

Jack, et al

The image I hoped to start out with was a lithograph made of the town in 1849 with the river steamer Comet on the water, but I cannot find a copy of it. Kemperman sent me a good one, and said he got it from a book, and it turned out it was even a book I had, but now I can't find one. Did a copy get into the archives? It shows the old German church and is not quite an authentic depiction, but it was clearly intended to be Saugatuck.

I did a piece for the newsletter asking for a number of pictures and some objects.

-- a bridgework certificate of completion, an old pass into town when the police barricades were up. Scans are to go to Jack.

Can't find a basic map for the U. S. 31 map, guess it will have to wait until I get back. Didn't finished 8 and 9 either, will take with me so I can think.

Jack, I have an envelope of pictures for you. Call Art to make arrangements for delivery or pickup. Please scan all the pictures even if have them already, or at least put copies of your scans with the file so they are altogether when we are ready to put them on a disc for Judy. Some of them need a little work.

Sally, please scan the Walton menu, especially the Italian section, with the spaghetti and chicken livers and get the scan to Jack.

Judy, please scan the little Douglas/Dudleyville map and send to Jack. It is the best copy I have seen. Didn't realize that when I stuck it in your book.

Vic, when you get a chance go by the drug store, please, and see if we can borrow some soda fixings – a tall soda glass, and a short soda glass, long spoon – anything else they offer that looks interesting.

I think I hear a Montserrat oriole calling me.

See you in about 12 days.

kit

## 1 Beginnings

Early drawing of town , Butler portrait

### No Covered Wagon for These Pioneers

William G. Butler, the founder of **Saugatuck** and the first white settler in Allegan County didn't exactly rush into the area. He was born in Connecticut and, as an adult, moved to Pennsylvania where he ran a store, found a wife and was married. Butler, his wife, Mary and at least one child moved on to Elkhart, Indiana, where he attempted to run a store with little success. In 1830, hearing of the money to be gained by land speculation in the Territory of Michigan he went exploring on horseback to find a likely settlement site. He returned to Elkhart, packed up his wife and (by this time) two children, and took a riverboat up the St. Joseph River to St. Joseph at the mouth where he bought passage on a passing sailing vessel heading north on Lake Michigan. When they arrived at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River the sailboat anchored off shore while Butler and family, with all of their belongings (tradition has it, including a covered soup tureen) were rowed ashore in a small boat. The captain waved, wished them a happy settlement, and sailed away. 189

**Douglas** began about 1851 when Robert A. McDonald, William Scovill and Michael B. Spencer of Saugatuck bought farms on the south side of the river. For a while, they tilled the soil, but did not live there. Residences were erected beginning about 1855, but there were also farms complete with large barns (many still stand) within the village, just blocks from downtown. It was not until 1861 that William F. Dutcher, formerly of Pennsylvania, arrived with his 12 members of his family and had a small village platted which he called Douglas. Douglas was originally bounded by the river on the north and east, Union Street on the west and Center Street to the south 115

### **How many people live in the villages?**

In the 2000 census the population of Saugatuck was 1,065 and the village, which became a city in 1984, had a land area of 1.2 square miles. Douglas was slightly larger in 2000 with 1,214 people. It has a land area of 1.8 square miles and became a city in 2004. The figures for the 2010 federal census are still being tabulated. If the census taker were to come around in mid July the count would be much higher. Some estimate that as many as 40 percent of the houses of the area are owned by non-residents who live in them for varying periods of the year. Some retirees and others without business commitments go to warmer climes in the winter but live in the Saugatuck area from April to November (or the first snow, whichever happens first). Others, especially those who are still working full time, spend weekdays at their other home, driving over here most weekends. 161

[table of population figures] see separate attachment

[caption] Federal census population figures for Saugatuck, Douglas and Holland, beginning in 1830. Note Holland's rapid rise, while the villages to the south realized change in small steps – up and down. For example the census of 1920 shows only about half the number of people counted in 1870.

