



Information Contacts:

Patty Meyer
616.836.5126
Patty@laketowntwp.org

John Peters
269.857.2967
jppubrel@aol.com

S/D HISTORICAL SOCIETY SEPT. 10 PROGRAM
RECALLS ORIGINS OF LAKETOWN'S FELT ESTATE

AUGUST 29, 2014 -- The story behind Laketown Township's Felt Mansion and Estate will highlight the next monthly Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society program on Wednesday, September 10, in the Old School House History Center, 130 Center Street, Douglas, at 7 p.m. Admission is free and the public is welcomed.

Felt Estate Director and S/DHS member Patty Meyer will highlight Dorr Felt's emphasis on making "Shore Acres" (the Felt Estate) a working farm and his desire to connect his family with the natural world around them. With Felt family photos and home movies, she will link Felt's story with local history of "The Midwest Riviera", as our area was known in the early 1900s, and how it became a popular "getaway" for escaping the turmoil and heat of nearby cities.

Dorr Felt (1862-1930) was a Chicago inventor and industrialist perhaps best known for inventing the Comptometer, an early mechanical computing device, and the Comptograph, the first printing adding machine. He went on to invent more devices and acquired 46 domestic patents and 25 foreign ones. The *Felt & Tarrant Manufacturing Company* that he co-founded with Robert Tarrant in 1889 remained a major player in the calculator industry until the mid-1970s.

Swayed by President Teddy Roosevelt's appreciation for rural America and efforts to make country life more attractive to city dwellers, Felt was drawn to the pristine beauty of the West Michigan coastline and in 1915 began purchasing several hundred acres on Lake Michigan in the rolling dunes between Holland and Saugatuck. Naming his estate "Shore Acres Farm", he began construction of the "Big House" in 1925. Completed in 1928, the 12,000+ square foot mansion consists of 25 rooms, including a third-floor ballroom.

Meyer is a former educator who graduated from GVSU and the School of Education with a major in English & Literature and a minor in Political Science and History. Her interest in art, history and architecture led her to the Felt Mansion and a new career. For the last 12 years, she has worked with volunteers to restore the Felt Estate, and as director of the Estate, planned and implemented hundreds of events. Patty speaks around the state and country at historic preservation conferences, emphasizing the importance of place in our lives, in our history, and in our learning. She is now earning her Master's Degree in Non-profit Administration from the Johnson Center at GVSU.

This meeting's presentation is sponsored by S/DHS members Bruce and Marilyn Starring, owners of Saugatuck's iconic "Star of Saugatuck" sternwheel paddleboat, offering summertime narrated tours along the Kalamazoo River and into Lake Michigan since 1978.

For more information about the Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society, its Museum and Old School House History Center, or its activities planned for 2014, visit www.sdhistoricalsociety.org.

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Late 1920s panoramic photo captures Dorr Felt's "Shore Acres Farm"; seen in the background, the mansion was designed to face east, away from the lake and overlooking the farm, while visitors today often mistake the back side of the building (the west side facing the lake) as its front.