Review of Achievements 1994-2014

Telling the Stories and Preserving the History of the Saugatuck-Douglas Area since 1986
THE PLACE
For more than a century the historic Lake Michigan port villages of Saugatuck and Douglas have offered the best in cottage life, entertainment, sports activities, fishing, the arts, and “back-to-nature” opportunities, all set amidst some of America’s finest dunelands.
Although the giant steamships that once carried urbanites to the West Michigan shore have been replaced by automobiles, many of the reasons for coming have changed little.

“A preservationist is someone who knows you can’t possibly have a future unless you have a past.”
—Ken Burns

THE DUNES | Saugatuck’s magnificent landscape is the centerpiece of the area’s attraction for residents and visitors alike. It supported the native pine forests that enabled early logging settlements. Today, along with expanses of Lake Michigan shoreline, it provides splendid recreational opportunities for people of many interests and ages.

SAUGATUCK’S “MAIN STREET” | The Kalamazoo River makes its final bend before emptying into “the big lake,” Lake Michigan. The cities of Saugatuck and Douglas lie along opposite banks of the river. From Native American times to the present, the Kalamazoo has brought commerce, transportation, and recreation to the area.

THE “BRIGHTEST SPOT ON THE GREAT LAKES” | From its construction in 1909 to its destruction by fire in 1960, funseekers from across the Midwest flocked to Saugatuck to swing and sway to the strains of America’s best known dance bands at the Big Pavilion, Saugatuck’s largest building and America’s second largest dance hall. In its heyday, the Big Pavilion welcomed shiploads of weekend partygoers from Chicago as WLS radio broadcast the festivities live.
SUMMER SCHOOL OF PAINTING | For more than 100 years students at Ox-Bow have had the opportunity to study with prominent American artists in the pastoral setting of the Ox-Bow grounds. The former Riverside Inn remains the social hub of the campus with various purpose-built studios stationed throughout the wooded dunelands and beside the lagoon.

THE BARREL | Since 2010, the Society has been involved in an effort to preserve the beloved Root Beer Barrel (ca. 1952) originally located on Center Street in Douglas. An excellent example of the roadside architecture of the “automobile age,” preserving the barrel means keeping memories alive for many area residents and visitors.

Leslie (Christenson) Such, who worked as a carhop in the 1960s recalled providing “curb service,” carrying trays of frosted mugs of root beer and foot long hot dogs out to cars as people stopped on their way back from the beach.

Saugatuck and Douglas remain the home of Ox-Bow (the summer venue of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago), sandy beaches that are among the country’s best, and fine hotels. There are more recent attractions as well, including an arts center, professional and community theater, and an annual chamber music festival. Combined with Saugatuck Township, the area’s full-time population numbers around 5,000. Add to those the tens of
A MAGNET FOR SUMMER FUN | Saugatuck’s “Oval Beach” has been rated by MTV and Condé-Nast as one of the top beaches in America. Over the years, thousands of visitors each summer have concurred, including Time-Life photographer and Saugatuck resident, Bill Simmons, whose photo (above) documented sun worshippers on Labor Day, 1949.

“...in my times [the Oval] was a magical place, equal to a romantic South Sea island or Mediterranean glamor spot, but at the same time as friendly as a neighborhood block party. Because it was special, visitors returned year after year, often unable to articulate what it was that attracted them.”
—Helen Gage DeSoto

thousands of part-time residents, who split their time between the Saugatuck area and primary residences in Chicago, Detroit, or other Midwestern cities, seeking connections to an historic sense of place. To complete the picture, many thousands of tourists who vacation in the area give tourism the distinction of being the chief driver of the area’s economy.

The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, which operates the History Center and Museum, occupies an important position in the community’s cultural and educational infrastructure. Its membership includes over 700 full-time and seasonal residents, the blend of which adds a uniquely cosmopolitan flavor to the local culture. The surrounding, largely rural, Allegan county ranks below average in per capita income and has been designated by the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs as an “underserved county” with regard to the availability of arts and cultural opportunities.
SEASONAL KICK-OFF | The annual Members’ Preview Reception, traditionally held on the Saturday night of Memorial Day Weekend, officially marks the beginning of summer for SDHS members who get their first glimpse of the Museum’s annual exhibition and an opportunity to re-connect with old friends.

MUSEUM & HISTORY CENTER

Founded in 1983, the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society established the Museum (1992) and History Center (2009) to further document, preserve, and present the area’s history. With a statewide reputation for innovation, the Society acts as an economic generator building a strong heritage tourism magnet for the Saugatuck-Douglas community, Allegan County, and the state of Michigan.

