

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
HISTORY
CENTER

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NEW LIFE FOR HISTORIC SAUGATUCK FISHING BUILDING:
AGREEMENT REACHED FOR SITE AND PARTNERSHIP

Jan. 8, 2021 – The Saugatuck-Douglas History Center has secured a new home for one of Saugatuck's last commercial fishing shanties by partnering with Retro Boat Rentals of Saugatuck.

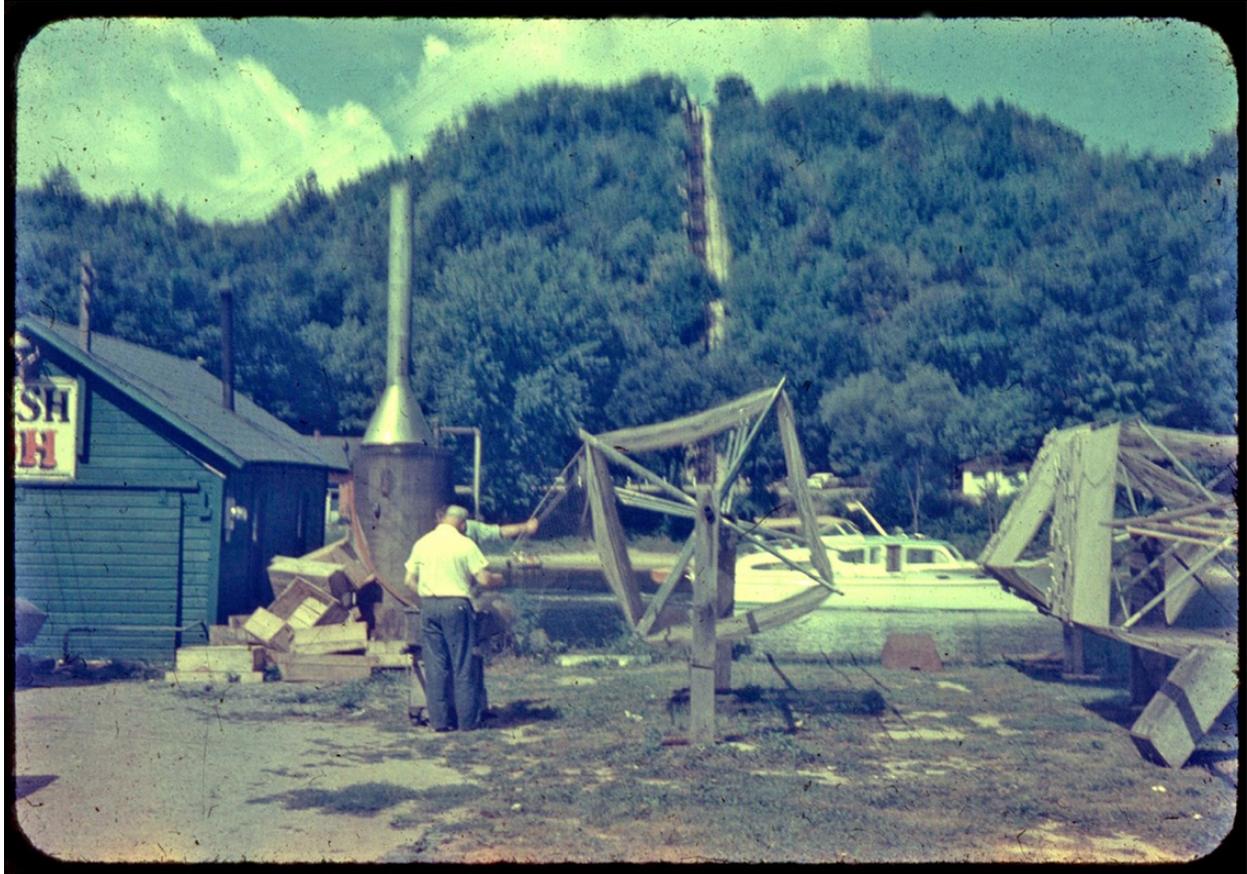
Retro Boat Rentals will restore the Demerest Shanty and place it at their 730 Water Street site. The History Center will research, design and install interpretive displays inside and outside the Shanty to tell the story of commercial fishing in Saugatuck. The exterior of the Shanty will be open to the public 24/7. Interior exhibits will be open during Retro Boat's normal operating hours. Marvin "Demi" Demerest, previous owner of the shanty and one of Saugatuck's last commercial fishermen, passed away in April of 2020.

For 100 years, from the 1860s to the 1960s, commercial fishing was an important industry in Saugatuck, employing hundreds of people and producing tons of fish for local and regional markets. The industry was originally concentrated at "Fishtown" across from what is now the Ox-Bow School of Art. After the course of the Kalamazoo River was straightened in 1906, Fishtown became landlocked and the industry migrated into Saugatuck. Buildings like the Demerest Shanty once dotted the shore around what is now Coughlin Park and between Francis and Lucy Streets. By the 1960s, environmental pollution, invasive species, and state regulations favoring recreational fishing contributed to the demise of commercial fishing in Saugatuck and throughout Lake Michigan.

The SDHC's unique public/private partnership agreement with Retro Boats was central to the preservation of the Demerest Shanty and its reinvention as a "mini museum." During this year of remarkable challenges, History Center representatives sought innovative solutions to preserving and interpreting local history. The SDHC worked with multiple public and private entities in the area, prioritizing a waterfront site accessible to the public and a partner willing to invest resources to restore and maintain the shanty. John Sharar and Lauren Stanton, owners of Retro Boat Rentals, and the Harrington family who own the site, generously agreed to take on this challenge. In partnership with the SDHC, significant portions of the shanty will be reserved for historic displays, and Retro Boats will use other portions as a gathering space for customers waiting to rent boats.

Display sponsorship opportunities are available at various levels, and sponsor names will appear on site. If interested, please contact SDHC committee chair Julie Bizzis at jkbizzis@gmail.com.

For more information about the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center and its Pump House Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, visit www.MySDHistory.org.



Caption: A typical Saugatuck mid-century fishing shanty with wooden boxes for packing fish, a boiler to sanitize nets, and net-drying reels. The Mt. Baldhead steps are visible across the Kalamazoo River. Photo: SDHC Collections.