

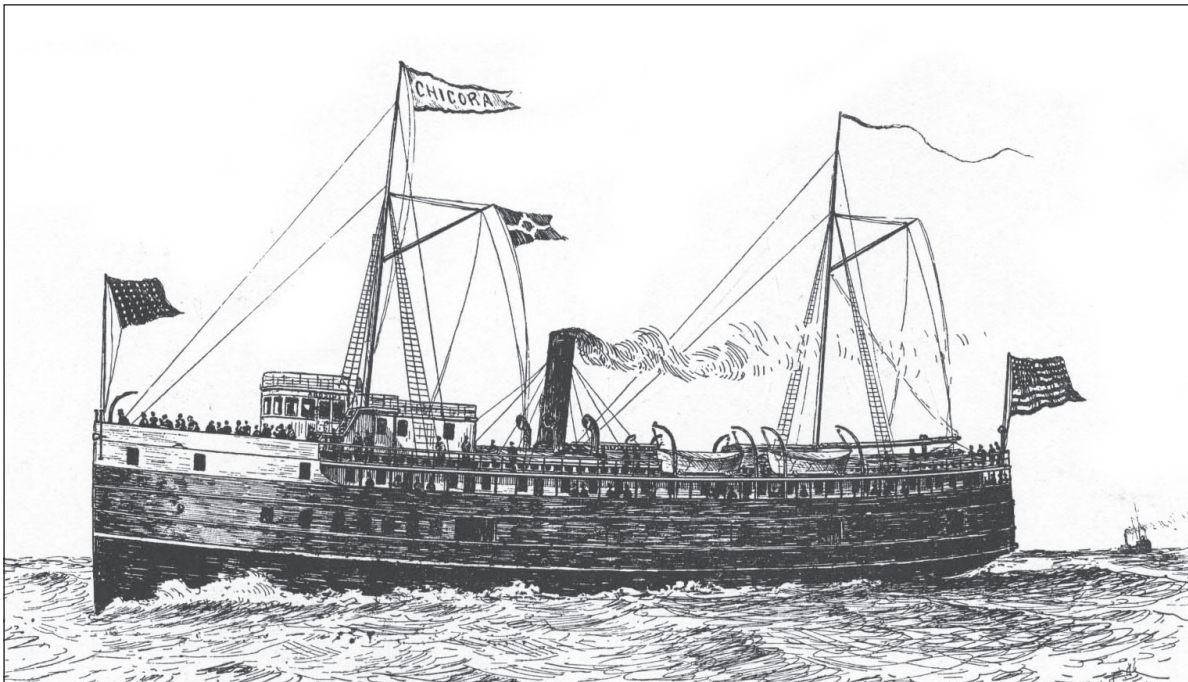
Historical Chronicle

Volume 1, No. 1 Published by the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society so we may... understand our past, preserve the quality of our community life, and shape our future.

Visit the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum 735 Park Street, Saugatuck At Mt. Baldhead Park Free Admission 269-857-7900 Hours listed on page 2.

Visit the Old School House History Center, Back-in-Time Pathway and Lifeboat Exhibit 130 Center Street, Douglas Free Admission 269-857-5751 Hours listed on page 2.

SHIPWRECK!



Message found: “We have lost all hope. She has gone to pieces. Good bye.”

TRAGEDY!

Steamship Chicora Sinks

Captain Edward George Stines and entire crew feared lost

Message in a bottle from Engineer McClure washed up in Glencoe, Illinois! A cruel hoax?

The Chicora, a passenger and freight wooden steamer, should not have been on the lake in the first place. She had already been taken out of service for the winter. Lake Michigan was well respected for its suddenly changing and potentially deadly conditions.

But 1895 was not an typical year. Cold, wet weather in the central plains brought a late wheat harvest and poor shipping conditions. Undelivered flour piled up at mills on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Mill owners grumbled of eliminating the steamship’s cross-lake shortcut and switching a longer, but more reliable all railroad route.

So the Chicora was put back into service for a January run. She broke through 10-inch ice in the St. Joseph, Michigan harbor on the way to the loading dock. A call was put out for a crew but few were willing to sign on. Short of men, Captain Edward C. Stines took his 23-year-old son on the voyage.

