

DOUGLAS CAFE

As Douglas becomes well-known for its restaurants, it is interesting that the corner of Center and Main Streets in downtown Douglas has been a sort of "restaurant corner" off and on since the 1930s. Many people today remember it as being the home of the Auction House restaurant (the Auction House sign is now in the Saugatuck-Douglas museum collection of local business signs).

Nevertheless, documenting the history of the present structure that houses the Chaps restaurant in that restored old building presented a puzzle. We became inspired to work on this when Geri Van Meter, the former owner of the Auction House (the predecessor to the present Chaps) sent us a couple of photos of the building, and we then acquired more information and photos from Jan Van Liere, who created Chaps in 1998.

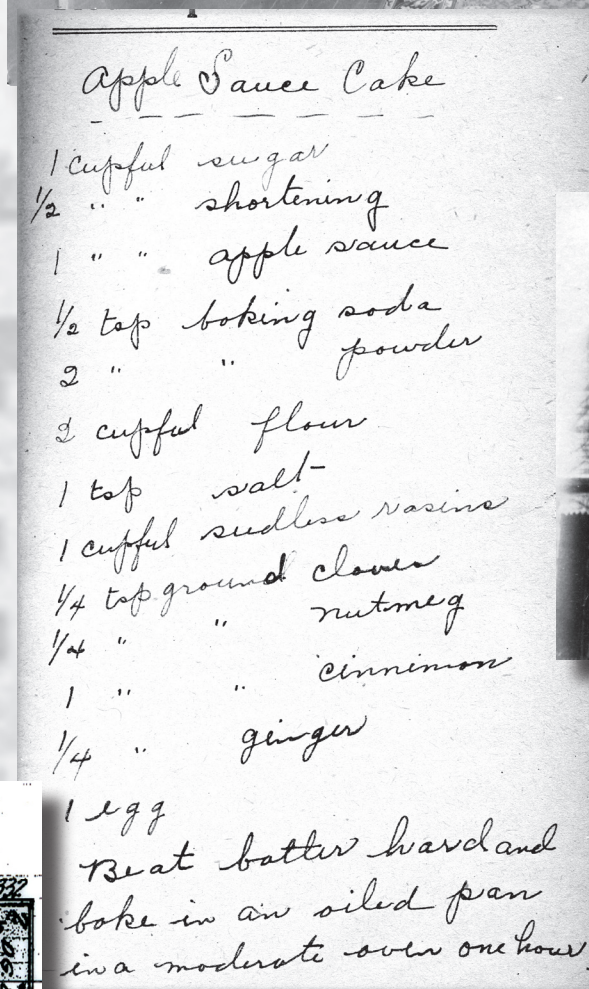
Assembling the clues, here is what we have found. The structure itself was built in the early 1900s as Ben Wiegert's Model Grocery and shows up on a 1910 "Sanborn Fire Map" with separate entrances for groceries and drugs. Ben is shown here with the family Ford sedan in 1923.

The photo of the store, from around the same time suggests that the grocery business had fallen into hard times, and might explain why, by the 1930s, the Wiegerts had converted the space into a restaurant called the Douglas Cafe. We speculate that the woman in the photo is the Weigert's daughter Beatrice—standing behind the dining counter at a cookie jar. Beatrice was in the Douglas school 'upper grades' in 1920-21. According to Mr. Demi Demerest, the Douglas Cafe was well known for pies and cakes (check out the glass case to the rear of the room). We feature one of the desert recipes from Beatrice's recipe book, now in the possession of Jan Van Liere. Does anyone have a Douglas Cafe menu and does anyone know when the restaurant closed? Let us know any information and of course we would like to sample a piece of the apple sauce cake!

Several years ago Kit Lane started a Historical Society research project on restaurants in the Douglas-Saugatuck area—collecting photos, menus and stories of people who worked in them. If you wish to contribute your recollections, photos and menus to this project, please contact us. *By Jim Schmicheen*



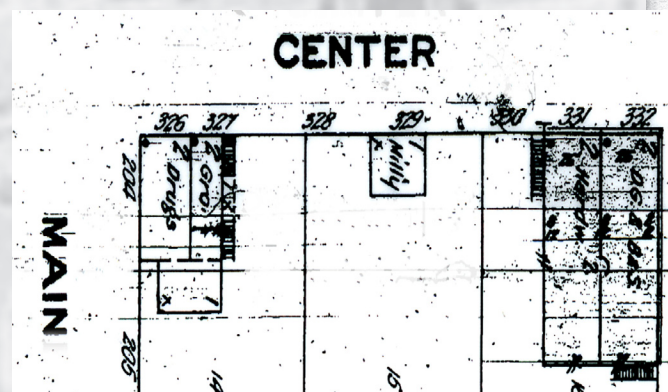
Probably Ben's daughter Bea behind the counter -1930s



Historic apple sauce cake recipe



Ben with family Ford 1923



Corner of Center and Main 1910 per Sandborn map

The Remembering When feature is the creation of Jack Sheridan and Jim Schmicheen 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.

