and improve our community.

This autumn newsletter shares some updates from your History Center as the leaves change color and the landscape slowly transforms itself. Covid-19 precautions have increased in response to conditions. This winter we are working on new kinds of SDHC events and we will share those with you in the next few weeks.

Out of an abundance of caution and care for our community, the History Center will not gather in person for a traditional Holiday Party. We do have plans to bring the celebration and cheer to you!

Read more in this newsletter about the exciting plans coming in December...

SDHC Annual Awards
Lorenz Award given posthumously to Michael Sweeney. Volunteer of the Year award goes to John Kerr.

In Memoriam
Recognizing the passing of SDHC members R.J. Peterson and Carolyn Clark.
Family History Group
Want to learn more about your family tree? Welcome new co-leaders John Mayer and Judi Thomas. Ask Jack on Chain Ferry History. *Cottage History: Beechwood* story.

Garden News
Dedication of the *Original Michiganders* Indigenous History exhibit. Peach orchard care bearing fruit!

SDHC Receives Grants
MCACA and Michigan Humanities support for 2021 announced.

Holiday Event Updates
**Saugatuck Center for the Arts Holiday Market** Support the History Center AND pick up gifts for everyone on your list on December 5th, 9 AM to 3 PM!

We're bringing the party to you this year! Holiday Cheer in a Box from **Isabel's Market and Eatery** arriving December 12th!

SDHC Awards for 2020
Presented at the September Meeting

**Charles Lorenz Award Winner**
Michael Sampson Sweeney

Accepting the posthumous award: Spring Ten Klay and Peter Sweeney

Historic Map Returns
Back in 2019, the SDHC sent one of its oldest collection items to Chicago for care and preservation. After Covid-related shutdowns this year, the map has now returned to us.

Published in Philadelphia in 1844, this traveler's folding pocket map includes place names for Singapore and Breeze, but predates the naming of Saugatuck!

Thank you to supporters Steve Hutchins, Bill Hess and Mike Mattern for contributing to this project. If you would like to help underwrite the cost of this conservation and framing project, please consider a donation. You will be acknowledged in all exhibitions of this artifact.
The SDHC’s oldest award is named in honor of founding member and treasurer, Charles “Chuck” Lorenz who dedicated himself to research on the early history of Saugatuck and Singapore before he passed away far too young in 1994. The SDHC gives this award to acknowledge leadership in service to our mission: “to preserve local history and inspire learning to inform and improve our community.”

This is the SDHC’s first ever posthumous award and the committee unanimously agreed to recognize founder and first president of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society with this honor: Michael Sampson Sweeney.

Michael was a founding member of the Saugatuck Douglas Historical Society which grew out of a movement to “save” the Saugatuck City Hall. Along with Charles Lorenz, Spring Ten Kley, and Terry Tatsch, Michael drafted the constitution and bylaws creating the SDHS in May of 1986.

As a professional musician, he became an expert on the history of the Saugatuck Jazz Festivals (1959-1961) and Saugatuck Pop Festivals (1968-1969) held in the area. He compiled his research on area history, art history, and local music into presentations and essays. Michael was also an accomplished painter with works in the SDHC’s collections.

**Volunteer of the Year**

**John Kerr**

A year-round Douglas resident by way of Chicago, John became a member of the History Center in March of 2019. Time is no indication of his dedication and work for this community.

Immediately he lent a hand with the installation of the History Museum’s *Then and Now* exhibit. While working at the Museum he shared ideas about the museum gift shop and found himself promoted to merchandise manager! That summer he coordinated the design, purchase, and sales of new products that brought in much needed revenue for the SDHC. His greatest achievement came in the winter with the Root Beer Barrel holiday ornament. That ornament became a runaway success as one of the season’s most sought after gift items.

John joined the SDHC board of directors in June of 2019. He also serves on the Collections committee. John also played a key role in the research and planning for the Century of Progress LGBTQ History Timeline exhibit, now set to open in the summer of 2021. This summer you probably saw John as part of the pop-up history team greeting passersby in the SDHC’s yellow tent during our open days.
In Memoriam

R.J. Peterson

As the previous newsletter went to press, word came of the passing of member R.J. Peterson on August 11th. R.J. was a history lover and a towering figure in our community’s history in his own right.

Click here for obituary.

Carolyn Clark

Carolyn Clark was an SDHC member who passed on October 2nd.

Click here for obituary.

Family History Group Updates

Welcome from John Mayer and Judi Thomas, your new co-leaders of the SDHC’s Family History Group.

Thank you to Jack Sheridan and Chris Yoder for their extreme dedication to this group over many years. Judi and John will continue their vision for the Family History Group.

You’re invited to our next meetings: November 19 and December 17

On November 19th, we will have a presentation on using FamilySearch.org for family history research. It is a free web site created by and is maintained by the Church of Ladder Day Saints. It has as of 2018 5.8 billion online records and images. If you are not using this site for you research, you should check it out.