The Chicora departed in warm calm weather on Sunday, January 20 and landed at Wisconsin about 5 p.m. She spent the next 10 hours receiving all the flour the vessel could hold and sailed again at 5 a.m.

Meanwhile, back in St. Joseph, John H. Graham, one of the transportation company’s founders, was unable to sleep. He checked the barometer. It read an astounding 28, the lowest reading he had ever seen and a sign that the weather would turn ugly. He rushed to the dock to stop his other ships from leaving the port and sent a telegram to the Chicora. But the message arrived too late! The Chicora had already departed.

Monday, January 21, 1895 was a day of rapidly changing weather. Temperatures plummeted from 50 degrees at 9 a.m. to 28 degrees at 11 a.m. By 3 p.m. a full-blow blizzard had struck. The Chicora

should have arrived in St. Joseph around noon but there was no sign of the ship that day or the next. The ship was reported overdue and telegrams were sent up and down the Michigan coast to alert all harbors to keep a watch for the vessel. Unfortunately, the blizzard made viewing from the shore impossible.

When the blizzard subsided, a dozen men from Saugatuck ventured out on the ice and found pieces of the Chicora’s decking, oars and both masts frozen into the ice about 3/4 mile from shore. The trail of wreckage stretched from Saugatuck to South Haven.

Hope succumbed to despair. A memorial service was arranged for the lost men. But then, the quiet of the Sunday, February 3, afternoon was shattered by the telegraph tapping out a message:

HULL OF A VESSEL BELIEVED TO BE CHICORA IN SIGHT OFF SOUTH CHICAGO WITH 14 MEN OR MORE ON BOARD.

Impossible! Churches and houses emptied as the people gathered around at telegraph office to learn more. A telegram at 4:50 from the Chicago Fire Department read:

THE BOAT IS WITHOUT DOUBT THE CHICORA AS HER NAME CAN BE READ THROUGH A FIELD GLASS FROM SHORE.

The telegraph continued to click out messages:

A TUG HAS GONE AFTER THE MEN. 19 HAVE BEEN SIGHTED ON HER. THEY EXPECT TO GET THEM OFF BY MORNING.

Find out what happened next, about the mysterious message in a bottle, and what ultimately became of the Chicora in the book *Storm, Fire, & Ice: Shipwrecks of the Saugatuck Area* available at the Saugatuck History Museum, The Old School House, or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org.

New Exhibit Reveals the Dangers of Lake Michigan Lifesaving

See the rare c. 1854 iron Francis Lifeboat

One of only two surviving crafts left in the entire United States of America

During the winter of 1870-71, Great Lakes shipwrecks claimed the lives of 214 people. Back then, before the establishment of railroads and highways, the lakes were busy with cargo ship traffic.

The destructive power of Lake Michigan’s storm-tossed waves is legendary. But the greatest danger to sailing vessels was the shore: rocks, sandbars and harbor walls. In fine weather, a captain could handily steer a craft into a narrow harbor mouth, but with a 30-mile-per-hour crosswind the task was more akin to threading a needle while standing on a pitching deck. In a storm, any ship stranded on a sandbar was smashed to pieces within hours, much to the horror of the people — sometimes friends and family — watching helplessly from the shore.

What could be done? If there were heavy onshore winds, a rescue ship stood a good chance of also being stranded. Only small boats could reach vessels wrecked close to the beach. So the burden of life-saving fell to teams of six to eight “surfmén” who would row out into the storm in their small life-boats.



An oft-repeated tale is that as surfmen headed out into a howling gale to aid a foundering ship, a bystander on the dock yelled, “You will never make it back!” The life-boat captain replied, “The book only says we have to go out. It don’t say nothing about coming back!” This story typifies the bravery of the surfmen who were the forerunners of the United States Coast Guard.

THE FRANCIS LIFEBOAT

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1801, Joseph Francis grew up hearing about the frequent shipwrecks in Boston Harbor. The increase in ship travel during the 19th century multiplied the occurrence of shipwrecks. The heavy wooden lifeboats in use at the time were inadequate for the task. They could easily capsize, be smashed against the shore, or for lack of proper maintenance be found unseaworthy just when they were needed.