Members socialize and sample hors d’oeuvres as they preview the 2006 “Raising the Roof” exhibition.
MISSION & GOALS

The Museum and History Center engage the community through an array of mission-based programs and activities, framed within one or more of five goals:

Goal 1 | Creating high quality places for exploring and presenting our collective past.

Goal 2 | Building audiences through expanded public access to local history, heritage education, and preservation awareness.

Goal 3 | Producing an array of programs for diverse audiences connected to annual themes.

2010 EXHIBITION | The Museum exhibit, “A Place Called Ox-Bow,” ready to be opened to visitors on Memorial Day Weekend 2010. By the end of the exhibit’s run in October, nearly 10,000 visitors had passed through the Museum to learn more about this famous summer art school, which had an enormous influence on Saugatuck-area history.

A POPULAR PUBLIC SPACE | A visitor stops along the riverfront garden pathway that leads to the Museum to study one of the Learning Station panels designed to help visitors better understand the history of Saugatuck’s physical and cultural landscape. Open to the public year round, an estimated 30,000 visitors pass through the gardens annually.
THE MAP COLLECTION | Maps at the History Center are a popular attraction for visitors and members alike.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE | Saugatuck Middle School students with their project—historic site model building combined with historical story telling.

PRESERVATION OF A SIGNIFICANT ARTIFACT | Society members get their first glimpse of the freshly restored Francis Lifesaving Boat as it is unveiled at the Members’ Preview, Memorial Day Weekend, 2006.

GOAL 4 | Storytelling through exhibitions, heritage preservation, books, tours, and programs.

GOAL 5 | Engaging dedicated volunteers and the membership in management and operations.
VOLUNTEERS

With skills and interests as diverse as carpentry expertise needed for restoration projects like the Lifesaving Boat, master gardener certification for the waterfront gardens at the Museum, or the sculptor’s eye, skill, and tools that turned trees into custom, site-specific benches for the garden, volunteers of all stripes find a welcome and much-appreciated place for their talents and time.

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR MANY JOBS WELL DONE | Congregating in the History Center gallery, volunteers enjoy the annual Fall “Thank You” chili supper that was cooked and served by the Board as an expression of gratitude for the many hours of work and intellectual capital that volunteers have put forth in service to another successful season.

KUDOS | Volunteers’ many long hours of work are rewarded not only with appreciation from the community and visitors, but also with prestigious state-wide awards.
PROGRAM WORKING GROUPS | Ongoing groups that work on programs include: Exhibitions, Publications, Heritage Preservation, Family History and Genealogy, Oral History, Gay History, The Art History Project, and Monthly Programs, as well as ad hoc groups that work on special projects, e.g., the Old School House Renovation Task Force, the Root Beer Barrel Rescue Project, the Life Boat Restoration Project, etc.

SUPPORT WORKING GROUPS | Support groups include: Volunteer Hosts, Membership, Archives, Communications, Special Events, Technology, Gardens & Landscape, Facilities, Finance, Fundraising & Grants, and Administration, among others.

AN ALL-VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION | The working Board and the cadre of over 100 volunteers include more than 50 museum hosts, a large garden design and work group, tech support group, archiving and collections team, and the exhibition production group. A small recordkeeping and administrative staff carry out program and facilities administration needs.
FACILITIES

The Society operates two primary facilities.

THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE HISTORY CENTER (above) occupies the former Douglas Union School (1867), a stately structure located on a prominent site on Center Street in Douglas.

THE SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY MUSEUM is housed in the historic Village Pump House (1904) on the Saugatuck harbor front at Mt. Baldhead Park.

Both of these historic structures are set within extensive gardens designed as outdoor learning centers. The buildings and the gardens are open for Society programs free of charge and available to the public for rental for other community events.

A JEWEL ON CENTER STREET | In 2006 the Society purchased and began renovation of the National Register-listed Douglas Union School (1867) as a venue for the study of local history. Opened in various stages between 2008 and 2012, the History Center is the Society’s main base of operations. It houses a large assembly room, a history study room, a gallery for the display of the Society’s growing collection of Saugatuck-Douglas area artworks, the archives, a technology center, and Society offices.

THE HISTORIC CENTER | In 2006 the Society purchased and began renovation of the National Register-listed Douglas Union School (1867) as a venue for the study of local history. Opened in various stages between 2008 and 2012, the History Center is the Society’s main base of operations. It houses a large assembly room, a history study room, a gallery for the display of the Society’s growing collection of Saugatuck-Douglas area artworks, the archives, a technology center, and Society offices.

