

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

Information Contacts:

Nathan Nietering
269.857.5751
director@sdhistoricalsociety.org

John Peters
269.857.2967
jppubrel@gmail.com

SDHC/GVSU "STORIES OF SUMMER" HISTORY HARVEST 2.0 INVITES MID-1900s ITEMS AND STORIES SATURDAY, JULY 21

JULY 13, 2018 -- For those who missed Saugatuck-Douglas History Center's first "Stories of Summer" History Harvest in June, a second chance to share local historical memorabilia and personal reflections of Saugatuck in the 1950-80 timeframe returns to the Old School House at 130 Center St. in Douglas on Saturday, July 21, from 9am to 4pm. Anyone with materials to share or stories to tell will be gratefully welcomed.

Volunteers from Saugatuck-Douglas History Center and the Kutsche Office of Local History at Grand Valley State University will team up to conduct oral history interviews and receive materials brought in by anyone who lived around here or visited this area during the mid-late 1900s. Special equipment will be set up to photograph or scan submitted materials for digitizing as additions to SDHC archives; originals will either be accepted if donated, or returned to their owners along with a digital copy.

Recapping the earlier History Harvest event, SDHC Executive Director Nathan Nietering reports recording 13 oral histories focusing on memories of everyday life in the area, with another ten scheduled, and digitizing many photographs, a scrap book, and personal ephemera such as local brochures and old membership cards from local organizations.

"The oral history interviews have been especially interesting", Nietering says. "We've heard memories from folks who were students at the Douglas Union School, stories about the "lakeshore life" near the Douglas Beach, favorite restaurants in downtown Saugatuck, and the wild and wonderful Music Festivals in the late 1960s. Our goal is to capture at least 40 stories to compose a "big picture" of the life and times of our villages in this era."

One of the prizes Nietering hopes will emerge from this project is the elusive 1969 Saugatuck Music Festival poster. "I've seen it in pictures," he says, "but it would be exciting to see the real thing turn up in our collection."

For oral-history interviews, advance reservations are requested to help make sure adequate staff will be on hand. These may be scheduled by phone call to 269.857.5751, or by e-mail to info@sdhistoricalsociety.org. For broader accommodation, sessions also may be scheduled later in July and August with advance arrangements. Oral history providers will receive a digital recording of their interviews on USB (stick) drive.

History Center's "Stories of Summer" project was designed in partnership with GVSU to chronicle our area's evolution through its turbulent post-war growth of tourism and concurrent rise as a lakeshore destination for the LGBT community. "What we're hoping to gather and preserve", Nietering says, "are the depictions and experiences of everyday life that will piece together a broader picture of how Saugatuck and Douglas came to be as they are today. It's a story best told by those who lived through it."

He notes that this period shares the focus of SDHC's current two-year exhibition at the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum at Mt. Baldhead, "Cold War / Hot Towns", in which first-hand accounts of wild music festivals, motorcycle gangs on the backstreets of Douglas, college parties in downtown Saugatuck and more are presented around a structure representing the Mt. Baldhead radar tower, dramatizing its mission to search the skies for Soviet bombers at the height of the Cold War scare.

Supported by a \$12,000 grant awarded to the Kutsche Office by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) through its "Common Heritage" program, the SDHC project shares \$250,000 in NEH funding for 23 similar projects nationwide, all aimed at capturing America's cultural heritage "hidden" in personal life stories, family histories, photo albums, newspaper clippings and other home memorabilia.

Staff members from Grand Valley's University Libraries will preserve the digitized interviews and images on-line for public access. Transcribed copies of oral histories and collected materials will be kept at SDHC's Old School House in Douglas and in an on-line database.

Later in the year, date to be determined, a community-wide dialogue will be scheduled to share items uncovered and highlight interesting aspects of the interviews, and to invite feedback about additional ways to make the information widely available.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, volunteer opportunities or activities planned for 2018, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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Kutsche Office Director Kimberly McKee explains the oral history interview process at the June History Harvest, will return for the July 21 "second-chance" event. (Photo credit: Adam Bird, of Bird+Bird Studio, Grand Rapids)