

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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**ORIGINS, ROUTE AND SITES OF WEST MICHIGAN PIKE
REVISITED AT SEPT. 13 SDHC FREE PUBLIC PROGRAM**

SEPT. 1, 2017 -- The story behind West Michigan's first paved highway linking Chicago and Mackinaw City will highlight Saugatuck-Douglas History Center's next free monthly program on Wednesday, September 13, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the Old School House, 130 Center Street, Douglas. Public attendance is invited and audience participation is welcomed to enrich the discussion.

Invited back to reprise his standing-room-only SDHC "Tuesday Talk" last July, presenter John Geisler will detail the West Michigan Pike's development, covering the names and numbering of the highways that became part of the Pike, along with photos and histories of the resorts served by growing auto tourism invited by the new road. In this "second look" presentation, he will sharpen focus on the area's ethnic resorts of the mid-1900s, and share his photo collection of "silly, weird and unusual" roadside signs encountered as he roamed the roads researching his topic.

A retired Professor of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University, Geisler has been studying the state's roads and highways for the past 15 years, traveling more than 5,000 miles, visiting museums and historical sites, and interviewing countless people about their experiences living along these highways. He has given more than twenty presentations based on his research throughout South/Central Michigan.

As the automobile emerged early in the twentieth century, but primitive West Michigan roads made long-distance travel slow and difficult, the West Michigan Lakeshore Highway Association was founded in 1911 to promote a continuous, improved roadway that would bring auto tourism from the Chicago area to support the new resort industry that grew up when logging ended in the region. Completed in six years (1916-1922), the West Michigan Pike extended from the Indiana state line to the Straits of Mackinac. It was designated one of the first state trunk lines (M-11) in 1917, as part of the Dixie Highway in 1923, and incorporated into the nation's first federal highway system as US-31 in 1926.

As traffic congestion and road deterioration began impeding travel along the Pike, its founding association's advocacy resulted in US-31 being widened, straightened and realigned in 1929 as a "superhighway", and portions of it became known as the Red Arrow and the Blue Star Memorial Highways. A full-blown tourism industry with lodgings, restaurants and other attractions blossomed along the improved road, underpinning today's flourishing vacation economy.

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 Joan Brigham and Marylouise Graham.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, or its activities planned for 2017, visit www.MySDHistory.org.



The SDHC Sept. 13 program remembers the West Michigan Pike, credited with bringing Chicago-area auto vacationers to Michigan beach towns in the 1920s.