



# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Tashmoo Park Book Project

with Arcadia Publishing

**Arthur M. Woodford** is an accomplished author and historian. While he has had many books published, his first (and only) book through Arcadia Publishing was *St. Clair Shores: Village on the Lake*. It was published in 2001 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of St. Clair Shores. At the time he was city librarian and director of the city's historical museum and archives.

What is his connection to Harsens Island? As Art tells it, "I have been a full time resident of the Island since fall 2001. I was introduced to the Island as a possible full-time retirement home by my long time friends, Jim and Jean Babcock. I have known them since the 1950s and came to the Island on several occasions to visit them. With my lifelong interest in Detroit and Michigan history, maritime history and the history of the Great Lakes -- what better place to live than Harsens Island!"

Art, along with wife, Mary Rose, make their home on South Channel. They are also charter members of the Harsens Island/ St. Clair Flats Historical Society.

He is active in a number of associations including the Great Lakes Maritime Institute and both the Michigan and Detroit Historical Societies.

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## From the President

**And now our work begins.** At our general membership meeting on January 22, 2011, I announced that I had signed the lease for our Society and we will officially take possession of the old Fire Hall on March 1, 2011. We have leased the building for twelve months; let us hope we can secure the necessary funds to purchase the Fire Hall before the end of our lease or find a better option. After the meeting a large number of the attendees went over to the Fire Hall for a tour of the building and got a firsthand look at the work before us. During our meeting several of the members suggested that we contact local contractors to inspect the building and give us their thoughts on what has to be done for our move in.

Board Member, Lucy Burby-Mastro has connected with House Calls Inspection Services, Steve Norcus, a former resident of the Island. He has offered his services to do an inspection of the building in exchange for a 'donation receipt' from the Society for his work. Board Member, Bernard Licata made a telephone call to the Township Building Department and found the following information on the Fire Hall. In 2001 Electrical, Mechanical and Plumbing permits were issued for the following work: New Furnace, Air Conditioner, Water Pump & Smoke Detectors, New Sink, Toilet, and Hot Water Heater. There is no city water connected to the building but there is a water line which runs from the building to the South Channel. We will see if this line can be used, as a renter connecting to the city water would be very costly for the Society. Several other Island contractors have been contacted for their thoughts on what we need to open the building to the public. I should be able to give a full report at our general membership meeting on February 26.

After we take possession of the Fire Hall on March 1, there will be a lot of work to be done. We will be organizing work groups to clean and paint the inside and outside of the building. I hope we can count on you to join one of these groups! Please contact one of our Board Members and let them know how you can help. Our goal is to have all work on the Fire Hall completed by April 30 and open the building to the public on May 1. Our May 28, 2011 General Membership Meeting will be held at the Fire Hall as part of a **GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION EVENT** with the meeting starting at 9:30 A.M. and activities from 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. Volunteers will be needed to greet the public and explain the artifacts on display.

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## the Society Pages

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## Upcoming Events

### HISCFHS General Membership Meeting

February 26, 2011  
2:00pm at the Lion's Hall

## the Society is looking for YOU!

Have you ever organized a birthday bash, backyard BBQ or dinner party?

How about helping a neighbor, meeting people or having a lot of fun?

**YOU** are just what we are looking for!  
see page 5 for more details

## THANK YOU!

Do you like the redesign on the newsletter? Special thanks go out to **Larry Zelensky** at Human Touch Graphics.

## Fact and Romance of Harsens Island Harsen Homestead Tragedy

*The Society President, Gary Grout, has contributed an article printed over 100 years ago. As it is rather lengthy, we will print it in installments. Here is the last part from the Detroit News Tribune, Aug. 30, 1896, page 16:*

### EARLY SETTLERS

Harsens Island was once in British water. At that time, the dividing line ran along the center of the north channel but a later survey gave it to the United States. The first white settlers on the Island were two fur traders, James Harsen and his son-in-law, Isaac Graveraet, and their families. They purchased the Island from the Indians under sanction of the British government and from that time until the present day it has been owned and occupied by their descendants.

Harvey Stewart, the pioneer of the well-known Island family of Stewarts, settled on the Island early in the present century. The ancient distillery which he managed at that time is still standing although in a ruinous condition. It was the first distillery in Michigan and, at one time during the war, served as a British fort.

A bright old lady, a granddaughter of one of the earliest residents and a Harsen by birth, has lived all her life of 74 years on the same spot near the western shore of the Island. The quaint old homestead with its old-fashioned interior and surroundings stands on the eastern bank of the north channel overlooking a long stretch of mainland on the opposite shore with a glimpse of the little village of Algonac in the distance.

In striking contrast to the bustling social life on the eastern shore of the Island is this quiet retreat. Although the water is dotted with pleasure boats of all kinds very little of the main shipping passes this point.

