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

October-November 2019
THE PUBLICATION OF THE
SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER
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Upcoming Programs and Meeting

We have our last Monthly Meeting of the year this week. But there are many more things happening as we head into winter. Make note of these events:

November 13, Monthly Meeting:
History of Invasive Species in the Great Lakes, 7 PM. Presenter Steve Pothoven, fishery biologist with NOAA/Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory's Lake Michigan Field Station in Muskegon since 1998, will provide an overview of how various invasive species have entered and affected the Great Lakes ecosystem, with an emphasis on the most recent trends and research regarding some of the more recent invaders in Lake Michigan, most notably quagga mussels.

November 23, Douglas Holiday Stroll, History Center Opening, Robert Fort paintings from 12-4 PM on Saturday.

Plan a trip to the History Center School House to see the new exhibit of paintings by Saugatuck artist Robert 'Harry' Fort (1875-1954).

So Long Fall Season!

Detail from a Cora Bliss Taylor late fall landscape now on view at the SDHC
The end of October marked the conclusion of regular History Museum and School House hours. We had a great season thanks to the dozens of volunteers at both sites.

**SDHC by the numbers for 2019:**

We greeted visitors from 46 U.S. states, 5 Canadian provinces, and 28 foreign countries!

Numbers of visitors: more than 6,000 at the Museum and nearly 2,000 toured the History Center–School House!

Stay tuned for more opportunities and open hours at the History Center throughout the winter.

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**Robert Fort, painter winter exhibit opening November 23rd through spring 2020.**

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**December 4, Holiday Party at the Saugatuck Yacht Club from 5:30-8 PM.**

We're just over three weeks away from the party and this week's wintry weather has us feeling the holiday spirit!

Thank you to everyone who has responded already. Spots are filling up and we're looking forward to seeing you very soon! RSVP today. Reserve your spot by emailing Janet Schmidt at jbschmidt@wmol.com. 

[Link for more Holiday Party information](#)
S.S. Keewatin Program on October 8th a Success

The S.S. Keewatin Museum visited Saugatuck to spread the good news of their restoration of 'The Kee' in October. Both Conroy and Corey Keeble, Emeritus Curator at the Royal Ontario Museum gave a riveting hour-long program at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts supported by the SDHC and generously underwritten by R.J. Peterson.

Copies of both the standard and deluxe editions of the new book are available to review at the SDHC School House in Douglas. You can also learn more about the publication and how to order a copy here: https://sskeewatin.com/book/

From the Archives

Saugatuck High School Stories

Are you a Saugatuck HS graduate? Booster? Know a few things about area history from the 1900s-1980s? We need your stories!

The Saugatuck High School Journalism class is working on a project with the History Center. Students have selected artifacts from our collections and are researching the stories behind the objects. Thank you to Christina Lewis for directing this project!
SHS students wrote: "Currently, we are researching a 1930-1940 (we believe) cheerleading sweater from Saugatuck High School. Inside the sweater, a name embroidered on a thicker piece of fabric reads "M. Brady". If anybody in the community knows anything about the cheerleading team during these years or may know who "M. Brady" is, please contact us. Any information will be appreciated! " Share what information you have and send a message to us at the History Center.

Check out our Facebook page for more objects and stories!

By Jack Sheridan

Welcome from Jack Sheridan and Chris Yoder, leaders of the Society Family History Group.

Please visit a regular Family History Group meeting to see what we are all about and join the group. We share "lessons learned" about the many tools available for family history research.

Questions/comments/advice/needs:

Mayflower ancestor, Revolutionary War vet, famous cousins, great grand parents, ...
Where did you come from?
Thinking about a DNA test?
Answering questions: we are best at ....

Call or email us, meetings are normally the first and third Thursday every month at 3:30 at the Old School House.

Your family history does not have to have any connection to the Saugatuck-Douglas area !!!

Not sure how to get going? Let us provide a helpful jump start by recording what you know about your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents and send it along for a review by Chris Yoder or myself.