### **What do the names mean?**

**Saugatuck** is an Algonquin Indian word which means “on a lake near the river’s mouth.” Saugatuck is situated on Lake Kalamazoo near the river’s mouth. The village was platted in 1834 as **Kalamazoo**, but there was already a post office named Kalamazoo in Calhoun County

community on the same river, so in 1835 the Allegan County town applied for a post office named **Saugatuck**. It is uncertain whether the word was from the local Indians, or whether the Michigan Saugatuck was named for the town of Saugatuck, Connecticut (later part of Westport), where the geographic situation is identical and the Indians spoke a similar language. When the village was incorporated in 1868 a petition was written out asking for incorporation as the village of “**Belle Haven**.” However, at some point in the proceedings, Saugatuck, the name of the post office, was written on a separate piece of paper and glued over Belle Haven. The petition in the Allegan County files still shows this alteration. 148

[might use map labeled Kalamazoo, and petition which shows alteration]

**Douglas** is named for Douglas, the capital of the Isle of Man, a self-governing British Crown Dependency located in the Irish Sea. It is where the *Dhoo* (“gray” in Manx) and the *Glass* (“clear”) rivers meet. The Michigan town was named by Frederic H. May, who had been born in Douglas, Isle of Man, when his father was headmaster of a school there. Jonathan Wade who owned the land south of Center Street, founded his own settlement called **Dudleyville**, named for his brother. In 1870 the entire area of both communities was incorporated as the Village of Douglas. The name was readily accepted by the former Dudleyville residents who were mostly Democrats and had been supporters of Stephen A. Douglas against Abraham Lincoln in the presidential election of 1860. 129 Copy of [1864 map showing douglas and dudleyville

## 2. Village Work

Main image Basket factory worker

### Early Sawmill Shenanigans

Sawmills were important early industries, and there were times the area’s rootin’ tootin’ image was well earned. Henry Hudson Hutchins tells the story of one sawmill incident in the 1850s:

“A lumber dealer from Chicago visited the Singapore saw mill and one of the mill hands took occasion to impose upon him repeatedly. Finally another burley young fellow, Hank Elliot, asked the dealer why he didn’t thrash the tough. The dealer said he wanted to, but he didn’t think himself man enough to accomplish it. After some talk it was arranged that the next time the fellow should carry his amusement beyond

the point of common decency, Hank would take it up and thrash the mill hand, and the next time he went to Chicago, the dealer would bring Hank a gallon of whiskey. When the mill hand renewed his antics and Hank suggested that he had carried that kind of treatment far enough, the two went out doors to settle it. It was a very even match, but finally Hank got in a knockout blow. True to his word the Chicago gentleman brought the whiskey and managed to turn it over to Hank secretly. After a while Hank was wanted, and a messenger was sent to find him.

Finally Hank and the fellow he had whipped were discovered off behind a slab pile, both very drunk, with the jug of whiskey between them.”

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Singapore sawmill

Later, after the basket factory in Douglas was in full swing they began to hire itinerant “nailers” who were skilled at assembling fruit baskets and affixing the rim. The nailers were every parent’s worst nightmare, and young girls were not allowed to walk along Lake Street in Saugatuck, nor near the riverbanks in Douglas, until basket production was over for the season, and the men had moved on.

Douglas basket factory

### Tanneries to Boutiques

The first factory in Saugatuck was a tannery in 1834, using the bark of hemlock trees for the tanning of **leather**. Following close behind, the sawmill workers cut pine timber for **lumber**, then, as the pine forests diminished, the mills switched to machine-intensive wood products such as **shingles**, **lathe**, **barrels** – and **fruit baskets**. At the same time new settlers engaged in subsistence farming, then **fruit growing**, and other commercial crops. Boat building was both early and late, nearly 200 **boats** were launched between 1845 and 1912, and in 20th Century, large **houseboats** were built in Douglas and **luxury yachts** constructed near the mouth of the river. In 1923 the American Twisting Company in Saugatuck began making twisted paper **cord products**, and beginning in 1953 workers were turning out **frozen pies** on Culver Street. Today only two industries remain, both in Douglas, Haworth **furniture**, which makes components for office furniture including chairs, tables and file cabinets, and Douglas Marine which builds the Skater brand of pleasure boats.

By about 1900 the area jobs were largely in the **retail** and **service** areas, staffing the restaurants and shops of the area, and maintaining the flotilla of pleasure and excursion boats. 189

Timeline of industry factory pictures,

{caption with industry timeline

Saugatuck went through the same evolution that was common in many Midwest communities. Tanneries and sawmills, fruit farming and processing and then commercial farming. By 1950 most area jobs were connected with the retail shops and restaurants which draw visitors to Saugatuck even outside of the summer season.