To solve this tragic problem, Joseph Francis devised a strong, lightweight and nearly indestructible metallic lifeboat. In 1847, to mass produce these boats, he invented an hydraulic press to stamp out the hulls from one thin sheet of metal. The finished parts were coated with molten tin, then zinc (in an early form of galvanization) and riveted together.

The Francis lifeboat was touted in the 1851 *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, “The seams of the metallic boat will never open by exposure to the sun

and rain, when lying long on the deck of a ship, or hauled up on shore. Nor will such boats burn. If a ship takes fire at sea, the boat’s iron can never be injured by conflagration. Nor can they be sunk. For they are provided with air chambers in various parts, each separate from the others, so that if the boat were bruised and jammed by violent concussions, up to her utmost capacity of receiving injury, the shapeless mass would still float upon the sea, and hold up with unconquerable buoyancy as many as could cling to her.”

The craft was considered so effective the U.S. Life-Saving Service sent 48 of these boats to Great Lakes locations. Saugatuck received its 26-foot boat between 1853 and 1860.

Joseph Francis went on to invent many innovative lifesaving boats and in 1890 he was awarded the Congressional gold medal in recognition of a half century of saving lives. From 1850 to 1854 alone, more than 2,100 passengers were rescued by his inventions.

You are invited to view a rare, recently restored Francis lifeboat at the exhibit *Rowing Them Safely Home: Lifesaving and Shipwrecks on Lake Michigan* at the Old School House History Center in Douglas. While there preview the 1.16 acre “Back-in-Time” Pathway that will eventually include learning stations, a rhododendron garden and a Mt. Baldhead viewing platform.

This copy of the *Historical Chronicle* is free, thanks to printing sponsorship donated by

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Saugatuck’s waterfront entertainment complex with five bars and four restaurants.



BEAR SIGHTED ON MT. BALDHEAD

Popular Scenic Viewpoint Not Without Perils

MAY FRANCIS HEATH, Saugatuck's first historian, recounts the following tale of a schoolteacher's encounter with one of the area's wild citizens.

Constance Bingham, teacher at the Loomis school, had a great desire to climb Mt. Baldhead. Miss Bingham could find no one to accompany her so she bravely went alone. The ferry man rowed her across the Kalamazoo River and directed her where to go. After several attempts she reached the top of the dune, took in the spectacular view, and headed down toward the beach. She encountered a little mound where an Indian child had been buried. This must have stuck a sentimental chord within the teacher because she paused to gather wild flowers and fashion a wreath to adorn the grave. After a rest she began the long climb back up the west side of Baldhead. She rested again at the top and reported that she

sat musing over the Indian grave and how she would recount the day's events to her pupils. While thus occupied the bushes beside her began to crack and snap and a black "something" thrust its head through the branches and gave an ugly grunt. Miss Bingham, too startled to even look back, with well directed bounds lost no time in getting to the foot of Baldhead. She was terribly frightened, imagining that all the animals of the forest were chasing her, so she ran at high speed to the ferry, arriving there in such a shaking and frightened state that she could not speak. The kind old ferry man advised her to hurry home. She did exactly that and the next day Mr. Morrison and a party of men discovered a black bear, —the largest ever seen in the area— roaming on Mt. Baldhead.

In the end Miss Bingham had quite a story to tell her students. May Francis Heath's *Early Memories of Saugatuck, Michigan 1830-1930* is full of tales from Saugatuck's early days. Copies are available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org



Brave Souls who survive a climb to the top of Mt. Baldhead can commemorate their achievement with souvenir "I Climbed Mt. Baldhead" T-shirts available at the Saugatuck History Museum ... along with bottles of cold water. Benches in the museum garden are a great spot to catch your breath and enjoy a splendid river view.



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The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society is an all-volunteer, non-governmental, not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization with membership open to all. Joining the Society is a delightful way to meet people who love the Saugatuck-Douglas area and learn about the forces that shaped this region. Monthly member meetings, newsletters and events will connect you with the community.



Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum

735 Park Street, Saugatuck, MI 49453 (in the Pump House building on the west bank of the Kalamazoo River at the foot of Mt. Baldhead)
OPEN from noon to 4 p.m. daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day and on weekends after Labor Day until Halloween.




Old School House History Center
Back-in-Time Pathway Lifeboat Exhibit

130 Center Street, Douglas, MI 49406. OPEN daily 11-2 a.m. and 5-7 p.m. from Memorial Day to end of August.

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SINGAPORE SWALLOWED BY DUNES

Lumber Boomtown Lived Fast and Died Young

In the 1870s, Singapore — sited down river from present-day Saugatuck — was roaring, just like its namesake city-state in Asia. The devastating Great Chicago Fire in October 1871 fueled a huge demand for lumber. Singapore, surrounded by forested land, was eager to provide. An October 1871 issue of the *Saugatuck Commercial* reported that the harbor shipped 3,232,000 feet of board lumber; 2,207,000 lath; 252,000 cords of wood; 2,169 railroad ties; 5,000 barrel staves and 20,000 barrel headers.

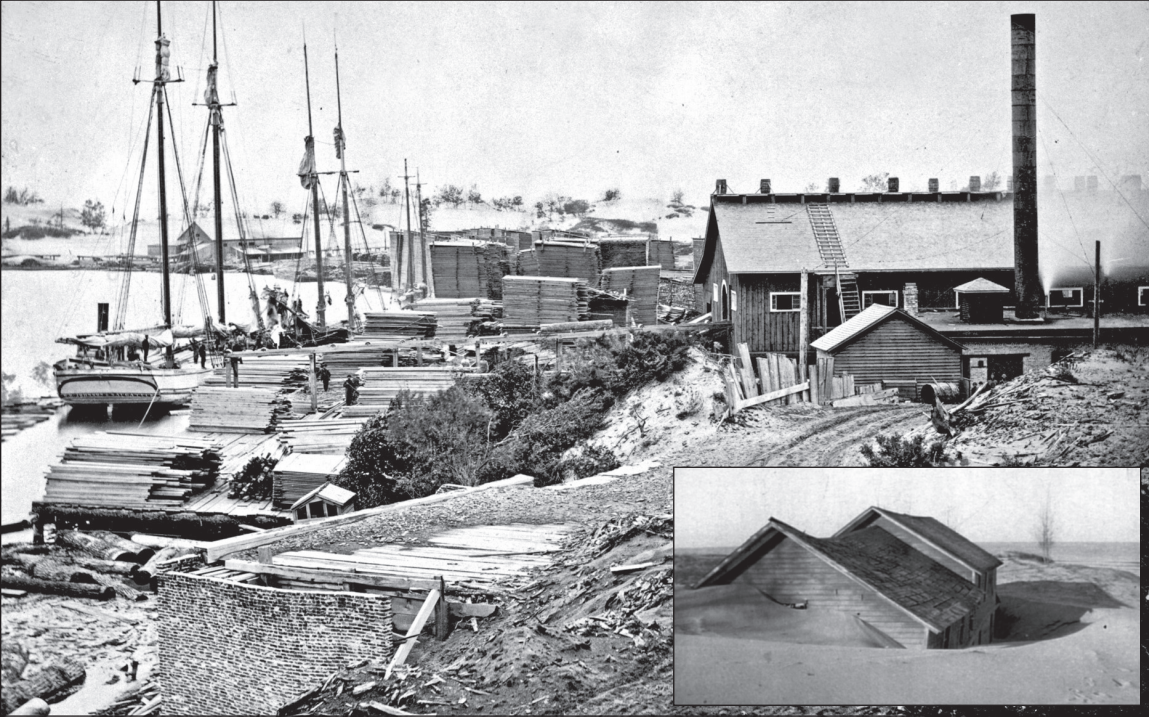
But by 1875 most of the easily-accessed pine forests were cut down. Even the fore dune that separated Singapore from

Lake Michigan was stripped of what little tree covering it ever had. Without the vegetation to stabilize the sand, the dune gradually blew inland on the prevailing west wind and was encroaching on Singapore.