THE HISTORY MUSEUM | Always free, the Museum is open to visitors from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. daily from Memorial Day through Labor Day and weekends through October. It attracts 8,000–10,000 visitors per year with an additional 30,000+ visitors to the garden and outdoor Learning Stations.

THE WILSON PAVILION | Framing a splendid river view, the pavilion is the entry gate to the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum and Gardens. Along the garden pathway seven Learning Stations teach visitors about Saugatuck’s physical and cultural riverfront landscape.
The ongoing schedule of activities at the History Center and the Museum includes exhibitions of local history projects by Saugatuck Public School classes, monthly Society programs, a series of weekly “Tuesday Talks” during the summer, semi-monthly meetings of a Family History Group that works on genealogy, a Writing Group, the LGBT History Group, and numerous other meetings and daily activities of the Society. From the History Center, the Society manages its website, which includes a large image blog and online research capability; a book publication program; preservation and documentation projects; a collaborative exhibition and lecture program, and a summer “Root Camp” to bring kids into the “history garden.”

GETTING SMART IN THE GARDEN | Stroll and learn our local history via story stops in both the Museum and History Center garden pathways—from peach growing and sand dunes to azaleas and shipwrecks.

The north side of the Boat House (architect: Nicolaas Wilkens) features a Potting Shed and outdoor teaching area for the garden.

THE BOAT HOUSE | A highlight of the History Center’s Back-in-Time Garden is the purpose-built Boat House, permanent home to the Society’s rare restored 19th Century Francis Lifesaving Boat.
Looking for a map? Are you a postcard collector? Wanting to learn about shipbuilding or your family’s history? The History Center offers multiple opportunities for exploring both the past and the present.

PARTNERING WITH OUR SCHOOLS | Mr. Shaw’s Advanced Placement Class of 2011-12 collaborated with a curator to plan and write the History Center lifeboat and lifesaving exhibit.

TAKING HISTORY OUTDOORS | The History Center’s one-acre “Back-in-Time” garden makes history come alive. Community gardeners and landscape professionals joined history curators and designers to convert the old schoolyard into a comprehensive learning experience, with the shipwreck/lifesaving Boathouse, five themed gardens and peach orchard, six “history story” stops, and over 200 azalea and rhododendron plantings (in collaboration with The Azalea Society of Michigan).
WHEN THE BELL RINGS AT 11 A.M.
TUESDAY TALKS
At the Old School House History Center
2012
TUESDAY TALKS
11 a.m. at the Old School House
130 Center Street, Douglas, MI 49406
Free admission. Donations always welcome.
For more information, visit www.sdhistoricalsociety.org

July 3
Lakeshore Life and Fruit Farming: Past and Present
by Joan Donaldson – Sponsored by

July 10
The Hungry Village: Exploring Agri-Business on the Lakeshore
by David Geen – Sponsored by

July 17
Goin Fishin’ – Lost Stories and the Big Catch
by Mike Peel – Sponsored by

July 24
Theater as History: The Red Barn Story
by John Huyge – Sponsored by

July 31
Re-Designing Douglas: Connecting People to a New Douglas
by Ryan Kilpatrick – Sponsored by

August 7
Saugatuck & Douglas Boys in World War 2: Rediscovering the Dope Newspaper
by Jim Schmiechen – Sponsored by

August 14
Art Collection Secrets: Stories from the SDHS Art Archives
by Ken Kutzel – Sponsored by

August 21
Look. See. Hear. How Does Our Garden Grow?
by Ruth Johnson, John Migas, and Greg Raymond – Sponsored by

August 28
Good Looking? The Art of Looking Good
by Maryjo Lemanski – Sponsored by

STREETSIDE HISTORY | Local history goes for high design. The History Center’s street entrance gets design attention from the best of Michigan’s designers.

PARTNERING WITH OUR SCHOOLS | Third and fourth grade school kids begin their study of local history and geography with an annual visit to the Museum and History Center.