1881 view from baldhead shows Saugatuck as an industrial town, no trees in town, etc.

(or use 1876 if the quality is too poor, but more is going on in 1881)

**Probably the Butler trading post was the first business to be opened in the area, what's the oldest business in town still operating?**

The hardware store at 439 Butler Street, Saugatuck. In 1865 John Nies returned from Civil War service as a bugler and looked around to see what sort of business Saugatuck lacked. He decided on a hardware store. The first Nies Hardware was in a wooden building near the Village Square. By the time it burned in 1903 and was replaced with a structure of red pressed brick, Nies had moved to Holland and sold the business to his former apprentice and later partner, John Koning. In 1920 it was passed to Koning's sons, James and Ira, who sold it to Heath Crow and Jean Simonson, former employees who maintained the old building with the dumbwaiter to haul things up from the basement, and the old open nail bins surrounding the counter. Ron and Bonnie Wilkins doubled the size of the structure and were the last to operate it as a full-service hardware store, although they still maintain a corner of it as a repair shop.

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Pix of old and new konings

The second oldest business is the *Commercial Record* weekly newspaper which was established in July of 1868, and has been continuous since that date (except for two weeks when the editor resigned in a huff in 1886). It was published in Saugatuck and first called the *Saugatuck Commercial*, later the *Lakeshore Commercial*, and then simply *The Commercial* until the spring of 1902 when it merged with the *Douglas Weekly Record* to become the *Commercial Record*.

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Old pix of cr, flags of newspaper then and now.

### 3. Going to Town

Main pix ??? -- consider a newspaper clipping, might be on in the collings stuff.

#### **A Volkswagon Trapped by a Tree**

The busy saloons during the lumbering era assured Saugatuck a reputation for fun – even after a visit from prohibitionist Susan B. Anthony put a temporary damper on things in 1879. But the legendary days as a good time place began in 1959 after Tom Johnson bought the old Leidecker's Inn, renaming it Coral Gables. College kids discovered Saugatuck. During spring break and holidays, there were long lines of people waiting to get into the bars, and crowds of underage visitors getting into mischief. One classic case was the Volkswagon on the Village Square. A bunch of students, probably looking for a parking place, lifted the car into the square where its front and back bumpers fitted snugly between two trees. When the owner returned he drew quite a crowd, before some burly revelers released the car in the same way it had been imprisoned. The busy police didn't have time to drive those they arrested to the nearest lock-up in Allegan, so Justice of the Peace Ervin Kasten Sr. set up court at his home near the cemetery on holiday weekends. The arresting officer would take you and his complaint "to court." If found guilty, you could pay your fine, and go on your way. Likely as not the policeman would give you a ride back downtown.

Occasionally holiday traffic would get so heavy that the road into Saugatuck was closed to traffic except for emergency vehicles and residents or local workers who had special passes to get past the police barricades.

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Pix of college kids, lineup at the dock, can we find an old pass into town?

**How many restaurants are there in Saugatuck and Douglas, every other building seems to serve food?**

Today there are over 20 food service establishments in Saugatuck, another 12 in Douglas, and nine more in the township. Most are open even after summer is over. This is a remarkable number for towns with a combined population of just over 2,000. People in Saugatuck have always eaten well. A newspaper editor who visited in 1859 praised the food at the local hotel, even though he wasn't impressed with anything else in town. Beginning about 1870, what and where to eat became an important part of the area economy. A secondary benefit is that the

young people of the town get early and extensive experience in the food service industry as wait staff and cooks, and many have gone on to restaurant-centered careers. In the earliest days fried chicken was top of the menu because birds young and tender enough to fry were only available in the spring and summer when it was warm enough to hatch chicks. Oysters, which had to be imported from the East Coast, were popular in the 1870s and 1880s, and steaks and chops were major draws on the menu beginning about 1920. Today's top chefs specialize in locally grown fresh produce. 198

The area received its first franchised fast food establishment about 10 years ago, but in response to pressure from residents and visitors it was constructed outside of both villages, near the interstate interchange to the north. 36

