



OLD SCHOOL HOUSE
HISTORY CENTER

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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HISTORY MUSEUM

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S JULY 13 FREE MONTHLY PROGRAM
VISITS NEW RICHMOND BRIDGE AND STURGEON HATCHERY

JULY 1, 2016 -- A "field trip" visit to the New Richmond Bridge and update on The Kalamazoo River Sturgeon Habitat Restoration Project highlights the next Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society free monthly public program on Wednesday, July 13. The program begins at 7 p.m. at New Richmond Bridge Park, located where Old Allegan Road dead-ends in Manilus Township about 4.6 miles from its intersection with the Blue Star Highway in Saugatuck, with the last 0.4-mile jogging east of 58th St. Carpooling is encouraged as parking space there is limited.

Presenter Al Weener will guide a walk-and-talk visit to the 137-year-old swing bridge while discussing its history and restoration. He and Zack Cleeman then will review progress and plans in restoring the Kalamazoo River's ancient native population of sturgeon, including a look at the mobile fish hatchery stationed at the park, where young sturgeon are being developed for river release in September.

Weener is president of *Kalamazoo River Lake Sturgeon for Tomorrow*, a not-for-profit organization that partners with the DNR, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Gun Lake Indian Tribe to restore a self-sustaining population of sturgeon to the river. Cleeman, a sturgeon expert, represents the Wisconsin Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and its Regional Fish Hatchery in Genoa, WI.

Sturgeon, Weener explains, have populated the Kalamazoo River for more than 10,000 years, but in the past 125 years human pollution, dam building and overfishing have severely diminished their numbers. Females, which can live 100 years, return upriver only every four to seven years but do not begin to spawn until age 24-26 years, making repopulation efforts a long-term project.

As a New Richmond resident in the late 1970s, Weener helped with the first "save the bridge" campaign and fundraising for its park development. Historically significant -- as multi-span, rivet-connected "Warren pony truss" bridges are very rare -- New Richmond's four-span structure is the longest remaining one of its type in Michigan. Built in 1879 to take Old Allegan Road across the river, it's also one of the oldest truss bridges in the state, and reveals the early development of American metal bridge construction.

Last repaired for vehicular use in 1980, it eventually was obsoleted by modern traffic requirements and dismantled, restored off-site, then reassembled in 2005 for pedestrian use only. Although the Kalamazoo River is no longer navigable commercially, the restoration included the manually operated mechanics that rotate a section of the bridge open for boats too big to pass beneath.

For this Historical Society program, Weener notes, "we're working with the Allegan County Parks Department hoping to get a bridge opening demonstration, but so far that remains unconfirmed". Guests preferring seating are encouraged to bring folding chairs, he adds, and mosquito repellent also might be a good idea.

The Historical Society's free monthly programs present entertaining and informative insights into our

community life and local history. This month's program is sponsored by Society members Arthur Ashley and Darin Reiling.

To learn more about the sturgeon restoration project, visit www.kazoosturgeon.org. For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, its Museum and Old School House History Center, or its activities planned for 2016, visit www.sdhistoricalsociety.org.

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This earliest photo found in the Historical Society archives shows the New Richmond Swing Bridge as it appeared in 1915, looking much the same as it does today.