

View from Baldhead 1874

Remembering When ...

Our History



Marvin and Evelyn Demerest—in front of Old School House—1938

Elementary School Class—Kindergarten, First, and Second Grades (1948-49)

IRREPLACEABLE: REAL HISTORY. REAL STORIES. Right here in Douglas on Center Street. How many people go places and spend money to see “history” in what is often falsified in Disney World or Las Vegas format?

Here is real history on Center Street, Douglas—one of Douglas and Saugatuck’s biggest resources. It certainly does not fit the conventional picture of an old-time schoolhouse, but that is exactly what it was: a 1866 public school established under a State of Michigan program to consolidate small one or two room schools to make a larger multiple room/multiple teacher school—and in a building that was specifically designed to help beautify Michigan villages and set standards for village architecture.

Did our ancestors from the 1860s take public education seriously? You bet they did. The school, with its massive roof, copula, and great “brackets” under the roof overhang is technically known as the Douglas Union School but commonly known as “The Old School House.” It was the school for all grades until the 1920s and then elementary grades only until 1957. Hundreds of local kids are still around to tell some very interesting stories about classroom life and community and family life in the past. Today it is recognized as one of the finest examples of school architecture in the State of Michigan—and Michigan’s oldest existing Union school.

A classroom again! Now the Historical Society plans to protect the resource from development that is threatening it—and to work with the Library and



the Saugatuck-Douglas schools to make it a local history “Discovery Center” where once again kids (and adults) will be able to experience the rich history of the school-life and community life. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

The Society is gathering stories and photos about the school’s past. Do you have class photos or other photos/information about the school? Stories to tell? Call Jack or Jim at the Society’s “Tech Center,” 857-7901—or Judy or Tom Anthrop at 857-1183. *By Jim Schmiechen*

Above - Old School House, 130 Center Street, Douglas. Standing on top of the tallest dune in Douglas and overlooking the Kalamazoo River, built by local ships carpenters to a plan provided by the State of Michigan. This school was revolutionary in its day because it was a multi-classroom/multi-teacher school and because it was of such grand architecture for the village—which in 1866 had very few buildings of architectural note.

The Remembering When feature is the creation of Jack Sheridan and Jim Schmiechen of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. We remind our readers that this year’s SDHS Pumphouse Museum exhibit titled “Lincoln’s Ready-Made Soldiers: Saugatuck Area Men in the Civil War” is now open. The historic museum is located on the west side of the Kalamazoo River at the foot of Mt. Baldhead. It is open daily, noon to 4 p.m. until Labor Day, and then on fall weekends. There is no admission charge.

In addition, special presentations featuring various historical topics will be presented at the museum on

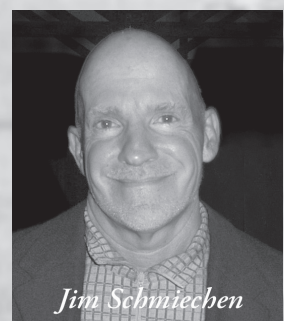
Tuesdays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to noon, beginning June 21.

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