Sally – please scan the Italian part of the Walton menu and send to jack/

[menus, Walton menu item showing 6 diff spaghetti's Pix of early waitresses

[caption] Thanks to chefs named Galli, Mocini, Mengarelli, Belardinelli, Palazzolo and Marro, Italian food has been served in Saugatuck since 1920, although spaghetti and chicken livers is seldom on the menu anymore. might do a photo essay on restaurants then and now,

**Are there any special foods associated with Saugatuck?**

Ice Cream! In the summer of 2010 there were 15 establishments serving ice cream in the villages and Saugatuck Township carrying on a tradition which began in the 1880s when the first ice cream factory opened in Saugatuck. When the drug store built a new building in 1913, a long soda fountain was installed. It was rumored that this is where the chocolate soda was invented, which is probably not true, sodas being common in the East much earlier, but it was certainly where the making of a chocolate soda was honed to a fine art. The soda fountain still operates in the summertime and still makes hand creamed chocolate sodas. Shop keepers who dip the frozen dessert say that this area is one of the few places they have ever been where customers actually shop for their ice cream cones, going down the street noting flavors available, prices, types of cones, and the length of the lines waiting, before deciding what and where to buy. Even then it is rare for a family to agree and they often split up to patronize different establishments, meeting after purchase for a licking session at a downtown park.

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[ Borrow some soda making tools from Saugatuck drug].

K-sign commemorating old soda fountain



## 4. Getting Around

Picture of old bridge, looking toward Douglas.

### Crossing the Bridge

There was a bridge across the Kalamazoo River near the foot of Mary Street built in the 1840s. It was a partially a floating bridge with a center section elevated to permit the passage of small boats, but which could also be opened to permit larger vessels. However, it was rapidly and poorly built and boats kept knocking it until one day in 1857 when it collapsed. According to a contemporary account “a wagon and oxen and two ladies floated gracefully along until the driver (who chanced to be on the body of the bridge) could hastily summon aid to the rescue.”

It was not rebuilt and a chain ferry was put into service at that point. A more permanent bridge was constructed in 1868 just west of the present bridge with a draw, and later a swing span to allow boats to go upriver to the Douglas Basket Factory . The present bridge was built in 1938 to convey the Blue Star Memorial Highway over the river and has been improved and widened several times. The structure is the site of the annual Labor Day bridge walk. The walk was inspired by a similar event which takes place on the five mile long Mackinac Bridge which links Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsula. The Kalamazoo River bridge walk occurs early Labor Day morning with as much pomp as can be mustered. The .4? mile length of the bridge, includes a stop for refreshment in mid-walk and a certificate of completion issued to those who go the entire distance. 256

Need bridge walk pictures, and certificate

**The route labeled U. S. 31 has been in West Michigan since the government first began route labeling, where did it go before the Blue Star Highway, still often called “Old 31,” was built?**

Right through the middle of the business districts of both Saugatuck and Douglas. To understand the roads of the area prior to 1936 you need to erase from your mind) both I-196 and the Blue Star Memorial Highway (A2). Both are at least partially diagonal roads which cut across the traditional grid system. When the Blue Star Highway was proposed in 1936, taking away the U. S. 31 route signs, the business people of Saugatuck wrote a letter to the editor which wailed, “We know that next year our summer traffic will be using the new highway instead of coming into the village. Well, what are we going to do about it?” Nothing was accomplished but some gnashing of teeth and, except for a few motels, which there was no

room to build in the village limits anyway, little was built on the highway to draw business away from the villages, although Saugatuck fared better than Douglas. In 1965 when I-196 was proposed to receive the U. S. 31, designation, highway officials promised the villages that there would be an exit for Douglas on Wiley Road (130th Avenue) and a Saugatuck exit on Old Allegan Road – but both of these were eliminated to cut costs and the isolation that had been feared has proven beneficial to both villages.

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West Michigan pike triptik, map showing us31 downtown pix building interstate, K-old painted sign on culvert

### **Does the Saugatuck traffic light ever turn green?**

For the first time it did not in 2010. Before 1960 Saugatuck's sole traffic light was shut off completely at Labor Day and, to better protect it from winter weather, it was wrapped in the raincoat belonging to the Chief of Police, who also retired for the winter. In more recent years the light was set to blink all winter and turned to red-yellow-green mode in May. In the spring of 2010 officials decided that it would better serve the purposes of summertime traffic if it continued to blink. Residents were disappointed because that cancelled the annual spring ceremony where on-lookers and the high school band would gather at the corner to mark the arrival of "the season". The mayor, with the help of the Department of Public Works, would officially switch over to red-yellow-green operation – and all would cheer.