A SUMMER SERIES | “Tuesday Talks” at the History Center as well as lectures and exhibitions at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts highlight various topics that complement the annual Museum exhibition theme. For example, “A Passion for Painting” featured the area’s best-loved professional and non-professional painters of the past and was staged to coincide with the Museum’s “A Place Called Ox-Bow” exhibition. Likewise, “Pie: A Slice of Pure Michigan” and “Small Towns, Big Picture” were corollaries to the “Everyday Life” theme.
OUR RURAL HERITAGE | In an early summer monthly program at Pleasant Hill Farm near Fennville, Joan Donaldson, author and proprietor, with her husband, John, guides Society members through the four seasons of farm life—from blueberry picking, vegetable gardening, raising goats, maple syrup production, to the 19th-century architectural models for their farmhouse and buildings.

BURRED HISTORY | The Monthly Program, “Ghosts of the Graveyard,” was the 2014 performance by the History Center Cemetery Players, telling lively stories of local characters of the past.

QUITE A BUZZ | Michael Pcolinski, local beekeeper, presented “Bee Garden Buzz,” a Tuesday Talk that gave members insight into the life cycle of the honeybee and explaining the process of honey production.
Houses on the Move | A Tuesday Talk about how three historic homes of architectural and historic significance were saved from demolition by creative-thinkers who moved them to new locations in the community.

History Center Garden | As the Back-In-Time Garden grows, so does its programming. In 2014 the Garden was the scene for the Center’s first “Root Camp.” Dressed in period clothing, kids engaged in garden planting, played traditional schoolyard games, wrote scripts, listened to shipwreck stories, and more.

A Welcome Splash of Spring Color | John Migas, member of our garden committee and the Azalea Society of America, presented a Tuesday Talk on the art and appreciation of azalea and rhododendron growing.
NEWSPAPER PROJECT | The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Chronicle is a free “back-in-time” broadside newspaper with lively stories that encourage readers to seek out local sites. The paper was conceived by the Society as a vehicle to attract new audiences for local history. Advertising sales support the publication as well as the Society’s general operations. Over 20,000 copies are distributed annually.

PUBLIC TELEVISION PARTNERSHIP | In 2011 the Society’s board initiated a collaboration with WGVU Public Television of Grand Rapids for the production of “The Saugatuck and Douglas Story”—the first in WGVU’s “Michigan Hometown Stories” series to be aired throughout Michigan.

ON-SITE LEARNING | Tour venues provide the public a variety of opportunities for experiencing local history and geography: program-specific tours, self-guided walking tours, village trolley tours, elementary school walking tours and museum visits. In 2012 these tours reached well over 1,000 participants.

THE ARTIST AS HISTORIAN | Growing out of our community’s legacy as an art community, the SDHS has developed a collection of local artworks and established the History Center Art Gallery for the study and appreciation of the history of the area’s art and artists. The growing collection consists of more than 100 artworks by famous and not-so-famous artists and architects.

THE ARTIST AS HISTORIAN | Growing out of our community’s legacy as an art community, the SDHS has developed a collection of local artworks and established the History Center Art Gallery for the study and appreciation of the history of the area’s art and artists. The growing collection consists of more than 100 artworks by famous and not-so-famous artists and architects.
FRIEND-RAISERS AND FUNDRAISERS | An ongoing series of culinary events, the popular “Dine Around Town” evenings support the work of the Museum and History Center. From gourmet dinners to casual cocktail parties, guests visit private homes and businesses throughout the community to enjoy great food and great times while supporting a great cause.

A SALUTE TO OUR VETERANS | With support from the Society’s team of historians, local veterans record their past with public presentations and oral history documentation. The archival recovery of the WWII Douglas veterans’ newspaper, The Dope, brings to life many forgotten chapters of the life and times during the War at both the front and at home.

YOUNG SCHOLARS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM | Since 2010 the Museum and History Center have collaborated with several Michigan public universities to bring advanced pre-professional college students to work with the Society’s leaders in developing new and more diverse audiences for the study and enjoyment of local history. The scholars shown above worked at the History Center during the summer of 2010.

A SALUTE TO OUR VETERANS | With support from the Society’s team of historians, local veterans record their past with public presentations and oral history documentation. The archival recovery of the WWII Douglas veterans’ newspaper, The Dope, brings to life many forgotten chapters of the life and times during the War at both the front and at home.

YOUNG SCHOLARS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM | Since 2010 the Museum and History Center have collaborated with several Michigan public universities to bring advanced pre-professional college students to work with the Society’s leaders in developing new and more diverse audiences for the study and enjoyment of local history. The scholars shown above worked at the History Center during the summer of 2010.

