Spring Newsletter
February and March 2021

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

Springtime comes to Saugatuck-Douglas

The last couple of months have seen changes at the Lakeshore. Ice came and went and lake levels have continue to drop, exposing more beach, a teaser of summertime fun ahead! Ahead of schedule, you can see green returning to the landscape and some spring flowers in bloom, too.

The History Center has stayed busy behind the scenes, preparing fresh history exhibits and programming for the summer and fall. We're all cautiously looking ahead to 2021 with events that can bring us together outdoors, online, and in our museum galleries. Here's a sampling of what's in store this summer:

- A commercial fishing exhibit housed in “Saugatuck's Historic Demerest Shanty” coming this spring.
- A refreshed and reopened “Then and Now” exhibit at the History Museum
- The much anticipated “Century of Progress” exhibit at the Old School House, exploring LGBTQ history in Saugatuck-Douglas, planned for August.

Read more about these programs in this newsletter and in the months ahead!

Late March in the Back-in-Time Garden. Sunshine is bringing out the daffodils!

April Monthly Meeting:
Exploring the SDHC's Online Collections

Join us for the first Monthly Meeting of the year, held virtually through Zoom, on Wednesday, April 14th at 7 PM.

This program presented by Collections committee member Linda Slusar offers an introduction to the SDHC archives, now accessible through a new online database. The Catalog-It cloud-based service allows one to search and browse through the full archives of documents, photographs, artwork, and artifacts from the comfort of your home.

Saugatuck Shanty Updates

Read more about plans for the Saugatuck shanty and telling the story of Great Lakes History this summer!

Click here to register for the April Monthly Meeting
In Memoriam
Recognizing the passing of SDHC member Thomas Otto.

Family History Group
Want to learn more about your family tree? We’re here to help! Also check out the Ask Jack feature on historic photography and Chris Yoder on the Bird family.

Root Camp is Back
Registration now open for the SDHC’s youth camp, June 21-24.

2021 Membership
April is the beginning of the History Center’s membership year. Read more about it here!

Board Updates
Meet the newest members of the SDHC board of trustees. Also read about upcoming elections for 2021.

Historic Saugatuck Demerest Fishing Shanty Updates
Back in February, the History Center announced plans for the preservation and interpretation of one of Saugatuck’s last commercial fishing shanties in partnership with Retro Boat Rentals.

Since then, SDHC volunteers have researched and produced an exhibit on the history of commercial fishing in the Saugatuck area while the team at Retro Boat Rentals have worked to restore the Demerest Shanty and place it at their 730 Water Street site as seen (above) in the design rendering.

Marvin “Demmy” Demerest, seen in the historic shanty that bears his name (photo, right) was one of Saugatuck’s last commercial fishermen. He passed away in April of 2020.
For 100 years commercial fishing was an important industry in Saugatuck. Pollution, invasive species, and state regulations contributed to the demise of commercial fishing in Saugatuck and throughout Lake Michigan at the close of the 1960s.

The restoration and reuse of the historic shanty will allow the History Center to share Demmy's story and that of many other area fishing families with a fresh audience.

The history of commercial fishing exhibit highlights the rise of Saugatuck's own Fishtown in the late nineteenth century at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River and the relocation of docks and buildings to Water Street by the early twentieth century. Interpretive panels inside and outside of the shanty also tell the story of families including the Sewers, Diepenhorst, Peel, Gleason, and Demerest, among others.

Would you like to get involved?

You can follow along on Facebook for regular updates on the history of the waterfront and fishing on Lake Michigan at our page: https://www.facebook.com/SaugatuckShanty

The History Center is funding its exhibits through the generous sponsorship and donations of individuals and businesses.

Add your name to the fishing shanty display by becoming a founding donor!

Exhibit Sponsor: $500
Underwrites costs to display, maintain and protect fishing artifacts.
- Donor names displayed on site.