The snail mail address is SDHS Family History Box 617 Douglas, 49406, or email to either cyoder@tds.net or jack.sheridan@gmail.com
We will soon be back to you with readily found data and with suggestions on the next steps to take. Further help is always available from Chris and myself by phone and email.

The only requirement is membership in the SDHS. Join the group and find the answers.

jack.sheridan@gmail.com 269 857-7144 or cyoder@tds.net 616 212-3443

**Family History Guest Writer**

For this edition of the *Ball and Chain*, Chris Yoder invited Karen Kratky Lehrer, to share her Saugatuck stories of Burr Tillstrom. The History Center is excited to share that the Burr Tillstrom in Saugatuck exhibit will be expanded for May of 2020 to coincide with the second annual [Kuklapalooza at Ox-Bow puppetry conference](#) May 1-3, 2020. Stay tuned for more details!

He would briskly walk thru the Village of Saugatuck, stroll along the sandy shores of the Oval Beach, and shop at Taft's Supermarket on Blue Star Highway, usually without fanfare or autograph seekers. The town respected him and left him alone.

His name was Burr Tillstrom. He spent years in Saugatuck, summer after summer, and eventually bought himself a barn-like red home on the hill, on Spear Street. His winters were spent traveling and in Chicago until in his last year of life, he bought a home in Palm Springs, California to find warmer winter months. His love for Saugatuck was deep and I remember him telling us that this gem of a Village he preferred over the famous Martha's Vineyard.

My parents, Warren and Estel Kratky, my brother Bryan and I spent every summer in Saugatuck, too, eventually buying a home on Spear Street a few houses from Burr's. As children, Bryan and I would walk Oval Beach to the private harbor setting, holding hands with Burr Tillstrom and his loved doggy, Lucy. Mr. Tillstrom was a fit man, had a gorgeous tan and accentuated his beach attire with a gold chain and stylish...
sunglasses. A great beach companion, he loved children and in return they adored him.

Burr's puppet mastery lent itself to the Saugatuck folk viewing and participating in free puppet shows sometimes in the summer months. Note the pictures of one such puppet show in the early 1960's, where Mr. Tillstrom stationed himself and his puppets outside on the grounds of the old Red Barn Theater. The audience flocked to see Kukla and Ollie perform their skits. He would randomly pick viewers to participate in some of the scenes, too. Obviously a genius and pioneer in the field, his stage shows were memorable 50 years later. In the 1980's, Burr wrote and published a wonderful children's book 'The Dragon Who Lived Downstairs', featuring his zany puppet characters. The book, like Burr, was kind and sensitive, leading the way to teaching life lessons. I cherish my copy and his personalized remarks inside the cover.

My parents grew close to him especially during his last five years of life. They entertained at each other's homes and in Burr's last year of life he bought a winter home in Palm Springs, a few miles from my mom and dad's place. This all lent itself to year round dinners and conversations. In December 1985 my family was scheduled to dine with Burr in Palm Springs at Lord Fletchers Inn. We never made that date, as Mr. Tillstrom passed away from a heart attack while lounging at his pool that morning.

Saugatuck values his contributions and talent and honored him with a statue in the Village park and with occasional lectures and displays of his work. Burr Tillstrom was a man who devoted his entire life to art and puppetry, making countless children fall in love with his storytelling.

By Jack Sheridan

Great for the production of the October ASK JACK column, came a question from my friend Dick Lyons. Dick is one [the master leader] of the craftsmen that restored the SDHC Francis boat, a historical treasure, now prominently displayed in its own building at the History Center in Douglas.

Dick had recently examined the Saugatuck Village Square cannon. Noting the small bore of three or four inches he wondered if it was a Lyle Gun. What was my opinion, he offered, reasoning that if it was a Lyle Gun, perhaps it might be displayed with the Francis lifeboat. And was there a connection with the Kalamazoo Lighthouse, which had the Francis boat, and maybe a Lyle Gun?
Saugatuck's Cannon Today - Village Square at Butler and Main

A Lyle Gun was a small cannon capable of shooting a light line a hundred yards or so, to link the shore to a shipwreck. The light line then would be used to haul a much heavier line over water to establish a rig capable of removing people stranded on the wreck.