FRIEND-RAISERS AND FUNDRAISERS | An ongoing series of culinary events, the popular “Dine Around Town” evenings support the work of the Museum and History Center. From gourmet dinners to casual cocktail parties, guests visit private homes and businesses throughout the community to enjoy great food and great times while supporting a great cause.
EXHIBITIONS & PUBLICATIONS
A 22-Year Record of Success

Since 1993, the Society has welcomed visitors to 31 local history exhibitions at its various venues—identifying collective memory and encouraging local story telling. By offering regularly-changing exhibitions, audiences revisit to discover additional meaningful interpretations of our collective past, hence the Society’s motto:

“History Lives Here.”

Annual Museum exhibits are augmented by complementary exhibitions, produced by middle and high school students, who provide fresh ways of interpreting the past. The Society collaborates in producing arts and humanities related exhibitions at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts.
1994 | THE BIG PAVILION: THE BRIGHTEST SPOT ON THE GREAT LAKES | The Society's first exhibition in its new museum in the Pump House featured the waterfront dance hall (1909) that put Saugatuck on the Midwest's vacation map, bringing thousands of people of all classes, many by giant steamships from Chicago, to experience the modern big-band phenomenon.

1996 | I WISH YOU WERE HERE: POSTCARDS FROM THE PAST | A postcard sent home was the preferred form of "social media" for much of the 20th century, and the sights and good times of the Saugatuck area offered many possibilities for messages back home. Today the cards tell us about what was "cool" then and hint at what travel life was like.

1995 | DOUGLAS: THE VILLAGE OF FRIENDLINESS. | A history of Douglas with text, photographs, artifacts, architectural models and a giant mobile of "village portraits." This exhibition charted the "Douglas Renaissance" of the 1980s, marking the renewal, restoration, and economic growth of largely abandoned Center Street.

1997 | PAINTING THE TOWN: A HISTORY OF ART IN SAUGATUCK AND DOUGLAS | Attracted by the scenery—the vast dunes, lakes, and woods that stretch along Lake Michigan—by 1900 artists were coming in droves. They established an art colony and several painting schools, rapidly making Saugatuck a famous venue for "plein air" landscape painting. (Accompanied by the book, Painting the Town. A Century of Art in Saugatuck and Douglas, see p. 21. The book and exhibit were featured in the article "Art as History" in Michigan History Magazine, May-June 1998.)

1998 | HEROES, ROGUES, & JUST PLAIN FOLKS | Saugatuck and the surrounding area have had an uncommonly diverse and interesting population including writers, diplomats, shopkeepers, engineers, dancers, ferrymen, and television personalities. The exhibition's 72 biographical narratives provide an understanding of the community. (Accompanied by the book, Heroes, Rogues, & Just Plain Folks, see p. 21.)

1999 | RAISING THE ROOF: THE BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE SAUGATUCK AND DOUGLAS AREA | For many people, "Reading" buildings is a way of connecting with the past. Using high-quality photo documentation, building models, and architectural artifacts, this exhibition was a complete social and spatial history of the villages. (Accompanied by the book: Raising the Roof: A History of the Architecture and Buildings of the Saugatuck and Douglas Area, see p. 21.)

2000 | LOST & FOUND: GHOST TOWNS OF THE SAUGATUCK AREA | Some towns die and leave behind only the ghosts of history. This exhibit separated fact from myth to honor ten area ghost towns and what became of them. Particular attention was given to the buried village of Singapore at the Saugatuck harbor, often referred to as "Michigan's Pompeii." (Accompanied by a book of the same title, see p. 21.)
2001 | OFF THE RECORD: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF BILL SIMMONS | Based on one of the finest collections of photographs of mid-century America, these photographs offer a unique window into small-town America. (Accompanied by a book of the same title, see p. 23.)

2002 | STORM FIRE & ICE: SHIPWRECKS OF THE SAUGATUCK AREA | With emphasis on the great Chicora disaster of 1895, “Storm, Fire, & Ice” looked at 36 maritime tragedies and some amazing acts of heroism connected to the busy Lake Michigan port of Saugatuck. (Accompanied by a book of the same title, see p. 23.)

2004 | TALES OF THE VILLAGES: A SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS STORY BOOK | From lakeshore children who collected pennies to build a chapel, to Burr Tillstrom’s puppet show days, this exhibit told tales of nine local residents. (Accompanied by a Tales of the Villages Coloring Book, see p. 23.)

2005 | LINCOLN’S “READY MADE” SOLDIERS: SAUGATUCK AREA MEN IN THE CIVIL WAR | With emphasis on newly discovered letters and autobiographies, this exhibit told the story of Saugatuck men who fought in the American Civil War. (Accompanied by a book of the same title, see p. 23.)

