

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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FRENCH VOYAGEUR LIFE CIRCA 1700 REVEALED AT JULY 6 "TUESDAY TALK"

JUNE 25, 2021 -- An open-air, hands-on look at the life of 18th century French Voyageurs in what now is Michigan highlights this summer's first Saugatuck-Douglas History Center "Tuesday Talk" on July 6, in the "Back-In-Time Garden" behind the Old School House, 130 Center Street in Douglas. The one-hour program begins when the school bell rings at 11 a.m. To assure comfortable outdoor seating, attendees are encouraged to bring their own camp chairs if possible.

Naturalist Tom Funk, with West Michigan's Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC) for seven years after serving similar organizations in Maine, Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee, will host an interactive discussion of the Voyageurs' role in the Great Lakes fur trade. Using replica clothing, tools and trade goods, he will demonstrate how and why these hardy adventurers did business with Michigan's Anishinaabe and other Indigenous People, and what their typical day would have been like.

Voyageurs were mostly French Canadians with skills in handling canoes, detecting rapids and falls in unfamiliar rivers, surviving in woods and waters of the Great Lakes alongside the Anishinaabe. They were regarded as legendary heroes celebrated in folklore and song, but their life was one of hard labor and not nearly as glorious as folk tales make it out to be. Essentially, they were the blue-collar workers of the Montreal fur trade, hired to man large canoes that carried trade goods and supplies over long distances to fur trading locations, then transport furs back to Montreal. Some went on to become guides for explorers probing deeper into the continent.

The ODC Network is a non-profit education and conservation organization founded in the year 2000 with the mission to connect people with nature through outdoor education for the benefit of wildlife and conservation of the natural world. Since then, the organization has served more than 1.25 million children and adults through outdoor education and recreation programs, with some 75,000 people annually visiting ODC Network sites to walk the trails and view the wildlife.

Thanks to the 2009 merger of the Outdoor Discovery Center and Macatawa Greenway Partnership, the organization now protects more than 1,200 acres along the Macatawa River in Ottawa County and a 160-acre nature preserve south of Holland's West Michigan Regional Airport. The preserve features a 5,000 square foot Visitors Center with taxidermy exhibits ideal for visiting during any season, the DeWitt Birds of Prey Center, the Eldean Family Play Park, plus habitats including meadows, remnant dune, upland forests, lowland hardwood forests, marshes and ponds, all laced with gravel and boardwalk trails.

The ODC Network also operates the DeGraaf Nature Center for the City of Holland, including day-to-day management and the coordination of all its education programs. Both the Outdoor Discovery Center nature preserve and DeGraaf Nature Center are free and open to the public.

A summertime tradition since 1996, SDHC's weekly Tuesday Talks present entertaining and informative insights into local community life and history throughout July and August. This program is sponsored by the Ullman family of Lakeshore Drive and Western Springs, IL, in memory of Josie Clark -- lifetime SDHC member, Tuesday-Talk devotee and "walking encyclopedia of all things Michigan Lakeshore" -- along with SDHC members Bill Hess and Mike Mattern.

While admission is free for current SDHC members, non-member guests are encouraged to attend with a donation of five dollars, or to become new members at the Talk.

Saugatuck-Douglas History Center is supported in part by the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information about SDHC, 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 "Portage")

Caption : Lithograph printed with a Harper's Monthly magazine article in 1879 depicts Voyageurs making a portage around rapids, visualizing the hard life discussed in SDHC's July 6 Tuesday Talk.