As the sand piled up, the once vibrant town began to fade. The mills were dismantled and shipped to virgin forested lands up north. Whole houses were put on sleds, pulled by horses down the frozen river and placed on new foundations in Saugatuck (where they continue to serve as residences and shops). Other buildings were dismantled and recycled. But the largest structure, the boarding house, often

derisively called “The Astor House,” was too large to move. During its final decade, a fisherman named James Nichols inhabited the structure. As the ground floor gradually filled with sand, he moved to the second floor. When the sand level reached the second floor windows, he moved to the top floor. When the sand began blowing down the chimney he moved away.

Singapore is one of the best known ghost towns of Michigan. Read the entire story in the book *Lost & Found: Ghost towns of the Saugatuck Area*, available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org



An 1869 photo of Singapore shows two bustling sawmills and the schooner “O.R. Johnson” ready to transport lumber across Lake Michigan. The inset photo shows the J. Hamel cottage, circa 1936, nearly devoured by sand.

CHAIN FERRY REPLACES FAILED DRAWBRIDGE



In 1856 the drawbridge at Mary Street crashed into the Kalamazoo River, taking with it a horse and carriage and two elegantly dress ladies. The entire party floated down river until they were pulled to safety by diligent bystanders.

The following year the Village of Saugatuck established a chain ferry. The original ferry was a flat, barge-type boat called a “scow”—large enough to transport wagons, horses, and eventually automobiles. An underwater chain connected the ferry to its east and west bank landings. The chain passed through the ferry’s hand-cranked winch mechanism to draw the ferry from shore to shore. A ferry man presided over the operation, but a boy called the “cranker” usually supplied the muscle. The ferry was (and remains) one of the most photographed scenes in Saugatuck. While the ferry launch site remains where it always was, the current vessel, with its white “gingerbread” ornamentation, was introduced by R. J. Peterson in 1965.

A popular outing from Saugatuck is to take the chain ferry across the river and climb the stairs to the viewing deck on the top of Mount Baldhead. The especially vigorous can then leap down the dune face and emerge at Oval Beach. Folks interested in a more restful excursion can, after disembarking the ferry, pause a moment to consider the bench placed in memory of Jay Myers, a beloved ferry man, and then stroll North along the road. It’s a short walk to the gardens at the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum.



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BEACH TIME

Visitors have always loved our beaches. In the 1890s, flat bottomed, canopied excursion boats picked up passengers in downtown Saugatuck and steamed them out into Lake Michigan. The boats beached near the shore but the final distance to the beach inevitably soaked the visitors wool attire. An alternative route was to take the ferry across the Kalamazoo River and climb over Mt. Baldhead. The construction of the Mt. Baldhead staircase make the climb a little easier.

Swimsuit styles may have changed but the pleasure is still the same: soft, golden sand; warm sun and the sounds of waves striking the beach. Don't miss the glory of the sun sinking into the water in an Oval or Douglas Beach sunset.



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WGVU Productions will be presenting a series of hour-long documentaries highlighting cities and towns throughout the Great Lakes State, beginning with Saugatuck/Douglas. The partners, along with local historians, will tell the stories that define the Saugatuck/Douglas community.


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TOWN “INVADED” BY ARTIST-TYPES!

Art Triumphs Over Saw Mills and Steam Ships



Back in the days of the first European settlers, the Saugatuck-Douglas area was little more than a fur trading post on the bank of the Kalamazoo River. But soon entrepreneurs built saw mills to harvest the rich area forests. Ports were built to ship the lumber to growing urban centers like Chicago. As the forest was cleared, farmers took over,

many planting fruit orchards. The saw mills declined and were replaced with factories to produced fruit baskets, barrels, crates and shingles. By the 1890s, steamships regularly transported fruit and wood products to the cities and on the return trip they brought something new: city folk eager to escape the noise, crowding and pollution of urban life.

To those visitors, the Saugatuck area looked like a paradise: green, quiet, untainted. Among these visitors were artists who were attracted to the rustic towns, the sweeping dunes, the opportunity to paint *plein air*, meaning “in the open air” like the Impressionist painters of Europe. Before the Impressionists, serious painting was done in a studio, rather than outside, directly observing the way sunlight lit the subject.

