



*NEWS From*  
Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society  
P.O. Box 617, Douglas, Michigan 49406-0617

Information Contacts:

Jim Schmiechen  
(269) 857-5605 / 414-9199  
schmi1@cmich.edu

Wendy Colsen  
(269) 857-2139  
wcolsen@saugatuckps.com

John Peters  
(269) 857-2967  
jppubrel@aol.com

2009 S-D HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM EXHIBIT  
TRACES 100 YEARS AS SUMMERTIME DESTINATION

MAY 11, 2009 -- This year's new exhibit at the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society Museum, opening for the season on Memorial Day weekend, Sunday, May 24, surveys the origins and evolution of the lakeside recreation culture that has made this community a summertime vacation destination with growing nationwide attraction. Although conceived a year or more ago, the new exhibit's theme resonates with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's recent naming of Saugatuck-Douglas one of it's "Dozen Distinctive Destinations for 2009".

Titled "Summertime...A Century of Leisure at the Lake Michigan Shore", the new exhibit is arguably the most ambitious in recent memory, combining digitized home movies and photos with artifacts and scale models. Says exhibit curator and writer Jim Schmiechen, "we're focusing on ten thematic stories to represent the unfolding history of our vacation economy, told from the viewpoints of both the visitors drawn here to enjoy our environment and the local folks who work to ensure their satisfaction."

"Those stories," he notes, "are based on real-life people sharing memories of their experiences here in times past, ranging back to the early 1900s. Each story reflects their impressions of one of our area's main attractions, including swimming at Oval Beach, roaming Mount Baldhead and the dunes, dancing at The Big Pavilion, cottage and cabin living, nature camps, boating, fishing, artistic pursuits, and of course the broad nightlife diversity of bars and restaurants that peaked in the tumultuous 1950s."

The Museum's design and technology team, headed by resident artist/designer Judy Hillman, have invented a variety of formats in telling these stories, woven around a centerpiece walk-through structure that in abstract form celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Big Pavilion's opening in 1909. This display features a video documenting the rise and fall of the Pavilion and houses a detailed model built by Historical Society member Arnie Shafer. Also highlighted there is a 1":1' scale model of the Chris Craft cruisers produced near here in the 1930s, built by Chris Smith, grandson of the boatmaking company's founder.

On one side of the central structure, a large flat-screen display continuously shows a combination of newly found vacation "home movies" from the 1910-1955 era, including early footage of moving the Keewatin steamer to its present exhibition site, and approximately 100 similar-period photos extending up into the 1980s.

Complementing the Society's "Summertime" exhibit is a display mounted by the Saugatuck High School students of art teacher Christa Wise, featuring imaginative works based on souvenir postcards, and accompanied by a "create your own vacation postcard" station for free use by both youngsters and adults.

Continuing the Museum's tradition of producing special books to accompany exhibits, this year's exhibit will offer an updated and expanded edition of the Society's Big Pavilion book, written by Kit Lane, one of West Michigan's best-known historian/authors, and designed by Historical Society member by Ken Carls.

---SuperMap Debuts ---

New this year in the Museum's south gallery is "SuperMap" -- a 6-foot high, 12-foot wide illustrated color wall map of the Saugatuck-Douglas area with an interactive computer display to provide a virtual tour through these historic villages, highlighting significant people, places and events of both past and present. Map artwork, created by Holland artist-cartographer Mark Cook based on Historical Society research, recalls the entertaining illustration/poster maps of the 1940-50 era, combining street layouts with stylized sketches and notes.

More than three years in development, made possible by gifts from Douglas Dunes Resort and Macatawa Bank totaling \$20,000 with matching funds from the Historical Society, SuperMap is the centerpiece of a permanent exhibit that will offer thousands of annual Museum visitors an engaging way to soak up the story of the Saugatuck-Douglas area. As many as 70 map-highlighted references will be keyed by number to let visitors select and learn about sites of interest by calling up information, narratives and images using several video/interactive touch-screen terminals near the map. The screens also will offer topical "interactive programs" such as *History of Hotels/Boarding Houses*; *History of Boatbuilding and Boat Builders*; *Buildings and Architecture*; *Artists and Painting*; *Local Biographies*; *History of Saugatuck-Douglas Schools*; *13 Tales of the Villages* and *A Video History of Saugatuck and Douglas*.

In addition, the computers will allow public access to the Historical Society's digitized archives of historical photos, pages of *The Commercial Record* dating back to 1868, the Saugatuck-Douglas Building Survey and more.

--- First Old School House Exhibit ---

Also open during Memorial Day weekend at the Historical Society's Old School House Discovery Center, 130 Center Street in Douglas, is that emerging facility's first public exhibit, designed to complement the Museum's new exhibit with a different perspective. Conceived by Saugatuck Middle School 6<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher Wendy Colsen and Jim Schmiechen, this exhibit gave Colsen's students the theme "Summertime Fun" and invited them to plan, design, research and produce displays that tell stories about how, when and why various kinds of summer recreation have come to characterize our area.

"Working on a collaborative project with the Historical Society is always such an exciting process for the kids," Colsen says. "They learn so many invaluable skills that apply to a real world setting, and the public presentation steps up the expectations for them. My favorite part is watching them get excited to do research each day and also the look of pride on their faces when they are showing their work to the public."

The Old School House exhibit will offer a public preview one weekend in advance, May 16 and 17, Noon to 3pm both days, then will reopen during the same three-hour period daily from Friday, May 22 through May 24.

Founded in 1992, the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society Museum occupies the historic Saugatuck Pump House at 735 Park Street, along the west shore of the Kalamazoo River at Mt. Baldhead Park, a short walk north from the Saugatuck Chain Ferry landing. The Museum is open Noon to 4pm daily from Memorial Day (May 24) through August, then Saturdays/Sundays in September and October. Admission and parking are free. Tel: (269) 857-7900. See more

information about the Historical Society, its Museum and its Old School House Discovery Center  
at [www.sdhistoricalociety.org](http://www.sdhistoricalociety.org).

# # #