Friends of The Shanty:
Support the project to preserve and share stories of our area's commercial fishing history.
- Gold $300
- Silver $200
- Bronze $100
- Donor names will be displayed on a plaque housed in the fishing shanty.

To become a sponsor, please make checks payable to: Saugatuck Douglas History Center (or SDHC) and note: SHANTY on the check! Send to: SDHC, PO Box 617, Douglas, MI 49406
Please also indicate how you would like to be recognized (ex: Bob & Mary Driver, The Drivers, Drivers Automotive). Gifts are tax deductible.

For more information, please contact SDHC shanty chair Julie Bizzis at jkbizzis@gmail.com.

In Memoriam

Thomas Otto
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 dedication to this group over many years. Judi and John will continue their vision for the Family History Group.

This is a reminder that our Family History Group meeting date has changed for the year of 2021. We will meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 3:30pm.

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.

If any of you are having trouble joining us because of very slow internet connections or no internet access at all, know that you can also phone into the Zoom meeting. Contact us for more information!

SDHS Family History
Box 617
Douglas, 49406,

sdhsfamilyhistory@gmail.com
269.857.5751

ASK-JACK featuring Jack Sheridan

DATING HISTORICAL PHOTOS

Almost the middle of March and I have not done a SDHC Newsletter piece for some time. I did receive a question suitable for ASK JACK recently from my friend, the talented exhibit creator Sally Winthers. She has asked me to help put together an aid for dating photographs. She asked, “Did I have anything organized to contribute”

I told her that I did not, other than what resides in my brain. So in order to rectify that sloppiness, I agreed to start one. Hmmm … so the start is right now, right here, in the March 2021 SDHC Newsletter ASK JACK feature.

Of course I have been dating S-D area historical photographs for some twenty years. You would guess I have it down and I do pretty much, but have not recorded the process in an organized manner. Thinking through the subject is the first step in the start of that task.

Here are some the essential factors and categories I use:

GENERAL: Of course there are many clues such as clothing, hair styles, vehicles, architectural
styles, photo styles, signs that put the date in the ballpark. But to zero in, a photo must contain at least one significant feature. Let’s take a quick look at some of those features and how they help with more precise dating.

PEOPLE: Some folks have appeared often in the historical records, others not so. The former are easy, the latter must have a name that might be found with a search of my personal database or in a public record like a census. ANCESTRY.COM is very useful for many records and the census records thru 1940 are particularly good. ANCESTRY also has millions of public family trees that are easily searched. The census data is great for age determination. In addition I have developed a fair ability to approximate identity and age when viewing a personal photo.

Another great source is our area cemetary records. These may be accessed through the SDHC website and also on ANCESTRY.COM which is linked to the Find a Grave organization. Chris Yoder has done an amazing job of linking cemetery records with obituaries from newspaper clippings and personal photos.

THE COMMERCIAL RECORD: Of course, this is very often best if a photo correlates with a happening that was reported in the newspaper. We are very fortunate to have digital images of most issues from 1868 to 1977. The data is available thru the SDHC web site. The address is commercialrecord.org The problem with the Commercial Record digital files is a lack of a good index, so browsing multiple issues is required when one lacks a close date.

PHOTO OBJECTS: Here are some of the more common ones that often appear, not necessarily as the main subject but in the background. There is a recorded history of most of these objects in which are clues to the date of the photo in which they appear. Consider just a few:

- Beaches
- Paving vs dirt streets
- Pavilion
- Mt Baldhead views
- Hotel Saugatuck
- Interurban
- Harbor area
- Hotels-motels
- River mouth area
- Odd Fellows Building
- Dutcher Hall
- Butler St
- Center St

- Schools
- Ferry area
- Bridges
- Main streets
- Electrical poles
- Local maps
- Blue Star Highway
- Automobiles
- Vessels
- Waterfronts
- Churches
- Businesses
- Village stuff