Summer art colonies sprang up. The forerunner of Ox-Bow held its first classes in 1910 and purchased its present location in 1920. Numerous other art schools and studios opened their doors.

Today, the Saugatuck-Douglas area justly promotes itself as the “Art Coast of Michigan.” The fur traders, saw mills and steam ships have all faded away and only art remains. *All Passes – Art Alone Endures*

Learn more in the book *Painting the Town: A History of Art in Saugatuck and Douglas* available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.sdhistoricalsociety.org

VIEW LOCAL ART

The Old School House houses a fine collection of local art. The second floor gallery is open to the public when the building is open. See page two for Old School House hours.

✧ 2012 Young Scholars ✧

While you’re at the Old School House this summer you might notice some earnest young people about. They are the 2012 Interns: Chad, Dustin, Greg, Mary and Jordan. The Young Scholars program matches the Society’s local history presentations and events with college students eager for “real world” experience.

*If you would understand anything,
observe its beginning and its development.*
— Aristotle



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Lake Michigan Dunes 28x31

Carl Hoerman
1885-1955

One of Saugatuck’s best-known landscape painters

Born in Bavaria, Hoerman studied at the Royal Art School in Munich before immigrating to the United States in 1904. Hoerman gave up his Chicago architectural practice and moved to Saugatuck in 1919. He built the Chalet Studio and Art Gallery on Pleasant Street in Saugatuck (now a private residence), provided illustrations for May Francis Heath’s *Early Memories of Saugatuck*, and was responsible for the remodeling of All Saints’s Church in Saugatuck and the River Guild Gallery (now the Button-Petter Gallery) in Douglas.

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FREEZE OF 1906 DEVASTATES CROPS

Every peach tree killed from the Indiana line to straits of Mackinac

Peaches are not native to Michigan, yet the first Saugatuck settlers found unkempt peach trees growing near a crumbling, abandoned fur trader’s cabin about a mile east of Douglas.

By the late 1850s, established settlers were growing all manner of fruits for home use. Many had fifty to a hundred apple trees in bearing condition. But there was no market for this fruit beyond peddling to mill hands in Saugatuck. Occasionally a passing ship would buy a load of fruit, or anything else edible, to transport to other coastal towns. No settlers depended on their fruit as a commercial crop and paid little attention to its cultivation.

In the early 1870s, three Ganges settlers went to investigate the thriving peach industry in St. Joseph. They were sufficiently impressed with the possibility for financial gain that each planted 1,000 trees, about half of which were of the Crawford variety, and the others were mostly Oldmixon Freestone, Smock and the optimistically-named variety Stun the World.

Local peach growers enjoyed some years of success. Fruit exchanges busily graded, packed and shipped fruit for local farmers. Steamships ferried fruit from Saugatuck and Pier Cove to Chicago and Milwaukee. A factory opened in Douglas to feed the voracious demand for baskets and crates. But other years the peach crop failed due to disease, frost damage, or overabundance that drove down prices.

THE BIG FREEZE

On October 10, 1906, the temperature dropped to a brutal 6 degrees above zero. Everywhere, peach trees, still full of sap, froze and died.

Some of the peach orchards were eventually replanted, but with increased competition from growers nearer to Chicago and Milwaukee, the peach was no longer a major crop. Apples, a slightly hardier fruit, were favored. Cherries, pears, plums, currants, gooseberries and quince were also cultivated along with raspberries and blackberries, which had always grown wild in wooded areas. Rhubarb was commercially grown to a small degree and could be found in every backyard patch in the springtime. Strawberries emerged as a major early summer crop. Blueberries did not make their commercial debut in West Michigan until the 1940s.

Today, farm stands are bursting with delicious locally-grown fruits and vegetables. And, just as in the past, Michigan fruits are not a sure-fire crop. Enjoy fresh-picked Michigan produce at every possible opportunity.

Mom’s Peach Pie

Haven’t had a really good peach pie lately? Try this straightforward recipe that lets the glory of a Michigan peach shine.