SDHS Family History
Box 617
Douglas, 49406,

sdhsfamilhistory@gmail.com
269.857.5751

Meetings are at 3:30pm on the third Thursday of the month

Until further notice all meetings will be held online using Zoom. An email will be sent to the members of the group 5 days prior to the meeting with a Zoom meeting invitation.
A couple of months ago I got a request to relate the history of the Kalamazoo River ferry. This was prompted by a discussion of Representative Fred Upton's work in Washington DC on Saugatuck's behalf.

Congressman Upton successfully navigated the swamp, er, the House, to resolve the Captains license issue!

Seems that the US Congress has now actually accepted the premise that a vessel always chained to the dock[s] should not be required to be operated by a licensed sea Captain. So anyway here is the ferry history story supported by photographs.

It is quite likely that there was a ferry of some kind in the very early days of Saugatuck. That was some 180 years ago. The present location was most likely, in that being the narrowest point in which to cross the Kalamazoo River. The first ferry was some sort of flat boat or raft that was pulled back and forth by a rope or chain stretching from bank to bank. It had to go to the bottom when not in use.

As years passed, There were folks living on both sides of the river, demanding an organized method of crossing. Yet, there is no surviving record of such activity until about 1855 when a flimsy swing or drawbridge was constructed. 1850s. After a few years, that structure came to it's demise due the proclivity of vessels to run into it, rather than passing through it! Finally, in 1857 the first formal ferry service was established by the Saugatuck government.

The basic method of propelling the ferry at that time is the same as exists today. A chain laying on the river bottom is anchored on the opposing banks. The chain rises and the links pass over a large wheel, geared and attached to hand cranks. The wheel is equipped with “V” shaped dogs that engage and disengage as the links pass along. The chain of course drops to the bottom when not in use.
Early scows carrying only horse drawn wagons or rigs were much smaller than those made to carry autos and trucks. The deck ends were open except during transit when pipes were in place for a barrier. Since the river water level was constantly changing, toe boards [small ramps] were often necessary to facilitate loading and unloading. Before the days of large autos it was easy to carry four vehicles, especially Model T size on the smaller size scow. The fare in the 1920s for car and passengers was two bits each way!

From photographs one comes to the conclusion the largest ferry scow was the last one built probably in the late 1920s. It was about forty by fifteen feet in size. It was flat bottomed and drew very little water unless very heavily loaded. The last cars carried appear to be pre war models so I am guessing the large scows were out of service by 1946.

If a stiff wind was blowing, cranking a full load across was a real chore for two men. On calm days, though, it was a one man job. So says my father in his book *SAUGATUCK THROUGH THE YEARS*. He should know. In the early 1930s, he worked his way through college by doing the cranking.

But the ferry vehicle scow is not the only piece of the ferry story. Next month I will tell the story of the nine passenger rowed scow. Yours truly had the privilege of operating that the summer of 1956. So stay tuned!

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**Garden Notes: Committee Updates, Peach Orchard Care**

*Just as gardens grow and change with the seasons, so too does the work of the Garden Committee. This fall saw the turnover of longtime committee members who have served for many years.*

We thank Ruth Johnson, Mike Economos, Maryrita Peters, and Leslie Thompson for their combined decades of service in making the gardens at the Museum and the Old School House all they are today.

The SDHC is grateful for the new members joining us to help steward the garden into its next stage of growth. The new committee includes Board Member John Kerr as chair along with Scott Jacobs of Specialty Gardens as well as support from the Saugatuck-Douglas Garden Club with new liaison member Ginny Stuart.

This summer our peach orchards also received some much needed TLC.

*The Garden Committee recruited a volunteer with local expertise in pruning fruit trees: Jay Ilmberger. Here's an introduction to his story.*

My name is Jay Ilmberger and I grew up in Allegan, MI on a small farm where my family grew corn and soy beans. I graduated from Western Michigan University where I met my wife, Leah (Babbitt). Leah is the daughter of David and Jane Babbitt from Fennville, MI.
David is a third-generation fruit farmer and I became interested in growing fruit when I became part of the Babbitt family. Through my college years, I worked in the laboratory at the Perrigo Company and I continued this position after my college graduation. I started helping David on his orchard on a part time basis while continuing my laboratory work.

Leah and I purchased a portion of the Babbitt farm approximately 20 years ago where we planted new varieties of peaches, pears, and apples. David continued to be a mentor to me as a fruit grower and as the new plantings started to mature and produce fruit, Leah and I started selling at local farmers markets. It was at the Holland Farmers Market that I became friends with Kay and Lee VerSchure who invited me to trim the peach trees at the Old School House.

Leah and I continue to maintain the Babbitt Farm and sell our fruit at local farmers markets. Our farm grows five varieties of peaches, fifteen varieties of apples, and four varieties of pears. David continues to assist on the farm during his retirement. This is a great help as I continue to work for the Perrigo Company as a laboratory supervisor. Leah and I also have one daughter, Macy, that is studying Pharmacy at Ferris State University. She enjoys taking part in farmers markets when time permits.

Native American History Dedication

The Original Michiganders exhibit opened in September in the Back-in-Time garden.

