This combined July/August newsletter shares some updates from your History Center as we all navigate life in the time of Covid-19. The decision to move programming outdoors has proven successful with increased visitation to our gardens and new community programs including the History Hop shopfront displays in downtown Saugatuck and Douglas.

We have postponed our September members picnic at this time and will provide a socially-distanced outdoor event to dedicate the Native American interpretive exhibit in the Back-in-Time Garden on September 9th.

Volunteer teams continue work on the Century of Progress: Saugatuck-Douglas LGBTQ Timeline exhibit. Stay tuned for updates in the next few weeks.

In Memoriam
Recognizing the passing of SDHC members and founders Michael Sweeney, Arnie Shafer, Art Lane, Jr. and Stub Louis.

Family History Group
Want to learn more about your family tree? Ask Jack on Avalon Cottage History.

Garden News
The Saugatuck-Douglas roadside 'totem pole' has returned to the Back-in-Time garden.

Collections Corner
News of new art acquisitions at the SDHC.

Summer programs at the SDHC
This year looks different, but the SDHC continues to deliver a blend of virtual and in-person outdoor programming this summer season.

Check out our full schedule of Monthly Meetings and Tuesday Talks online.

Did you know you can view a selection of SDHC programs online? Visit our YouTube page for history on-demand!
Michael Sweeney

Sharing sad news of the passing of Michael Sweeney, charter member and first President of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. Michael brought together his talents as a jazz musician, painter, writer, and historian to guide our organization through its founding years. He also contributed substantial research on Saugatuck’s music history and the Blue Tempo jazz club. His tempera paintings also capture the many moods of the lakeshore landscape. He passed away peacefully on July 26 at the age of 73.

Click here for obituary.


The family has asked us to share that "a party for Michael's life will be planned for a later date. In the meantime we ask you all to celebrate. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center where a fund will be set up in Michael's name."

Arnie Shafer

Arnold Shafer was a member of the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center was well known for his woodworking projects including his model of the Big Pavilion on display at the museum.

This is from a profile of Arnie from 2013: "He and his wife lived in Chicago for over 30 years. They heard good things about Saugatuck and came up one Thanksgiving weekend. They saw the downtown and thought it was a movie set. They bought an Arts and Crafts cottage on Elizabeth St. and worked on it until 1994 and then in 2000 bought the barn at 429 Union St., Douglas."

You can read a memoir of his experience in the US Navy during the Korean War in our November 2013 newsletter.

Click here for obituary.

"A celebration of Arnie's life for family and friends will be held at a later date. Contributions in Arnie's name to the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center would be appreciated."
Art Lane, Jr.

Longtime Commercial Record editor and husband of SDHC historian Kit Lane passed away at age 90, on August 6, 2020.

Click link for obituary.

Warren "Stub" Louis

Charter and life member of the SDHC. Louis passed away at age 90 on July 6, 2020.

Click link for obituary.

Family History Group

Ask Jack with Jack Sheridan, SDHC history volunteer

Welcome from Jack Sheridan and Chris Yoder, leaders of the Society Family History Group.

Please visit a regular Family History Group meeting to see what we are all about and join the group. We share "lessons learned" about the many tools available for family history research.

Update on virtual meetings this summer:

Meetings are 3:30 on the first and third Thursday of the month.

Currently due to the Corona Virus regimen, meetings are held only on line utilizing ZOOM.

Not sure how to get going? Let us provide a helpful jump start by recording what you know about your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents and send it along for a review by Chris Yoder or myself.

Your family history does not have to have any connection to the Saugatuck-Douglas area!!! The only requirement is membership in the SDHS. Join the group and find the answers.

SDHS Family History
Box 617
Douglas, 49406,

jack.sheridan@gmail.com 269-857-7144 or cyoder@tds.net 616-212-3443

Upcoming meetings:
August 20, September 3 and 17
If you want to test the ancestral waters, all you have to do is print off and fill out as much of the tree chart (above) as you are able, with names, places, dates (if possible) and send it in to Jack Sheridan at either snail mail: P.O. Box 731, Douglas, MI 49406 or scan and email it to him at: jack.sheridan@gmail.com

*Who knows what treasures exist in the history of your family, just waiting to be revealed to you?? Give it a try!!!*

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**New Project Launch: Trace Your Family History the Easy Way!**

*Did you ever want to explore your ancestry but did not know how to start?*

Well, volunteers from the History Center Family History group stand ready to get you started in this adventure.