- Pastry for a 2-crust 9” pie
- 2 cups sliced **peaches**
- 2 level Tbsps **minute tapioca**
- 1 cup **sugar**
- Sprinkle of **nutmeg**
- 1 Tbsp **butter**
- 1 tsp **lemon juice**

Put the peaches in an unbaked pie shell. Mix the tapioca and sugar and pour over peaches. Sprinkle with nutmeg. Dot with butter and drizzle over the lemon juice. Cover with an upper crust and bake at 400°F. until bubbly and brown, 50-60 minutes.



If you’re a fan of local food, history or cooking, consider *The Village Table: A Delicious History of Food in the Saugatuck-Douglas Area*. This richly-illustrated book explains the food ways of our special micro climate and includes recipes and menus, old and new. Copies are available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org.

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LANDMARK BIG PAVILION BURNS

The Brightest Spot on the Great Lakes Destroyed. Cause of Fire Unknown.

In 1909 the western Michigan fruit industry was still reeling from the big freeze of 1906. Saugatuck businessmen realized their future economy would be based on summer vacationers. Competition for these visitors was keen, so businessmen decided to build, down by the Kalamazoo River, a dance pavilion of such size and grandeur that people would speak of it with awe far and wide.

Completed in 1909, at a time when most homes lacked electric lights, the Big Pavilion's "5000 colored incandescent lights in its high arches made a scene of dazzling splendor which cannot be described in words and has to be seen to be appreciated. The red, white, blue, green and amber lights were switched on and off as the occasion demanded and the dreamy waltzes and lively two steps were affected as much by the lights as the music provided by a ten piece orchestra."

Steamboat service from Chicago initially brought a steady stream of revelers. But as styles changed, the Big Pavilion's allure faded. The addition of movie theaters, roller skating, bars and restaurants only slowed the inevitable decline.

On the morning of May 6, 1960, telephones began ringing all over town. The message was the same, "The Pavilion is on fire!" By the end of the day, the mighty dance hall was reduced to a pile of smoldering rubble.

Explore the probable causes of the fire in "The Big Pavilion: The Brightest Spot on the Great Lakes" available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org.



The Big Pavilion, at right, stood south of the present-day Coral Gables.



MICHIGAN CALVARY CAPTURES JEFFERSON DAVIS, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES, DRESSED IN HIS WIFE'S CLOAK

Lieut. Col. B. D. Prichard, from nearby Allegan, is depicted in this fanciful (and fabricated) capture scene that shows Jefferson Davis cowardly fleeing Union troops in a woman's dress.

Get the real story in *Lincoln's "Ready-Made" Soldiers: Saugatuck Area Men in the Civil War*, available at the Saugatuck History Museum or at www.SDHistoricalSociety.org.

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BIG DOUGLAS BARREL MISSING

Locals and visitors alike shocked and mystified to discover old friend gone.

The unique barrel-shaped structure on Center Street west of the Blue Star Highway has been called by many names—*The Barrel of Fun*, *The Root Beer Barrel* or simply *The Barrel*. The Barrel was built to be a hot dog and root beer stand in 1950 by entrepreneurs Chuck Decker and Harold Kelley from Flint. Constructed of first grade redwood to exactly duplicate a common barrel, it stood 17 feet tall and 17 feet wide at the middle and was erected with no nails, no glue and, at first, no steel bands. One hundred and twenty five tongue and groove, tapered boards (staves) were fitted into steel bands at the top and bottom.

During its heyday in 1950s and 1960s, the Barrel was ringed with the cars of beach goers hungry for frosty mugs of Mason Rootbeer and foot-long hotdogs. Carhop service was accompanied by the latest rock and rolls hits via WLS radio. [Read the Barrel's history at www.tinyurl.com/7c9hosp]

By the mid-'70s, the times had changed and this local icon of roadside architecture had shut its hatch-shaped doors.

The Barrel stood forlornly for



Read Barrel stories on the Barrel Blog www.douglasrootbeerbarrel.blogspot.com
Add your own Barrel memories by sending them to SaveTheBarrel@gmail.com

the next 30 years. As the structure sagged, rumors of its demolition or collapse swirled. Then, in the fall of 2011, “POOF” the Barrel disappeared. The only traces remaining were a few rotten boards, a couple of cement blocks, and two rusty beer cans on a circle of barren dirt. Aliens? Looking for a return ship?

