

1920s



DOUGLAS

UNION SCHOOL

AND THE SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

For more than 150 years, this site has served as a community center for education, learning, and play. The monumental two-story building in front of you stands as a reminder of the importance of public education then and now—Michigan’s public school system was established in 1835—two years before statehood!

As settlement in Michigan grew, land sales in each township funded primary school districts where students of all ages attended one-room schoolhouses. By the 1840s the state legislature enabled smaller districts to merge and become “union districts” with larger and better funded “union schools” built to serve growing student populations. These reforms gave the Douglas Union School its name and purpose.

Built at the end of the American Civil War, the Douglas Union School opened in 1866 with 229 students in four classrooms, grades 1-12. The Union School represented a major advance in American education: the teaching of standardized curriculum by qualified teachers to students organized in grades by age.

The largest and most expensive building in Douglas at that time, the new school demonstrated Classical values through its architecture. Elements of the fashionable

Italianate style were combined with an older Greek Revival style. With a large front yard, the symmetrical building featured a classical temple front entrance, tall windows for maximum daylight, large classrooms with high ceilings for ventilation, and a belfry (bell tower). Although not the first in the state, it was soon followed by Union Schools in Saugatuck and Ganges.



Local craftspeople built the school, inside and out. The massive structure was built using a traditional post and beam timber-frame system. Jonas Crouse, a Douglas mill owner, oversaw the project. The cost was \$5,000 (approx. \$76,000 today).

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
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