On Wednesday, September 16th the SDHC dedicated its Native American history and culture exhibit in the garden at the History Center. Over 50 members attended the event with two members from the Gun Lake Tribal Council making remarks at the dedication, Phyllis Davis and Jeff Martin. Special thanks to Sally Winthers who led research and design for this exhibit over the last two years.

Thank you to our generous sponsors for the outdoor exhibit:

Stephen Hutchins
Mark Randall and Christopher Saldivar
Adrian Vincent Bequest
Bill Hess and Mike Mattern
Sandra and Travis Randolph
Robert Golub and Dede Dupre
Maryrita and John Peters
Ann and Jerry Longerot
Beechwood Photo Organizing
Candice Lewis
Julie Hislop
Nancy O'Donohue

Cottage Histories: The Story of Beech Hurst
contributed by Andrew Plummer with assistance from Chris Yoder
The 1906 purchase of the Eddy Homestead was by Lillian Grimes Eddy. She put her own money down and got her own bank loan. It was about the time that Mrs. Kirby, a widow, bought the house that was to become the hospital. Lillian had two boys Raymond and Benjamin. Ben had five girls: Betsy, Barb, Joan, Joyce and Susan.

Lillian named the place Beech Hurst. We would come to know that the grove of beech trees were state records. The last tree to come down was 400 years old. Hurst is a German word for wood or grove.

Lillian was one of the principles at the Douglas Schoolhouse, now the Historical Society. She taught Latin, Greek and Mathematics. She was a suffragette, working for the woman’s vote. The young men she tutored during the peach crop failure went on to graduate from the University of Michigan. They became professionals and one a United States Congressman.

The US highway from Chicago to Mackinaw City used to go in front of the house, Ferry Street. It went to the chain ferry and to Holland Street in Saugatuck and on to Holland. When the swing bridge went in, the highway took a sharp right at Center to meet the bridge. The highway people bought Beech Hurst property behind the house and eliminated the “dog leg” at Ferry and Center. Now the highway then known as US31 passed just West of what is now Blue Star Café. It is now called the Blue Star Highway.

When the highway past in front of the house, family friend Martha Siefert had a booth selling home-made pies. Lillian built a garage with two rooms above. She loved her grand-daughters but loved her quiet, too. They stayed with her Summers.
The beech trees were so tall, that when I climbed one as a child, I could see Lake Michigan. One by one storms and tornadoes took the old grove down. Now there is only one of the old trees left. There is a sad pile of wood from the 400 year old monster that was a seedling in 1642. One of the limbs weighed tens of tons before it came down.

One day little Lillian rode with her father, taking milk to Singapore. She rode by the house on Ferry Street. She said. “Some day, I will buy that house.” So she did.

SDHC Awarded New Grants

October also brought news of an Operational Support grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs. This year, the MCACA awarded the History Center $15,000 to underwrite general operating expenses such as salaries, exhibit costs, and facilities.

Michigan is distinctive as a state that provides broad support for operations through this program. Funded by the State of Michigan and the National Endowment for the Arts, this program reaches 480 museums and arts organizations in 58 Michigan counties.

Both of these grants require matching funds from our organization. We rely on members like you for these matching funds (over $23,000 for 2021) so please...
Holiday Events at the SDHC

In lieu of an in-person Holiday Party this year, the SDHC has teamed up with Isabel's Market & Eatery to deliver holiday cheer direct to you!

A gift box filled with treats hand-curated for friends of the History Center will be available for curbside pick-up and local delivery on December 12th. We will also host a virtual gathering via Zoom on December 13th.

Watch your email and mailboxes for more information about ordering this week!

The SDHC has two December events in the works to help spread holiday cheer! On December 5th the History Center's elves will be at the outdoor and socially distanced Holiday Market at the SCA. There you will be able to purchase holiday ornaments including the Root Beer Barrel ornament and new Saugatuck Palette Sign ornaments, puzzles, cards, and more!

About the Saugatuck Douglas History Center

The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society was founded in 1986 by a group of charter members interested in preserving and sharing the unique
history of Saugatuck, Douglas and the surrounding area. In 2016, the Society was renamed the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center to celebrate its growth and to recognize the development of the History Museum and Old School House sites.

We are a vibrant non-profit 501(c)3 history organization with nearly 700 members residing in nearby communities and across the country.

Members are the lifeblood of our volunteer organization.

To renew or join as a member, visit our website for more information.

The SDHC indoor facilities remain closed to the public this fall. Please check our social media and website for updates about programming.

The Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum is located at 735 Park Street in Saugatuck, in the historic Saugatuck Pump House building.

The History Center -- Old School House and Francis Surfboat Exhibit are located at 130 Center Street in Douglas.

The adjoining Back-in-Time Garden and Surfboat Exhibit are open daily.

The History Center Archives are available for research by appointment. For more information, e-mail the archives directly at archives@sdhistoricalsociety.org

History Center main phone: 269-857-5751
Archives direct phone: 269-857-7901

The SDHC is supported with a grant from Michigan Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act economic stabilization plan.

The SDHC also receives operational support from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).