No! Members of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society organized under the name of “Friends of the Barrel” had care-

fully dismantled the structure. The on-going restoration process can be viewed at the Old School House workshop/garage.

You can help! “Friend” the Douglas Barrel on Facebook. A donation of \$150 will sponsor the restoration of one of the 125, sixty-year-old redwood staves. To order a retro-cool “Save the Barrel” T-shirt, volunteer your time or services, donate or simply ask questions, email SaveTheBarrel@gmail.com.

AS THE HOT TOWN GETS HOTTER, THE CORAL GABLES STAYS COOL

Saugatuck has a long history of being mobbed by summer fun seekers. Already in the 1890s, visitors were piling off of crowed steamships at the Saugatuck docks. When the Big Pavilion dance hall opened in 1909, the flood of visitors became a torrent.

The unprecedented scale of the youth invasion that began in the late 1940s took the town by surprise. Beaches, bars and hotels were packed, huge traffic jams resulted in periodic closing off of town entrances, and the local police court went into overtime. Saugatuck became known as the weekend “Ft. Lauderdale of the north” for Midwest college students.

Through it all, Coral Gables — located on Saugatuck’s riverfront boardwalk — has remained one of the area’s most popular hot-spots. The structure was completed in 1906 and had many different owners and attractions.

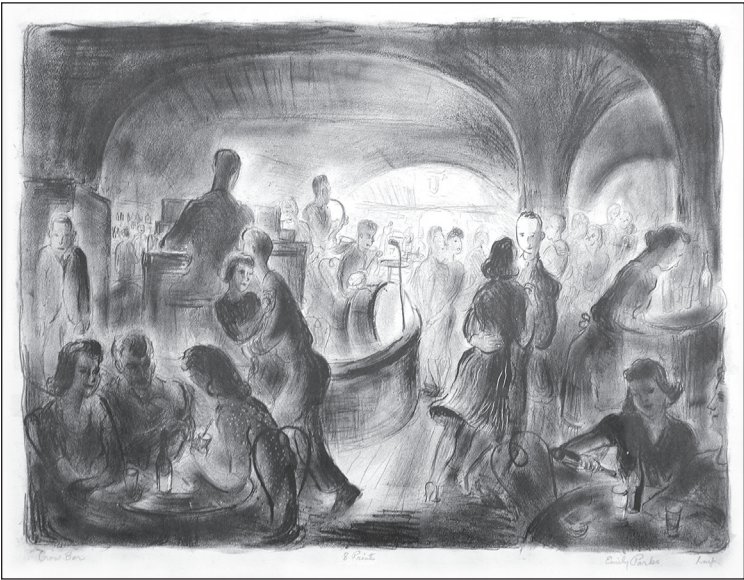
In the 1920s and ’30s, the “Crow Bar” night club was the hopping place to be. The hotel once offered a water taxi to take vacationers directly to the beach. As the Hotel Saugatuck, the venue boasted a “German orchestra.”


In 1958, Tom Johnson purchased the (then) Hotel Saugatuck and renamed the place the Coral Gables Hotel and Restaurant. Throughout the ’60s & ’70s, the Gables hosted a wide variety of entertainment events, from the Saugatuck Jazz Festival to the Chippendales dance troop. Numerous big name bands traveling through the Midwest have made Coral Gables one of their stops. In the 1980s the Gables became sponsor of offshore power boat races.

The Coral Gables is no longer a hotel — the rental rooms were closed in the early 1970s. But in addition to the bar and restaurant, today the Gables includes a coffee shop, dock slips, children’s amusements, and scooter/jet ski rentals. Mike Johnson, the son of Tom Johnson, continues the family business. The third generation of Johnsons, now school-aged, occasionally set up a summer lemon-aid stand on the sidewalk in front of the building.



Above: A newspaper ad from 1905 promises that “work will be begun ... as soon as the lumber arrives.” Below, an artist’s rendering of Crow Bar nightlife.





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