He will assign it to one of our team members. They will NOT do a full family tree for you, but they will find, sample and share information about your ancestry which should be of interest...perhaps taking one line all the way back to immigrant, or finding a photo of a long lost ancestor.

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**The Avalon Story**

Yesterday, my friend Chris Yoder asked me what historical cottage names I could remember. Chris writes for this newsletter about cottage names, how a cottage got the name, and of course some interesting history. Seems his name history inventory is running a little low. Hmmm, I know of one for sure, the AVALON. And by the way, the AVALON history would be great story for the Ask Jack August newsletter. So here we go!

The best I can do on the source of the name is that it is of Welsh origin and means Apple Island. Ahah, the name Avalon has some famous association with the fabled King Arthur. The cottage builders were William and Elizabeth Boynton Harbert. Their first child was named Arthur Boynton Harbert, who was born in 1871 and died in 1900. Maybe an Arthur connection?

William Harbert [1843-1920] was a successful attorney in Chicago. He founded the law firm of Harbert and Daley which specialized in right of way work for railroads in the period 1880-1910. His wife Elizabeth Boynton Harbert [1845-1925] was a successful writer and famous for her leadership activities in the National Woman Suffrage movement.

The Harberts were introduced to the area as a result of their close support of the Forward Movement Camp [later the Church Camp and now the Dunegrass development just south of the Oval] They fell in love with the Saugatuck area and all of it’s charm.

As a personal investment, the Harberts bought a large piece of property just to the north of the Forward Movement property. See the yellow highlighted area on this ca 1912 plat map. This parcel included what is now Oval beach on the west and stretched to Park Street on the east.
They built the Avalon in 1905 on the high ridge overlooking Park St, the river and the east area of the river bank where Saugatuck Marine is now located. There is a spectacular view in all directions!

The story is that it was a gift for their daughter Corinne. No doubt it was used by the family including daughters Corinne and Boynton.

Twelve years ago I was contacted by a great grandson and family historian Bill Frederic. According to Bill, William and Elizabeth died in California in the 1920s. Although very well off, Corrine the daughter, was not attuned to financial management and neglected - or could not afford - to pay property taxes due on the Avalon and it went to the Saugatuck Village for back taxes sometime in the early 1930s.

I suspect that the structure was not properly maintained, fell into disrepair and probably collapsed … but the details of the Avalon’s fate and the source of the name Avalon remain a history mystery … for the present.

Garden Notes: Return of the Saugatuck-Douglas "Totem Pole"
by Anna Minnebo, SDHC Intern

in a wind storm last October, volunteers Vic Bella and Sally Winthers repainted and repaired the sign this summer. The totem pole is now reinstalled thanks to John Migas. A new interpretive sign will also tell the story of the artifact later this month.

The Saugatuck-Douglas totem pole has been a familiar sight in In the Back-In-Time Garden at the Old School House since 2013. After falling down, Hoffman, and her husband Richard “Dick” Hoffman, were also the proprietors of the Island Queen excursion boat, and its miniature golf course. During her time in Saugatuck, Deb Hoffman was an active community member, serving on both the school board and the Chamber of Commerce.

Totem pole imagery was very prevalent in the Saugatuck area during the 1950s and 1960s. Often used to promote tourism, local businesses also adopted the form. The Chamber of Commerce (above) even used a totem pole...
Bright, colorful, and nearly 20 feet tall, the totem pole-inspired sign formerly stood outside of the Chamber of Commerce at the intersection of Lake Street and Blue Star Highway in Saugatuck. It captured the attention of passing motorists for almost 20 years, until it was removed when the Chamber of Commerce relocated in the 1970s. The pole was left to weather away until Bruce Starring and Henry Gleason rescued the pole, holding it in safe keeping for decades until its donation to the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center in 2012.

In the summer of 1957 local artist Deb Hoffman created the sign to welcome visitors to the area. She was previously a student at the Sarasota Art School, today the Ringling College of Art and Design. The Commercial Record from August 2, 1957 mentions the installation of the pole, and its goal to entice visitors to “stop and stay.” The totem pole was not Hoffman’s only artistic contribution to the community, in 1973 she also created this map (below) of the Saugatuck-Douglas area, and its major attractions.

(Above) An advertisement from the 7/12/1957 Commercial Record

Why Totem Poles?

Totem poles, or gyá’aang, were carved by indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast. They are not a cultural tradition of the Native American peoples of southwest Michigan, the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Bodéwadmí.

