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JUNE 10 HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAM
TRACES PAST OF CORAL GABLES RESTAURANT

DOUGLAS, MAY 29, 2015 -- Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society's next monthly program recalls the history of Saugatuck's Coral Gables Restaurant, on-site in the restaurant's "Old Crow Bar" at 220 Water Street, on Wednesday, June 10, starting at 7 p.m. Admission is free and public attendance is invited.

Owner Mike Johnson will tell the story of how Coral Gables evolved from the building's earlier lives as Leidecker Inn and Columbia Hotel, when his father and brother -- Thomas and Topper Johnson -- began its latest reincarnation in 1958. It was then the latest addition to the family's chain of eighteen different restaurants established across Michigan and eastern states in the days before franchising became popular. Mike and Topper took over the Saugatuck business after their father's death in 1979 as the other family restaurants were sold, and with Topper's passing in 1985, Mike continued as sole owner. The family's original Coral Gables restaurant, sold by Thomas Johnson in 1969, remains in East Lansing under different ownership.

Illustrating his talk with photos recalling his family, its restaurant tradition, and Coral Gables' earlier lives, Mike will share highlight memories, including how his father once installed a "jail" in the restaurant to challenge the city and Police Department after they arrested one of his employees, and how he responded when a crowd of underage kids once threatened to storm the Gables during a performance of their favorite band. Mike also reveals a plan concocted by his father and the owner of Ship 'n Shore Boatel to build a ski resort on Mt. Baldhead.

This month's program is sponsored by S-DHS members Jolene Jackson and Lonnie Hannaford.

For general information about the Historical Society, its History Museum in Saugatuck, Old School House History Center in Douglas, programs, social activities and volunteer opportunities, visit www.sdhistoricalsociety.org.



June 10 Historical Society program about the evolution of Saugatuck's Coral Gables Restaurant reaches back to this 1904 photo showing the Leindecker Inn, built in 1899, prior to its 1905 addition of the second gable, still there today.