Douglas also has one traffic light at the corner of Center Street and the Blue Star Highway but it operates fully the year around, except that it switches to blinker operation after 11 p.m. The newest area traffic light was installed about five years ago in Saugatuck Township at the corner of 64th Street west and the Blue Star Highway just south of Exit 41 on Interstate-196. That light remains green for the highway traffic until vehicles on 64th Street trigger its operation.

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## **5. Public services**

## **The Day the Postman Came to My House**

People who live in small communities do not have mail delivery. Most of us have to go to the post office for our mail every day, more often if you are expecting some local mail. Saugatuck-Douglas children are mystified by the mailman on *Sesame Street* and in children's books who brings the mail right to your house! And he walks from place to place carrying a big mail bag! One third grader who lived in Douglas could hardly wait for show and tell time at school one Friday afternoon. His family had received a special delivery letter, and, because they lived within ¼ of a mile of the post office the postmaster had actually brought it to his house. The rest of the third grade was awe-stuck.

Beginning about 1980 new residents who were accustomed to home mail delivery moved here and began petitioning for rural route delivery, even within the boundaries of the village, if they lived the requisite distance from the post office building (1/4 mile as the crow flies). The first Saugatuck rural route was established in February of 1985. But most of the people who live within the villages, and some who don't, still go to the post office for our mail.

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Old Saugatuck po, K-pix douglas staff,

## **How come almost nothing seems like a local call when you phone from Saugatuck?**

The first telephone system, before 1900, was the Saugatuck-Ganges Telephone Company and one of its major purposes was for fruit growers to communicate with the piers at Pier Cove. If the weather was too rough, or the boat too full, he would carry his fruit to Fennville and put it on the train. Until the 1980s Ganges remained the only exchange which was not a long distance call from Saugatuck-Douglas. Then local service was opened to Holland. After Saugatuck became part of the new 269 area code about 2005 and Holland did not, it is still not a long distance call, but it seems like it.

When the Saugatuck-Ganges Telephone Company began in 1895, it was the first cooperative telephone company in Michigan, and probably in the country. Some of the rural lines had as many as 15 customers on a party line. Dial phones arrived in 1940 with the local exchange Ulysses 7. You gave your phone number to a long distance operator as, for example, Ulysses 7-2700. When direct dial began, the exchange was converted into numbers – 857. However,

none of this mattered on the local level because for calls within the exchange you only needed to dial the last four numbers. Then one morning about 1970 we woke up and, with no advance warning, found we had to dial the whole number. To this day when many local people are asked their telephone number they will give you only the last four numbers. 246

[In archives we should have a 1970 or 1950 phone book.

[caption] Newcomers used to thick, big city telephone books, start to reach for a phone book to help a visiting child sit high enough to be comfortable at the table. The Saugatuck-Douglas telephone book didn't help much. ]

### **Where did the Big Pavilion get the electricity for all those lights?**

The Big Pavilion, an enormous dance hall which was built in 1909 by the river in Saugatuck had its arches and windows outside and inside outlined in thousands of electric lights. It was called "The Brightest Spot on the Great Lakes." To get the power for this they built their own generator in a separate structure with a towering chimney just south of the building. Although nearby towns, specifically Fennville and Holland, had household electricity before the turn of the century, Saugatuck lagged behind. For one thing they could tap into the lines which ran the Interurban, an electric railroad from Holland. The newspaper reports that there were times that so much electricity was being diverted from the power line that the train could barely move.

The Big Pavilion had showcased what electricity could do, and, in 1912 the steam plant which pumped water to the reservoir on top of the dune next to Baldhead was enlarged and lines laid across the river to power the lights in Saugatuck, every evening from sundown to 11 p.m. Later the housewives petitioned the village to turn on the power for a few hours every Monday during the day so that they could use their electric irons. 204

Nighttime photos of bp, photo showing generating plant – pumphouse generating plant interurban