So the current project is to match relevant objects which have changed over time with the date of the change. Stay tuned for a future progress report. Take a look at a montage of four photos of the The Butler for a good example of changes over time. It has gone from a flour mill to restaurant in the last century and a quarter!
Many thanks to Ken Howe, great-grandson of Henry Bird, Jr. Ken shared stories written down by his great Aunt, Edith Bird Smith. After leaving Saugatuck, Henry Bird Jr. lived with her family in Idaho and later in Montana where he died. Ken writes: “My grandfather was Kenneth Max Bird who was born in Saugatuck. .... I appreciate that Edith Bird Smith wrote down stories that she was told by her father and grandfather Bird.”
Henry Bird Jr. was born Jan. 7, 1843 at the Columbia Lake settlement, Washtenaw County, MI, the eldest son of Henry and Desiah (Van Hoesen) Bird who had married there in 1839. His father Henry Sr. was appointed postmaster of Columbia Lake in 1840. Henry “Sr.” was the son of yet another Henry and his wife Laura (Wakelee) Bird and he had moved with them to Washtenaw County from New York by land and was living next door to them in the 1840 census. (The oldest of these Henrys died in 1846 and is buried in that county.) Henry Sr. and family then moved to Illinois and took up a homestead near Wheaton. A crop failure sent them back to Michigan, where Henry Sr. ran a (saw) mill near Croton in Newaygo County for two years before returning to the Wheaton area. In 1864, Henry Jr. enlisted for service in the Civil War, but saw little action, getting a bad case of typhoid fever in Kentucky. As he was a Mason, the local Masonic hospital cared for him, and he said later he “would have died otherwise.” After his release he went back to Illinois and attended Wheaton College.

The following parts have been selected from Mrs. Smith writings:

After graduation “… he went to Michigan and taught school in Graafschap (people called it Grassup then), a Holland settlement. He enjoyed the teaching and several of his pupils became quite noted. He told of boarding in a Dutch home and each morning the mother in the family would bring him coffee before he was up. The father in the family wore wooden shoes to do his work in the barn. He would put some coals in his shoes to warm them. One morning he accidentally left a coal in a shoe, and when he put his foot in burned his toe; he let out a yell that waked the house.

Henry had met a girl at Wheaton College, Ellen Collins, by name, sister of the Adeline Collins, who was Lady Dean of the college. Ellen was a very pretty girl and of great refinement.

In 1866 he went to Michigan. He saw his first canning of fruit into glass jars while there, and canned some peaches and sent them home to Illinois. Their (first) taste of canned fruit. Always before they’d eaten dried fruit when they couldn’t get it fresh. In 1868 the family followed him to Michigan, and settled into a beautiful little town of Saugatuck, on the Kalamazoo River.

Henry kept thinking about that girl, Ellen, and finally went to Lockport, Illinois, her home, to see if she was like his memory of her. He had evidently found her much better, and finding favor with her, they were married November 10, 1869. He took her to his home in Saugatuck, Michigan. They went by train part way, and then in a sleigh the rest. Henry seemed to think sweets to the sweet, for said later she had so many sweet foods, that when they went to a hotel on the way to Saugatuck, where they had venison, tho it was badly burned in the cooking, she thought nothing ever tasted so good. They had a big sawmill.

His mother, our grandmother Dezi, told me that seven other Saugatuck boys married about the same time, and the town took a vote to see which boy had the most lovely bride. Henry’s bride was almost unanimously elected the most beautiful. I can say for her that she had a most beautiful disposition as well, was musical and had a lovely alto voice. She was also very artistic, created lovely pictures, and took many prizes and flower shows for her flower arrangements. Her great-granddaughter has a lovely ink drawing done by her.

They prospered for several years, tho the new climate did not agree very well with Ellen, who had chills and fevers, as so many had in those early days, and life was pretty hard, part of the time.