2006 | RAISING THE ROOF: THE SECOND STORY | This exhibition posited that architecture can reveal many layers of sometimes common, often unique history of our villages. A notable component was stories and drawings about local places by Saugatuck Middle School students. (Accompanied by the book, Raising the Roof: A History of the Architecture and Buildings of the Saugatuck and Douglas Area—Rev. Ed., see p. 23.)

2007 | THE ART OF CARL HOERMAN: AN ÉMIGRÉ’S VISION OF AMERICA | In collaboration with the Saugatuck Center for the Arts. Hoerman (1885-1955) was a well-known Saugatuck plein air artist and architect. His personal vision of the Arts and Crafts Movement reflected his German heritage. This was the first retrospective of his work.

2008 | MOMENTS IN TIME: THE ARTIST AS STORYTELLER | Paintings, lithographs, and drawings told about Saugatuck life in a way rarely recorded by photographers or writers, featuring the reconstructed studios of two well-known artists, William Olendorf and John Norton. (Accompanied by a portfolio of 13 prints and drawings from the exhibition and the book, History By Camera. Saugatuck and Douglas Photographs. 1870-1970, see p. 23.)

2003 | SNAPSHOTS: A SAUGATUCK ALBUM | Essays and photos give voice to the thousands of people who came to these shores, interacting with each other and with nature as they looked for fortune, good health, social freedom, and good times. (Accompanied by a book of the same title, see p. 23.)

2007 | WALLS TALKING: STORIES OUR HOUSES TELL | Featuring over 40 “house stories,” including room reconstructions that told of three very different lives—a single farmwoman, a local artist, and a famous American muralist. The exhibit featured 27 stories by Saugatuck Middle School students.
EXHIBITIONS & PUBLICATIONS

2009 | SUMMERTIME: A CENTURY OF LEISURE AT THE LAKE MICHIGAN SHORE | A groundbreaking exhibition that considered the history of “summertime” through artifacts, images, stories, and photographs—from steamships full of funseekers to fishing, boating, beach culture, swimsuit fashion, cottage life, and sexual liberation. A scale model highlighted the story of the famous Big Pavilion dance hall (1909–1960). The exhibiton featured a display of “Postcards from Home” by high school art classes. The “Summertime Post Office Station” yielded over 300 summertime postcards drawn by young visitors. (Accompanied by the book, The Big Pavilion: The Brightest Spot on the Great Lakes, see p. 23.)

2009 | BLAST FROM THE PAST | Saugatuck Middle School 6th graders wrote historical fiction and built models to tell summertime stories for a concurrent exhibition staged at the Old School House History Center.

2009 | SIGNS OF THE TIMES: HISTORIC SIGNS FROM THE SAUGATUCK AND DOUGLAS AREA | A collaborative project with the Saugatuck Center for the Arts. Using 24 signs as markers of time and place, old signboards chronicled the commercial past, telling of places lost in time, ways of work, and everyday social and economic life.

2010 | A PLACE CALLED OX-BOW: 100 YEARS OF CONNECTING ART, NATURE, AND PEOPLE | The first exhibition of the history of America’s longest existing art colony/school. The Ox-Bow Summer School at Saugatuck was founded by rebellious artists from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1910. The exhibit featured work from French plein air painting to American abstraction, Ox-Bow’s artists and its social scene, and ceramic garden sculptures by Saugatuck High School art students. (Accompanied by the book, A Portrait of Ox-Bow, Architecture, Art, and Artists.)

2010 | A PASSION FOR PAINTING: REDISCOVERING A CENTURY OF ART IN SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS | A collaborative project with the Saugatuck Center for the Arts. 33 paintings illustrated the range of work that has made Saugatuck synonymous with art and art history in the Midwest, including names such as Frederick Fursman, Albert Krehbiel, Ellen Lanyon, Louis Redstone, and Thomas Eddy Talmadge. (Accompanied by a lecture, “A Passion for Painting,” September 16, 2010.)

2011-12 | A VILLAGE PATCHWORK: EVERYDAY LIFE IN SAUGATUCK AND DOUGLAS | A look at “off-season” village life and the villagers who engaged in work, school, church, civic life, and much more. Saugatuck High School art classes interpreted local life in the manner of Joseph Cornell-style box art, using artifacts from the archives, with accompanying stories. (Accompanying book, The Village Table: A Delicious History of Food in the Saugatuck-Douglas Area, see p. 23.)
2011 | PIE: A SLICE OF PURE MICHIGAN
A collaboration with the Saugatuck Center for the Arts. “Pie” was a colorful story of how fruit from local orchards made its way to distant markets and the unlikely path from piemaking to art, in which a large, abandoned pie factory was transformed into a venue for the performing and visual arts.

