

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
HISTORY
CENTER

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SDHC OPENS FREE ROBERT FORT ART EXHIBIT
AT THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE SATURDAY, FEB. 15

FEB. 7, 2020 -- A free, public exhibit showcasing the Saugatuck artwork of Robert Fort (1875-1954), titled "Rediscovering a Michigan Painter", will open Saturday, February 15, at the Old School House, 130 Center St. in Douglas, and remain through May. The exhibit includes fifteen paintings combining new acquisitions by the Saugatuck Douglas History Center with several pieces on loan from other collections. Opening-day hours are from Noon to 5pm, with cookies and light refreshments to enhance the event.

Robert Harry Fort, born in Bloomington, IL, moved to Chicago in 1890 where he became a commercial artist and architect. A recreational sailor known to friends as Harry, he visited Saugatuck in 1904, loved the village and surrounding area, and convinced his family to relocate here in 1905.

Plagued by eye problems, Fort was forced to abandon his profession. On his 1918 draft card, he listed his occupation as "boat builder", and is perhaps best remembered for creating a 16-ft sailboat prototype called *Papoose*, which was used in competitions at the Saugatuck Yacht Club beginning in 1934.

Fort lived a quiet life on Griffith Street in Saugatuck, with his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Newnham. A self-taught painter, he mastered the oil-on-canvas medium to create visual memories of his community, many of which reflect his mid-century view from the Newnham House front porch. His knowledge of architecture is evident in the careful detail seen in the buildings he portrayed.

Over the 66 years since his death at age 78, Fort has faded into the mist of Michigan's Art History. The new exhibit is intended to reintroduce this nearly forgotten local artist to the Saugatuck-Douglas community and beyond, hopefully reestablishing him as one of Michigan's great painters.

Concurrently, the free, public exhibit celebrating the life and works of noted Saugatuck artist/teacher Cora Bliss Taylor (1889-1986), which opened last August, remains in the Old School House augmented with six more paintings.

In addition, the Old School House offers a new supply of SDHC's Douglas Root Beer Barrel holiday ornaments, which sold out in record time early last December, prompting many requests for more. Also available is a limited supply of the commemorative SS Keewatin book that was introduced last October in celebration of the ship's 112th anniversary and its significance to both Canada and the U.S.

For more information about the History Center, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, and its activities planned for the months ahead, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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PHOTO ATTACHED SEPARATELY (see jpeg "FortArt")

Caption:

This untitled winter town scene, circa 1947, exemplifies Robert Fort's artistry in the Old School House exhibit opening Feb. 15.