

REMEMBERING TARA makes a rather interesting story. In 1933 a Saugatuck couple, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Koning, purchased an old farmhouse on a steep hill (actually a sand dune) on Center Street in Douglas—with a grand view of the Saugatuck-Douglas bridge and harbor (the highway at the bottom of the hill was under construction). The house, built in 1861, had been the home of a Saugatuck mill owner, Michael Spencer and his family. Spencer's father had fought in the War of 1812, and in addition to the mill, Spencer owned one of the big boarding houses for mill workers where the present Toulouse Restaurant is located in Saugatuck. This was the same family that had donated the property for an impressive new schoolhouse (1866) next door—and the story goes that part of the house was an older house that was moved from the corner of Spring and Wall Street. The Spencer daughter was married to Daniel Gerber (of the Douglas family

that invented the baby food) and lived across the street in a big house next to the present library. Mrs. Spencer was famous in Douglas for her musical abilities.

The top photo, was loaned by Demi Demerest and shows Tara at the time it opened in about 1937—with groups of well-heeled ladies enjoying the patio overlooking the Kalamazoo. Note the stylish umbrellas, the covered porch, and the very modern neon sign. The name Tara, of course, came from the southern plantation in *Gone With the Wind*—itself a reference, we believe to Irish mythology.

It was one of few establishments in Saugatuck-Douglas allowed to sell liquor. Over time, ownership switched from Charles to Fred Koning and then to Del Herrold. In the history of Saugatuck-Douglas as a big place for music and

dance, the Tara became one of the area's hottest night spots—a bit of a rival for the more famous Big Pavilion "Dock Bar," and the "Crow Bar" in the Coral Gables in Saugatuck. In 1943 the Tara billed itself as the place where "dancing is a real thrill when the music is played by Charlie Fischer and his Band." This is what happens when a farming village becomes a resort town.

The original Tara burned in 1975 and was rebuilt to remain a landmark restaurant and tavern with a grand view of the Kalamazoo Lake and river until its recent demise—making way for a large condominium and commercial development. We would like to have a photo of the successor to this Tara, and would welcome your photos and tales about Tara in more recent times.

By Jim Schmiechen



Tara ca 1943

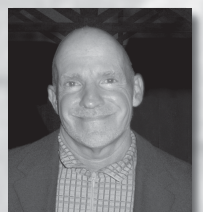


Tara burning January 1975

The *Remembering When* feature is the creation of volunteers Jim Schmiechen and Jack Sheridan of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. Utilizing the SDHS technical resources, Jack produces the finished feature every week. Jim is a history professor and our master of research. We split the fun of choosing topics, photos and writing. Thanks to our readers, the *Local Observer* and SDHS supporters, we enjoy this opportunity to exhibit the great history of our area.

We welcome your comments on *Remembering When*. Call 269 857-7901, email us at sdhistory@accn.org or write to Box 617 Douglas, MI 49406. SDHS historical images can be seen on the SDHS web site at www.sdhistory.com and all historical photos are available for purchase in print sizes up to 12x17. Our historical image database is growing through your contributions. We scan your old photos—you keep the originals—and we then provide you with a CD of your digitized images.

Jack Sheridan



Jim Schmiechen