2012 | SMALL TOWNS, BIG PICTURE. THE BILL SIMMONS PHOTOGRAPHS: SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS, 1941-1960
A collaborative project with Saugatuck Center for the Arts. Time-Life photographer Bill Simmons took nearly 3,000 photographs of the villages of Saugatuck and Douglas between 1939 and 1960. Lost for decades, the 31 over-sized Simmons images provided a unique window into Mid-century Michigan life.

2012 | ROWING THEM SAFELY HOME: THE STORY OF SHIPWRECKS AND LIFESAVING ON LAKE MICHIGAN
The restored 1854 Francis Gallinipper life saving boat is surrounded by display panels and a 47-by-9-foot mural of the 1895 wreck of the steamship Chicora as a permanent exhibition in the Boathouse. Featured at the opening of the Shipwrecks exhibit was the Saugatuck High School 12th Grade Advanced English Class production of their play, “Mutiny Aboard the Ship Milwaukee, 1842.”

2012 | SHIPWRECKS, HEROES, AND SCALLYWAGS
Saugatuck Middle School 6th Graders combined historical fiction writing with local shipwreck stories, artwork, and model building.

2013–14 | DUNELANDS: FOOTPRINTS ON THE SAND
Stories of nature, man, and the stewardship of our area’s spectacular dunelands. Featuring a panoaromic photograph by James Cook and hanging beach-debris sculpture by artist Ted Reyda.

2012 | 1936 MINIATURE CIRCUS
The story of model circus building, featuring the rare authentic 1936 scale model A. G. Barnum’s circus with over 200 moving parts was witnessed by 1,085 visitors during this 10-day exhibit at the History Center.

2013 | MT. BALDHEAD EXHIBIT
Saugatuck Middle School 8th Grade project, “History as Poetry.”

2014 | “ROOT CAMP”
A week in the History Center Garden and Boat House learning about local history.

**We Interact.**
We invite community participation in exhibition building, which encourages fresh—and often surprising—interpretations of the past. All of our exhibits are planned, written, designed, and produced by members of the community, bringing about innovation and personal investment in heritage preservation.

2012 | SMALL TOWNS, BIG CHANGES
An exhibit of 72 drawings by Saugatuck Middle School 6th graders at the History Center, with a book of oral interviews by the same title.
We Publish.

In 1997, with donated start-up funds of just over $13,000 the Society initiated a self-sustaining local history publishing program. Our publications list has grown to more than a dozen titles.
Since 2000, with attention to school children, residents, businesses, and visitors, the society’s Heritage Preservation Group has worked to document what is good about the old, demonstrate good preservation and construction practices, and make history part of community life and the local economy.

The local newspaper series, “Remembering When” and “History Mystery” bring stories of people, places, and events to a large readership and introduce them to the Society’s vast photographic archives.

In 1999 the Society published Building the New and Rehabilitating the Old: A Builder’s and Owner’s Guide, a “How To” book to guide those involved in local building projects towards more preservation-sensitive solutions. Hundreds of copies have been distributed free of charge.

Since 2001, the annual Heritage Preservation Awards program has recognized over 230 homeowners and builders for projects that respect the town’s scale and character.

HERITAGE FESTIVAL | Attracting hundreds of participants, the frequent Heritage Festival home walking tours build community pride and teach the value of design that respects the best of the past and adds value to the Michigan economy.

HERITAGE AWARDS | Since 2001, the annual Heritage Preservation Awards program has recognized over 230 homeowners and builders for projects that respect the town’s scale and character.
For many volunteers the mystery, complexity, and creative ingenuity in the act of salvaging historic objects is a way of embracing a sense of place and time. Each one of these projects was managed by members of the community.

Heritage Preservation: Participatory History
Some Significant Projects

**DOUGLAS UNION SCHOOL $1.4 MILLION HISTORY CENTER RENOVATION** | Ceased school operation in 1957 and reclaimed for community service in 2006-09. After thousands of hours of volunteer planning, design, and hands-on labor, this extraordinary example of Michigan Civil War-era school architecture was reborn as the Society’s History Center.