### **Both Saugatuck and Douglas are largely wooden villages, has there ever been a major fire?**

Although individual buildings have burned over the years, there has never been a village-wide fire in either Saugatuck or Douglas. A very early fire department, organized in Saugatuck in 1870, is credited with saving the village from destruction during the fires of October 1871 which burned Chicago, Fennville and Holland. One of Douglas's first major fires was when the fire

station, with engine inside, burned to the ground in 1902. The most dramatic fire in Douglas was the burning of the basket factory in 1927 when a warehouse of baskets produced flames that were seen in Muskegon. The largest fire in Saugatuck was the burning of the Big Pavilion on May 6, 1960, which drew 16 trucks from 12 west Michigan fire departments. Until about 1980 both villages had a fire siren which was used to call the volunteer firemen. For those who arrived at the fire barn too late to go out with the trucks, the location of the fire would be written on a blackboard. Residents could gauge the size and importance of the fire by listening to the sirens. If one village fire siren was followed rapidly by the siren in the second village, it was probably a pretty big fire. The two village fire departments merged with the township in ??? and radio communication was established with each individual fireman.

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Fire pictures – we also have a picture of the Douglas fire station which burned (part of the DC Putnam store) Somewhere in town there is the old hose cart, our first fire “truck”

## 6. Caring

**-lead pix – picture of old hospital**

**“Let’s take a look at that schedule. . . “**

Robert J. Walker had just received his medical degree from Trinity Medical College, Toronto, Canada in 1895, when he received a letter from the pastor of the Congregational church , in Saugatuck, a Reverend W. Lindsay, asking him to set up a practice in Saugatuck because the doctor serving the area was an atheist. Although the new Dr. Walker was about to open an office in Adelaide, Ontario, he agreed to come to Saugatuck. It is not known whether he, like the pastor, was concerned with the spiritual well-being of the people, or whether there was something else about the community or the financial arrangements which made the offer more enticing. His new position ran into a glitch when he went to the train station to buy a ticket. Train officials in Canada had never heard of Saugatuck, and couldn’t locate it on their schedules because it didn’t have a train station. He was routed out of his way, one story has it that he was sent to Saginaw, before he finally got near enough that someone knew what he was talking about. Dr. Walker arrived in Saugatuck on June 3, 1895 -- by stage coach.

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**Dr.R. J. Walker**

### **Where is the old hospital?**

The area’s first hospital was begun in the old Kirby house on Center Street in Douglas, just west of the Blue Star Highway by Faith (Kirby) Nevins a nurse who worked with Dr. R. J. Walker. It had three beds and an operating room on the second floor. When a patient was scheduled for surgery they would call on the men who worked at the gas station on the corner to help them carry the stretcher up the steep stairs. After 1935 the hospital (eventually it had six beds) was run by a Hospital Corporation. The tall white building with a tower served until 1956 when the old plant could not meet standards for renewal of its license. In 1957 a fund drive was begun with the first donation from Lloyd J. Harris of the local pie company for a new building on the

south edge of Douglas. The new structure was dedicated in the summer of 1960. The old hospital building is now the Kirby House Bed & Breakfast. The new building served until 1985 when the hospital ceased operation. The building was remodeled and still stands on Wiley Road, just east of the Blue Star Highway, housing various medical and business offices. 204

### **Why is it called Riverside Cemetery, it's no where near the river?**

The first cemetery in Saugatuck was at the corner of Butler and Culver streets where there had been an early Indian burial grounds (commemorated by a memorial stone near the information building). About 1865, when communities were first beginning to worry about the health hazards of cemeteries in damp ground near residences, graves in the downtown cemetery, and elsewhere in town, were all moved to a new facility on a hill northeast of town. It was just called the Saugatuck Cemetery until the 1920s when a letter to the editor in the local newspaper began a drive to give it a name and suggested Riverside Cemetery, an odd choice because it is at least a mile from the river, although the creek from Goshorn Lake, sometimes called Moore's Creek, runs past the south corner.

Douglas too, had a cemetery downtown south of Center Street between Union and Mixer streets, but moved to new land west of town about 1860. The Douglas Cemetery is frequently visited by tombstone aficionados to see a stone which is included in at least two books on Michigan epitaphs. The wife's headstone declares, "I die a Christian." The husband's stone, which was erected before his death, declares: "And the atheist above named at the end of life will sleep here close beside his wife." 218

[ Martha and Clark Gillespie—should we name them?]

