

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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SIGNIFICANCE OF 1997 ART EXHIBITION EXAMINED AT AUGUST 18 "TUESDAY TALK"

AUG. 7, 2020 -- How a "seminal" 1997 museum exhibition defined the intersection of art and our local history is the focus of Saugatuck-Douglas History Center's next "Tuesday Talk" on August 18. Breaking with Tuesday Talk's Old School House venue traditions, this Talk will be hosted via Zoom technology beginning at 11 a.m.

Public attendance is invited and audience participation is welcomed to enrich the discussion. Interested participants will need to register in advance online at tinyurl.com/SDHC-TT-8-18, in order to receive instructions for joining the Zoom program. Questions regarding online registration procedures may be e-mailed to info@sdhistoricalsociety.org.

Presenter Ken Kutzel, SDHC's longtime volunteer Art Collection Manager, will share insights from his analysis of *Painting The Town*, the '97 exhibition that brought together 150 mostly borrowed artworks selected to represent a "who's who" of artists that worked in the Saugatuck-Douglas area in the 20th century. The "catalog" for that exhibition, written by Saugatuck historian Kit Lane with graphic design by Ken Carls, remains one of the most popular publications ever produced by Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society (now History Center). The exhibition was curated by Kit Lane and Mary Hart.

Based on researching records of the exhibition's development, including a rare and aging videotape documenting the effort, Kutzel has been working to preserve information that wasn't included in the book. He plans to explain the significance of what was and wasn't chosen for the exhibit, while showing clips extracted from the video along with some examples of the pieces the curators selected.

"At that time," Kutzel observes, "only five of the exhibition's paintings belonged to the Historical Society. Now, the History Center's growing permanent collection includes more than 300 examples of local art, many of which appeared in *Painting the Town*."

Distilling the exhibition book's introduction -- written by architectural historian James Schmiechen, museum co-chair at that time -- Kutzel notes that in the early 1900s, the increasingly overcrowded, noisy, dirty, industrial-urban environment led "city folk" to idealize the wholesome, natural landscape and rural "life of the plain people" as the genuine America. Chicagoans, Detroiters and others sought respite in West Michigan, while artists flocked here seeking to portray the unspoiled beauty of forests, lakeshore dunes and rustic simplicity of village life.

The resulting artwork came to depict the Saugatuck area as a visual definition of what is good and worthy about life, he continues, and in the process created an invaluable collection of historical "documents" through which we can better understand our past. Simply put, *Painting the Town* was a tribute to the artist as historian.

A summertime tradition since 1996, SDHC's weekly Tuesday Talks present entertaining and informative insights into local community life throughout July and August. For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, or its activities planned for upcoming months, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

PHOTO ATTACHED SEPARATELY: see jpeg "LCwaterfront"

Caption: Waterfront scene painted in the 1940s by Saugatuck artist Louise Crawford exemplifies works borrowed for 1997's "Painting the Town" exhibition that later came into SDHC's permanent collection, this one thanks to the Henry and Claradine Gleason Trust.