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LAKE MICHIGAN'S 1940 ARMISTICE DAY TRAGEDY
RELIVED IN HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S MAR. 9 PROGRAM

FEB. 26, 2016 -- An epic maritime tragedy caused by a freak 1940 storm will be revisited at the next Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society monthly program on Wednesday, March 9, at 7 p.m. in the Old School House History Center, 130 Center Street in Douglas. Admission is free and public attendance is welcomed.

Author and underwater explorer Valerie van Heest, of Holland, commemorates the tragic Armistice Day Blizzard of November 11, 1940 in which five ships and 67 sailors were lost. She and the dive team from Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates have examined the wrecks of the *Novadoc*, *William B. Davock*, and *Anna C. Minch*, all lost off Pentwater within a few miles of each other. Their research now provides insight into what caused these massive freighters to sink when others survived the storm. Also lost that day were South Haven fishing tugs *Indian* and *Richard H*, never to be found, while 12 other vessels were damaged or grounded.

That storm arguably was the worst to hit the Great Lakes since 1900, cutting a 1,000-mile-wide swath from Kansas to Michigan, leaving 145 dead, many injured, and many homes and businesses severely damaged. The day started deceptively with unseasonable temperatures in the mid-60s, but by late afternoon an intense low-pressure system swept up from the southern plains pulling Gulf moisture north and arctic air south. When these collided temperatures plunged 50 degrees, winds picked up as high as 80 mph, while rain turned to sleet, then to a 27" snowfall, creating drifts 20 ft. deep. Lake Michigan waves reached 27 ft. heights at Pentwater, with spray estimated to 100 ft., while power and phone lines fell, trees were uprooted, buildings collapsed, and road and rail transportation were paralyzed. The blizzard hammered the West Michigan shore overnight for twelve hours.

The Historical Society's free monthly programs offer entertaining and informative insights into our community's past and present life. This month's program is sponsored by *Star of Saugatuck Boat Cruises* and owners Marilyn and Bruce Starring.

For more information about the Historical Society, its Museum and its Old School House History Center, visit www.sdhistoricalociety.org.

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Sunlight filtered through shallow water casts an eerie glow on the bow of the *SS Novadoc*, one of three storm-sunken Lake Michigan freighters explored in the March 9 S-D Historical Society program.