### A TRAGIC HISTORY

Adjoining this farm is the old Harsen farm with its homely associations, its tragedies and its neglected burial ground. Of the original homestead, nothing but a few decayed timbers remain. The following incidents are a part of the tragic history of the Harsen family.

The first Mr. Harsen was a strict Lutheran and trained his family in the same belief. Although in a locality where wild game was abundant, he forbade the use of firearms on the Sabbath. One Sabbath morning while all the family were in the house studying the catechism and reading the Bible, a large flock of ducks lit on the shore. The temptation was too much for the oldest son. He seized the gun and started to run out when the butt struck the door and it exploded. The charge entered the arm of his niece, a girl of 7 years. She was taken to Detroit where it was amputated.

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## Harsen Homestead Tragedy continued



Later on in 1800, another tragedy took place in the old house. A keg of powder had been placed in the parlor chimney for safekeeping and the fireplace opening filled with green boughs. A Moravian minister, an inveterate smoker, had been visiting the family and soon after his departure there was a terrific explosion, which completely demolished the house. Mr. Barnard Harsen was killed and his sister, Mrs. Graveraet was nearly cut in two with a pewter platter which was lying on the keg. It was supposed that the minister's pipe caused the explosion.

Another house was built on the same site which is still standing and known as the old Harsen homestead. It is well preserved and only for recorded facts and its primitive architecture, one could scarcely believe that it had felt the suns and storms of more than 75 years. The quaint interior has been transformed into one of the prettiest summer homes on the Island. A bathing beach in front reaches out for several hundred feet over the clean white sand and at the back is the old apple orchard, in whose shadows are the graves of generations of red men.

A magnificent tree, called the will tree, near the house has a peculiar history, if we may credit the story as told by a resident. A colored man, a servant in the family named Will, was buried at the foot of the tree. The apples are black! The connection between these two facts form the gist of the story.

A country lane leads from the back of the house to the ancient burial ground of the Harsen family, located on an elevated site midway between the two channels. Scattered over a cleared spot in the center of a grove of grand old forest trees are the sunken neglected graves. Some are marked with slabs, cracked and braked, and bearing names and dates of a past century and over all is the wild growth of grave moss, once planted by loving hands and the sun glints down through the thick foliage, leaving flickering shadows on the prostrate tombstones.

Over a large part of the Island is the unbroken forest with its woodland wealth and forming a magnificent background for the summer colonies of Maple Leaf and Sans Souci.

But the heart and soul of the Island during the summer season is Grande Pointe clubhouse. It is a beautiful building, decorated and furnished with the most perfect taste, with immense pleasure grounds and quiet groves and walks and drives, starting from nowhere and ending nowhere, yet managing to reach the home of every cottager in the most sociable manner.

Truly, Harsens Island is a unique spot, a combination of the past and the present. ■

*If you would like to know more about the Stewart family history, there is a wonderful article at [www.stewartfarm.org](http://www.stewartfarm.org). The Stewart Farm is a registered Michigan Historical site.*



## Tashmoo Park Book Project continued

2011 celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the sinking of the Tashmoo in 1936 and Art has chosen to make his next book project about Tashmoo Park and the steamer, Tashmoo. There are plenty of pictures of the ship available but very few of the park itself. He has asked our help to locate old photos of people, events at and of Tashmoo Park. Part of the proceeds from this venture will be donated to the Society.

If you can help with this project, Art would like to borrow your photos and scan them himself. If you live off-island and have the ability to scan your own photos, see the enclosed flyer for detailed information. If you have any artifacts from the ship or the park, Art can photograph them, too. Please contact Art directly on this project at 810-748-3571. ■



## MEMORIES

What have you done that no one would guess you'd done, to look at you? People are surprising. Everyone has done something exciting, interesting or amazing at least once in their life. Your deed doesn't have to be a huge, death-defying stunt; just something to make your grandchildren say, "Wow - I never knew that!" When people look back at your life, how do you want to be remembered?

### Childhood and School Days

Where and when were you born? In a hospital? At home? In a taxi cab?

Where and when did you go to school (elementary, high school, college, trade school, graduate school)? What were your favorite subjects? Why? Who were your favorite teachers? Why?

What were your favorite hobbies, sports, amusements, youth groups (Scouts, 4-H, etc.) as a child, teenager, young adult?

What would a typical school day, Saturday, Sunday have been like as a child, teenager, young adult? Chores, for instance, have changed a lot since children had to fetch water, chop kindling and hold a leg while Dad butchered the elk. Did you get an allowance?

If you had an after school or summer job, what did you do? What did you like about it? Dislike about it? What was the funniest thing that happened on the job? How much did you earn? What would that buy in terms of candy bars, movie tickets, toys, or other things you were likely to buy at that age?