After some sleuthing here are my findings:
Our little cannon certainly has a small bore but research reveals that was not unusual, particularly for ship deck cannons. In my opinion this is not a Lyle Gun. It is too large and cumbersome for that purpose. I suspect the carriage is not original. Plus it does not resemble a Lyle Gun. This cannon is for shooting at whatever military cannons shoot at, and in this case, for making a loud bang to celebrate a significant happening! But what did I find out about the cannon?

My father, James E. Sheridan in his local history book SAUGATUCK THROUGH THE YEARS, touches on the history:

For a great many years the village hall housed an item which is far more familiar today than it was in many past years. This is the little black cannon with red wheels which for a long period was not kept on public display, as it is today, in the public square. This small gun is said to have been a gift from Stephen A. Morrison about 1880.

For many years it was kept stored away in a corner of the hall and only brought out for public inspection and use on very special occasions. It was generally fired to celebrate some extraordinary event of the period, including the endings of three wars. It was fired in the celebration that accompanied the formal opening of the new harbor in 1906, and at the 1930 Centennial and the Bi-Centennial celebration in 1976.

During World War II an effort was made to persuade every community to make a significant contribution of scrap metal to help win the war and that prompted the village to agree to part with this relic of the past. This potentially deep sacrifice received considerable publicity in the district, some adverse, but the little gun was finally wheeled out of hiding and placed with the rest of the metallic junk piled in a
heap on Morrison Park, where a few photographs were taken.

However, when the hour for the scrap pick up arrived the cannon was missing. This was noted by few, if any, at the time but the truth of the matter was that, after dark, Harry Newnham, then Superintendent of Public Works, had quietly placed it back in its accustomed rear corner of the fire hall, to continue to be available should other momentous occasions require its presence and use. No doubt the scrap drive suffered very little.

The only other clue was a short description found as part of a circa 2005 Saugatuck tour guide a reference to the Village Square where there was:

... a ships cannon from the 1840s - brought to Saugatuck about the time of the Civil War. Now fired only on special occasions."

Hmmmm ... not much to go on, Dick. That is the best I can do for now. Love to hear from any readers having more info. In the photo montage the cannon today, cannon next to the Big Pavilion ca 1911, and a late 1800s Lyle gun for comparison.
In Memoriam

We take this time to remember our friends and members who gave so much to the community and to the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. Please click on the photographs for links to full obituaries.

David Balas

Dottie Lyon

Henry Gleason

ABOUT THE SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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 organization with nearly 700 members residing in nearby communities and across the country.
Members are the lifeblood our largely volunteer organization. To join as a member, select from the following categories:

- Individual: $50
- Household: $70
- Premium: $300
- Corporate: $500
- Lifetime: $1,000
- Senior (65+): $30
- Senior Household: $45

Send check payable to the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center to: PO Box 617, Douglas, Michigan 49406 or visit our website at [http://sdhistoricalsociety.org/membership/membership.php](http://sdhistoricalsociety.org/membership/membership.php).

**SAUGATUCK- DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER FACILITIES**

The Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum is located at 735 Park Street in Saugatuck, in the historic Saugatuck Pump House building. The History Museum is open Saturday and Sunday from 12-4 through October.

The History Center -- Old School House and Francis Surfboat Exhibit are located at 130 Center Street in Douglas. For group tours of the School House, please contact director Eric Gollanek at 269-857-5751 or by email at director@sdhistoricalsociety.org.

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, call 269-857-7901 or e-mail the archives directly: archives@sdhistoricalsociety.org

History Center main phone: 269-857-5751
Museum phone: 269-857-7900
Tech Center/Archives direct phone: 269-857-7901

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