**SIMMONS PHOTO COLLECTION REDISCOVERED** | Lost for half a century, an important collection of nearly 3,000 photographic negatives of Saugatuck (1940-1961) by Time-Life photographer William Simmons were retrieved, digitized, archived, and indexed, culminating in the exhibition, “Off the Record” and a 133-page book with 150 of the images.

**PUMPHOUSE BECOMES A MUSEUM** | When the 1904 architecturally significant village pumping station (engineer-architect John Alvord) fell into disuse in 1992, the Society undertook a restoration/renovation project, converting the structure into the area’s first museum. With the addition of a garden pathway, entry pavilion, and outdoor “learning stations,” it is now one of Michigan’s most highly-acclaimed small museums.

**ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS SAVED** | This endangered collection of 33 original architectural drawings by Carl Hoerman (1885-1955) was rescued and placed in the Society’s archives and is now available for public study.

**FRANCIS LIFEBOAT RESCUED** | Abandoned, the rare Francis regulation iron lifeboat (1854) was restored in 2004-06. Designed by Joseph Francis, a founder of the U.S. lifesaving movement and built by builders of the Civil War-era “ironsides,” it is one of only two known to remain in existence.

**ROOT BEER BARREL SAVED** | A beloved Douglas landmark and significant example of mid-century American roadside architecture, the barrel (1940s) was scheduled for demolition when volunteers stepped in to rescue, restore, and return it to public use.

**RARE CANOE GIVEN A NEW HOME** | An 1845 Indian dugout canoe, made locally by “Indian Joe” Shashaguay, was gifted to the Society and placed on public display in 2011.
Recognition & Awards

1997  Quest for Excellence Book Design Award, *Painting the Town*  
      Michigan Museums Association

1999  Quest for Excellence Graphic Design Award, *Raising the Roof*  
      Michigan Museums Association

1999  Quest for Excellence Exhibition Design Award, “Raising the Roof” Exhibition  
      Michigan Museums Association

2000  Quest for Excellence Graphic Design Award, *Lost & Found*  
      Michigan Museums Association

2000  Exhibition Design Award, “Lost & Found” Exhibition  
      Michigan Museums Association

2002  Award of Merit  
      Historical Society of Michigan

2002  Tourism Achievement Award  
      Saugatuck-Douglas Convention and Visitors Bureau

2003  Preserve America Designation  
      National Park Service, US Department of the Interior

2004  Institutional Recognition in book, *Rooted In Place/Cultivating Community*  
      Michigan State University

2004  Quest for Excellence Exhibition Award, “Tales of the Villages” Exhibition  
      Michigan Museums Association

2006  Heritage Guardian Award (1st recipient)  
      State of Michigan

2006  Best Museum Award  
      Lake Magazine

2007  Quest for Excellence Exhibition Award, “Walls Talking” Exhibition  
      Michigan Museums Association

2008  Preserve America Designation  
      National Park Service, US Department of the Interior

2010  Quest for Excellence Graphic Design Award, *Raising the Roof*, Revised Ed.  
      Michigan Museums Association

2010  Museums for America Designation  
      Federal Institute for Museum and Library Services

2010  Exhibition Award, “A Place Called Ox-Bow” Exhibition  
      Historical Society of Michigan

2012  Book Award, *The Village Table*  
      American Association of State and Local History
GRANT FUNDING
(1-for-1 matches fulfilled for all grants.)

2006  The Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation
       $425,000

2008  Preserve America
       National Park Service, US Department of the Interior
       $23,265

2010  Museums for America
       Institute of Museum and Library Services
       $47,000

2011  Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs
       State of Michigan
       $7,500

2012  Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs
       State of Michigan
       $12,000

2013  Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs
       State of Michigan
       $12,000

MAJOR CAPITAL FUNDRAISING
(includes Grants, above)

1993-2002  Museum & Garden restoration/improvements/additions
           $102,000

2005-2006  Old School House purchase/renovation as the History Center
           $1,250,000

2010-2012  History Center, Back-In-Time Garden, Boat House
           $212,365

THE BOTTOM LINE

Total capital investment in Museum and History Center properties
$1,564,365.

Total outstanding SDHS debt
$0
The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society believes in equal access to facilities and opportunities for all persons. It is the policy of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society not to engage in discrimination or harassment against any person because of race, color, religion, gender (including pregnancy), national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, height, weight, gender identification, or sexual orientation and to comply with all federal, state, and local nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, and affirmative action laws, orders, and regulations. This nondiscrimination policy applies to employment, access, and treatment in SDHS facilities, programs, and activities.