Pix of Butler monument, and Gillespie tombstone

## **7. Schools**

[lead photo – high school building, contemporary probably)

### **Consolidation, Early and Late**

The first public school in Saugatuck Township which opened in 1838 was, in a manner of speaking, a consolidated school. Since none of the three areas where people resided at that

time – the community by the lake which would become Saugatuck; Singapore, the sawmill town near the mouth of the river, or the gathering around the Plummer sawmill at the outlet from Goshorn Lake – had enough student-aged children to form a school they consolidated and opened one small school with a single teacher. The first school building, a partially log structure with a dirt floor, was constructed on the old dugout road near the river, equally inconvenient for them all. By the 1850s Saugatuck and Douglas had begun separate school systems which would continue for more than a century before finally consolidating in 1963 with an elementary school on the southern edge of Douglas, and a Junior-Senior High school on the hill in Saugatuck. Efforts by the state to foster consolidation with Fennville were not successful. The first ballot in 1970 lost in Saugatuck, 401-488, but passed in Fennville, 621-323. The second in 1971 was approved in Saugatuck, 524-363 but lost in Fennville. Then both districts gave up on the idea and constructed new high schools.

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### **How many students in the local school system?**

As of the official student count day in the fall of 2010, the Saugatuck Public School system had 842 students, 440 in the Saugatuck Middle/Senior High School, grades six through twelve, on Elizabeth Street in Saugatuck and 402 in Douglas Elementary School, kindergarten through fifth grade, on Fremont Street in Douglas. Saugatuck is part of the Ottawa County Intermediate School District which has a schools-of-choice program, so 251 of that total were out of district students who elected to attend Saugatuck schools. The high school graduates between 40 and 60 students each year. Saugatuck High School competes in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SAC) as a Class C school. The Saugatuck Indians football team was a finalist for the Division 8 MHAA football championship in 2010.

What's it like to go to school in a district with less than 1,000 students? One high school sophomore, newly arrived from a big city system, said there wasn't much difference. "It's just like my old school," she mused. "Except I have to keep reminding myself that the building is only one story high and stops at the end of the corridor."

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[I would like to use the other panel to display photos, and years of use, for several of the schools – including the old school house.]

-- work in progress --



## 8 Gathering together

### **Where Two or Three Gather Together. . .”**

One of the advantages of a small town is that the people interested in a specific program are easy to call together. A letter or story in the newspaper, or sending notes home with school children, has often gathered enough interested people to insure continuation of the summer swimming lessons, support baseball programs for children 4 to 15, and create a holiday parade.

The drive to raise funds to purchase the old Denison property south of the river started with a handful of people who were willing to work on the project with no personal remuneration in mind.

About 1971 citizens interested in parks found out that the highway department, had a 27-acre piece of riverfront which was leftover. They met and asked the township board to set up a township park commission. The board acquiesced on the condition that seven members of the group would accept appointment to the first park commission.” The newly-minted body applied for a grant to cover the design of River Bluff Park, and got a one-year millage on the ballot to cover the matching funds. They also built two other small parks and used federal revenue sharing funds to hire a caretaker and a recreation director. Saugatuck Township Park Commissioner was the first political office held by Patty Birkholz of Saugatuck Township, who, later served in the state legislature for 14 years, the maximum time allowable. As State Senator she was the first woman elected president pro-tem of the Michigan Senate. 247

Social Clubs --Clubs: First clubs I Saugatuck and Douglas were male fraternal organizations which were a major part of the social life of the towns. Douglas Dutcher Lodge No. 193, Free and Accepted Masons, was chartered 1867. In 1876 the Saugatuck Masons, Lodge No. 328, was demitted from the Douglas group. In Saugatuck there were also two groups of the International Organization of the Odd Fellows, and one in Douglas. Douglas also had a chapter of the Knights of the Maccabees. Women were active in the Order of the Eastern Star, the female side of the Masons, and the Rebekahs, the women’s auxiliary of the IOOF. Today only the Saugatuck Masons remain active.