True totem poles are carved from red cedar, and depict images of humans, animals, and supernatural beings. They showcase national and familial histories, cultural practices, or are used as memorials. It is a common misconception that the poles convey a social hierarchy, with the chief at the top, and the commoners at the bottom. This is false, the poles are designed to tell stories. Often the most powerful figure can be found at the bottom.

Totem Poles were first brought out of the North West Coast in 1904, for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition’s Alaskan Pavilion. The name “totem pole” was given to the carvings at this time, on their membership sticker in 1963.

Totem poles and Native imagery were common in roadside attractions across the United States. They were used to attract the attention of passing motorists. The Saugatuck-Douglas totem pole is a vivid example of this tradition. Another example can be seen in the Arrowhead Motel sign, visible behind the pole in this historic photo.

Non-indigenous businesses and communities across North America used imitation totem poles and other Native themes as roadside attractions for decades, when Native peoples themselves were being actively oppressed.

(Left) Cover of the S-D Chamber Tourist Guide from 1968.

Today, the taking or using of someone else’s cultural heritage inappropriately or without permission is considered cultural appropriation.

The Saugatuck-Douglas totem pole allows us to reflect on injustices of the past, as it makes its return to the Back-In-Time garden. While it was likely not made with any harm in mind, it is important to acknowledge it as a work of cultural appropriation today.

Along with the new sign for the totem pole, stay tuned for the installation of the new Native American panels in the Back-In-Time Garden. They will provide more information on the Native Americans in this area, past, present, and future.

(Below) Commercial Record article from 8/2/1957 describing
reflecting American beliefs about them. Afterwards they were brought to museums across the country, some remaining in public view to this day.

During the same time as the world’s fair, the federal government sought to assimilate the Native tribes of North America. This included banning all cultural and religious practices, including carving poles. Native Americans were not free to express their beliefs and practices again until almost 80 years later, with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.

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Collection Corner: Notes from the Gallery
by Kenneth Kutzel, SDHC Board Member

Historic Saugatuck paintings come to the SDHC

The Covid-19 epidemic may have forced us to limit access to our galleries, but the Collections Committee continues to meet virtually and our Archives and Art volunteers have safely continued to work behind the scenes to make sure that the History Center remains healthy and relevant!

Generosity has so often been a defining attribute of our membership, and the pandemic has only strengthened our resolve to preserve the wonderful gifts our community shares with all of us. Here are two acquisitions that have recently been added to our growing art collection.

Both paintings were given to the Saugatuck Douglas History Center by the Henry and Claredine Gleason Trust, in memory of Henry and Claredine. The works are an invaluable gift to our community that will be enjoyed for generations, thanks to the generosity of the Gleason family.

If you would like to help with our ongoing work preserving the art heritage of the Saugatuck Douglas area, please make a donation to the Saugatuck Douglas History Center, with Art Fund indicated in Memo section of your check.

Donate Online Today!

Supporters like you make these successes possible! Please consider supporting the care for our area's artistic and historic treasures.
Online Program -- Wednesday, June 10 at 7 PM
Monthly Meeting: Collecting in a time of crisis: A look at rapid-response collecting and the SDHC’s #3CShutdown Project. Virtual Program.

Online Program -- Tuesday, July 7, 11 AM

Garden Program -- Tuesday, July 14, 11 AM
Tuesday Talk: Conservation in West Michigan with the Outdoor Discovery Center. Virtual program.

Tuesday, July 21, 11 AM
Tuesday Talk: Boating and the History of the Saugatuck Yacht Club with Andrew Zolper. Held at the Saugatuck Yacht Club.

Tuesday, July 28, 11 AM
Tuesday Talk: Getting the Vote: Michigan Women and the Path to Suffrage with Ruth Stevens from the Greater Grand Rapids Women’s History Council. Virtual Program.

Tuesday, August 4, 11 AM
Tuesday Talk: Looking Back, Looking Forward at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts with Kristin Armstrong and Kurt Stamm. Held at the SCA.

Tuesday, August 11, 11 AM

Wednesday, August 12 at 7 PM

Tuesday, August 18, 11 AM
Tuesday Talk: Re-Painting the Town: Looking Back on the 1997 SDHC Art Exhibition with Ken Kutzel. Virtual program.

Tuesday, August 25, 11 AM

Wednesday, September 9 at 7 PM

Wednesday, October 14 at 7 PM
Monthly Meeting: Celebrating Douglas, Michigan on its 150th Anniversary.

Wednesday, November 13 at 7 PM
Monthly Meeting: Saugatuck District Library, Past and Present.
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 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 summer. 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).