Their first child came January 2, 1872 his name was Henry Frederick, after his
grandfather’s. And came Edith Adaline, born April 1, 1874. About this time they sold the saw mill and Henry became a druggist. In 1880 they sold the drug store to his brother, Charles E. Bird, and moved to Douglas across the river from Saugatuck and had a drug store there until 1894 when they moved to Lockport, Illinois. In Douglas Harold Collins was born April 16th, 1882. March 22, 1864 Helen Constance was born. She died October 31, 1886 of membranous croup. On February 25, 1886 Leon Horatio was born, and Kenneth Maxwell on January 18, 1892. They lived on the Collins farm (in Illinois) a number of years. Ellen became an invalid and in 1913 and they went to Salmon, Idaho to live with their daughter Edith. Ellen died November 11, 1913. Henry lived with his daughter except for short periods until his death. He married a Mrs. Sunderlin, which marriage did not last long. Then moved with his daughter’s family to Bozeman Montana. There he married Mrs. Boomer. After she died he lived out his life with his daughter and family. He was always active in community life, interested in local politics. He was elected commander of the local G.A.R (Civil War soldiers local of the Grand Army). Later he was elected commander of Montana’s State G.A.R.

Henry Jr. died in October 16, 1932, 89 years six months and eight days of age. His body was taken back to Saugatuck, Michigan, to be buried beside his wife Ellen and daughter Helen.”

His parents and sibling Charles E. remained in Saugatuck and the Bird family continued for generations to be prominent in our community (not the least of whom was our own beloved Jane Bird Van Dis). His parents Henry Sr. (1817-1915) and Desiah (1824-1910) as well as grandmother Mary Parks Van Hoesen Watrous (1803-1893) all rest with him at Saugatuck’s Riverside Cemetery.

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**Root Camp Returns for 2021**

![Root Camp Logo](image)

**SDHC youth camp back for June**

During the four days of Root Camp, June 21-24th, young campers will learn about the history of the forests and lumber industry at the Lakeshore, see historic tools used in woodworking, learn how artists create wooden sculpture, experience animal power demonstrations, and experience the fizzy science behind natural root beer soft drinks. Campers will also visit the Root Beer Barrel for a celebratory treat!

**Registration now open--click here!**

*When registering please note that space is limited in the AM session, with greater availability in the afternoon group at this time.*

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**2021 Membership Campaign Begins**

The Board of Directors approved a simplified membership structure at its March 17th board meeting. The new structure will take effect for the 2021 membership year, starting in April.  

**Business members** will be included in the SDHC newsletter and offered special advertising opportunities and gift memberships.
Your SDHC Board of Trustees

The History Center began 2021 with several board vacancies filled by new members appointed to serve in these important roles.

As May approaches, the SDHC will hold elections by mail-in ballot from the membership to fill or renew those members with terms expiring.

Treasurer Angela Page moved to Saugatuck Township four years ago from Detroit. She retired from General Motors where she worked for 32 years as a financial analyst. Angela has been serving as the SDHC Board Treasurer since the first of this year after a year as Assistant Treasurer working with retired board member Leslie Thompson.

Board member Michael Mok

"I retired as Vice President of Global Sales from an information technology company. We were the leading provider of top-rated digital learning solutions to libraries, schools, child care centers and other educational entities with content that promoted self-directed, independent learning. Our mission was to inspire an enthusiasm for learning by supporting school readiness and literacy in the community.

I’ve been a part-time resident of Douglas for a long time and became a full-time resident last year.

I’m currently the Chair of the SDHC Membership and Development committee."

Board member Randy DiRosa recently retired from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, where he directed health policy research and analysis in Chicago, and is now a full-time resident of Saugatuck. At the SDHC, Randy is actively involved with the group creating a commercial fishing exhibit in the restored fishing shanty, is a member of the Membership Committee, has begun working with the exhibits group, and has helped out as a museum host and on the History Hop project.

Board Member Julie Bizzis retired in 2018 from Flexsteel Industries as SVP Strategic Growth. After 14 years as a part timer in Douglas, her partner Laura and she built their retirement home, becoming full timers in 2017. Julie serves as an Old School House docent, chaired the History Hop, works pop up tent sales and chairs the Fish Shanty project.
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 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).