American Legion, VFW,

Garden clubs, literary and music club, woman’s club, Rotary Lions

Friends of State Park, Library,

### **The first church wasn't built until 30 years after settlement, why so late?**

Saugatuck began as a very small and slow growing settlement in 1830 with an assortment of people who identified with many different religious denominations. For 30 years there were not enough people of any denomination to build a church and hire a pastor, although there were itinerant preachers and circuit riders who often held services in the local school house or meetings in homes. It was not until 1860 that the Congregational Church in Saugatuck organized, hired a pastor, and built a church meeting place. The first church in Douglas was the Methodist which was established in 1871. This development has always seemed slow when compared to the Dutch settlers to the north who arrived from Europe beginning in 1847 traveling as entire congregations already organized and accompanied by their pastors. 131

Other churches organized in Saugatuck include a very early "German" or "Dutch" church on Holland Street which was opened in the 1840s but held no services in English. It shows on early maps and drawings but was gone by the turn of the century. The Saugatuck Methodist church was founded in 1865 on the hill, and moved to its present location on Mason Street in 1915. In addition there is a Christian Reformed congregation organized in 1957 as an outreach of the East Saugatuck Christian Reformed Church, and Baptist services were held in a storefront on Butler Street for several years in the 1960s and 1970s. In Douglas the Congregational society, (now the Congregational United Church of Christ) denied use on Sundays of what was built as a "community church," organized in 1872 and built a church edifice in 1882. There was a Methodist church in Douglas 1871 to 1918 when it merged with the Saugatuck church. The former church building is now home to the Saugatuck-Douglas District Library. There was a Seventh Day Adventist church at the northeast corner of the Douglas ballfield 1874 to 1975. The building has recently become home to a new church family. A Roman Catholic congregation was established in 1894 in a former home on Washington Street moving to a new modern church across the Blue Star Highway in 1958. And, at Christmastime 1965 the Community Church of Douglas held its first service in the old Catholic church in Douglas, and later constructed a new building just outside the city on Wiley Road. Most of the area churches cooperate with Christian Neighbors, housed in the old St. Peter's School building, which assists area families with food, clothing and other needs.

## **9. Wintertime Fun**

### **Buried in Lake Effect**

Visitors to summertime Saugatuck often ask, "What's it like here in the winter?" The answer is: cold and often snowy. The presence of Lake Michigan to our west causes a kind of wintertime precipitation called "lake effect." Because the lake usually doesn't freeze completely, shore to shore, it remains warmer than the land. Clouds crossing Lake Michigan pick up additional moisture. As they hit the colder air over the land mass on the eastern side of the lake, the clouds are forced to drop some of their moisture in what looks like a snowstorm, but is really only "lake effect." There are winter days when "lake effect" falls all day in Saugatuck, but Fennville, six miles inland, receives very little. Of course sometimes it really snows too.

Many area residents embrace the snow in the winter in much the same way we embrace the beach in the summer. Sledding and tobogganing are popular sports. One hill off Ferry Street in Douglas is the most popular venue. If there has been a snow storm from the northwest, it is sometimes possible to sled down the narrow track on the west side of Baldhead. In the 1940s there was a ski route grubbed out around Baldhead. 204

A Christmas Carol

Place for the big sled

Views of the village in the snow winter activi.

## **Birdseye view wall**

These birds eye views were an art form popular about the turn of the century. They are essentially aerial views, without the use of an airplane, which hadn't been invented yet. Saugatuck and Douglas were sketched in 1907 by Holland artist Joseph Warner, an Englishman who had immigrated to New York in the 1830s with his family. He worked as a portrait painter in Chicago until 1895, after photographs had largely replaced painted portraits, when he moved to Holland. In Western Michigan he painted many landscapes, and did his unusual birds eye views of several local communities. Besides Saugatuck and Douglas he drew Hamilton, Zeeland, Jenison Park, Jamestown and Overisel. Each individual building was studied and most are true representations of the structures including the number of placement of windows, chimneys, etc. Warner died in Holland in 1924, when he was past 90 years of age.

Douglas:

Swing Bridge

Basket Factory

Catholic Church

Base ball field

Bekken blacksmith shop

[Downtown block Kerr building and People store across street from each other on west

Meat market and Weigert across street from each other on east

Masonic Lodge and Village Hall

Douglas School

Octagonal house

Methodist church (library)

Jonas S. Crouse --boat

Ferry launches in river

Saugatuck:

Two river mouths

Lighthouse

Butler Hotel

Leindecker's

School on hill

Leland Building and Leland Lodge

Tourist Home

Coal yard where Big Pavilion was later built

Old Methodist church

Chain ferry

Village Hall and Bay building