

REMEMBERING THE BUFFALO HOUSE

This photo of the house at 526 Butler Street, was found in the Society Simmons collection. The house—known for years as “the Buffalo House”—has a story that goes with it.

I heard the Buffalo House story from Peggy Boyce who lived in the house with her husband Jim for eight years soon after they were married. The story goes something like this: the house was once the Saugatuck Post office, and one day when a circus had come to town, a buffalo escaped and charged down Butler Street and made a visit to the Post Office. Inside the building, it “frightening everyone considerably.” Peggy guesses that this may have been in the late 1800s. She knows that her husband’s grandfather Elmer Bauhahn lived in an apartment upstairs when it was being used as the post office.

At that time Elmer and his new bride were fresh German immigrants.

We know that Saugatuck has had 22 postmasters since a post office was established in 1835—but who knows where all the post offices were located?

Back to the story. In his book *Saugatuck Through the Years*, Jim Sheridan adds a bit of additional

context. He writes that the said circus was staging a parade along Butler Street to advertise its arrival in town, and the buffalo had broken loose from its tender—rushed through the front door of the post office “creating a local version of ‘the bull in the



china shop.” Sheridan ends the story by noting that it was “a never-to-be-forgotten event worthy of a place in the community history.”

The photographer, Bill Simmons was, as some may recall, the Time-Life writer and photographer who ran the Commercial Record in the 1940s and 1950s, and during that time he took thousands

of photographs of the Saugatuck area. This is one of the images that did not make it into the book, *Off the Record*, (2002) a photographic history of the Saugatuck Area based on his photographs. Simmons was aware of the buffalo legend because

he wrote “Buffalo House” on the envelope which holds the negative—and it is possible that the photo was taken at the time the house was being prepared for removal in 1958. On its site was built a new home for Cornelia Koning—and is now the home of Bill Galligan. The present Water Street Gallery can be seen to the right in the photo.

Peggy tell us that the house, which had been the home of her grandfather, Miller Robinson, (photos below) a local watchmaker, was cold as heck because it had been crudely constructed out of irregular sized pieces of scrap lumber from nearby mills—and hence was full of holes.

In 1958 Peggy tried mightily to save the old building but her efforts were for naught. She knows however, that her brother used some of the salvaged lumber and the old window glass in a house he owned on Wall St. in Douglas.

By Jim Schmiechen



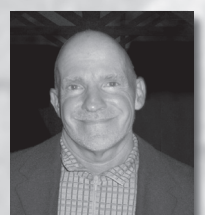
Above: Miller Robinson and wife Anna ca 1920

Left: Ca 1902 Miller Robinson, wife Abby and daughter Irene, in front of his shop which was located west side of Butler St on the village square .

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