Did you have any pets? Were any special to you? Any funny stories or memories?

Who were some of your friends growing up? Who was your best friend? Did your parents like your friends? Did any of your friends get you into trouble? What were some of the crazy fads you and your friends went through?

Where did you live as a child, teenager, young adult? What was the house like? What was the town like? What do you remember liking and disliking about it? As an adult, why did you pick the places you picked to live (specific apartments, neighborhoods, cities, regions)?

What was the most exciting thing that happened to you as a child, teenager, young adult? Or, what were the three most, five most, seven most exciting things?

## MEMORIES continued

### Parents and Grandparents

Who were your parents and grandparents? What memories do you have of each? Where did your father/mother work?

### Romance, Work, Play and History

How old were you when you went on your first date? Where did you go?

How did you and your spouse meet? What attracted you to each other? Do you have a favorite incident from your courtship that was funny in the ordinary way or embarrassing then, funny now?

What was your wedding like? Where and when was it held? Was this typical for the time? (Not everyone gets married while skydiving.) Did you dance? What did people wear?

Military service - When and where did you serve? Why did you choose it, if you had a choice? What was the most exciting thing that happened to you in the service? Funniest? Most frightening?

Occupation - what did you do? Why did you choose it as a career? What did you especially like and dislike about the job(s)? What are some of the things you are proudest of? How much did you make to start with at your first full-time job?

What did you do outside of your job as an adult? Why do you do it? What did you like or dislike about it? Funny, proud, sad events? Not just volunteer work, but hobbies, recreation, travel, and so on. Do you bird watch, water ski, play the banjo, teach Sunday school, volunteer at the library, fly fish, collect stamps, refinish antiques, rebuild hot rods?

What historical events have you witnessed in person? Via radio or television? How did you and your friends and neighbors react to them?

### Religion, Children, History again

Religion - Why did you choose your particular denomination, if you did? What do you like about it? Dislike? What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you in church? What was the most awe-inspiring thing? What was your proudest moment? What was your saddest moment?

Children - where and when were they born? How did you pick their names? What were they like as infants and toddlers?

Larger events, personal perspective - what do you notice is the biggest (three biggest, five biggest) change in the world today from the world you knew as a child?

### Eating and Holidays

Food makes memories and binds families together. How did you celebrate Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas? What did you eat, and how did you cook it? (Some people in Texas deep-fry their turkeys for Thanksgiving). How did you decorate the house? Did you do anything special for breakfast, lunch or dinner on your birthday? Any other special family holidays or traditions?

**Please** take the time to write your memories down, the future generations will appreciate it! ■

## From the President continued

We will be looking for donations such as artifacts and displays for the museum as well as items needed to open the doors. We have a system in place with the necessary forms to accept artifacts and catalog them. We may hold a series of workshops to archive photos and memorabilia that you don't want to part with but would like to share. It will be a very busy year for your Society, I for one am looking forward to the first year of our decade of change.

*- Gary Grout*

**To donate items to the museum or help with an event, please call**

**810-748-3802.**

## Wish List

We need everything! If you have an item you would like to donate or loan, please contact any board member or call 810-748-3802.

- Computer, preferably running Windows 7, printer, scanner
- Copier
- Paper, pens, office supplies
- 3-ring Binders, sheet protectors
- Folding chairs
- Bookshelves
- Display cabinets
- Address labels – 30-up
- Paint and paint supplies
- Borrow ladders/scaffolding
- Cleaning supplies – broom, dustpan, paper towels, TP, etc
- Elbow grease and VOLUNTEERS!

and more to come . . .

## 2011 Activities & Events Calendar

<b>February</b>	Assess Clean-up / Fix-up needed at Fire Hall. Organize materials & manpower schedule for March 1 - April 15 to complete clean-up & make ready for move in by April 15.
	<i>26 2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>March 1</b>	Start Clean-up / Fix-up
	<i>26 2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>April 15</b>	Complete Clean-up / Fix-up - Ready for MOVE-IN
	<i>23 2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
	<b>30</b> Complete MOVE-IN process
<b>May 1</b>	<b>OPEN DOORS</b> to Public
	<i>28 9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
	<b>28 GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION</b> -- 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM
<b>June 12</b>	<b>BUY THE FIRE HALL</b> -- EVENT -- Fund Raiser @ OLD CLUB --- Details TBD
	<i>25 9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>July 3</b>	<b>HOT DOG &amp; ICE CREAM SOCIAL:</b> 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM -- Fundraiser
	<i>23 9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>August 6</b>	Society Booth at <b>FIELD DAY</b> -- Invite folks to stop in for Free Peanuts & Popcorn Day @ Fire Hall
	<b>13</b> Society Booth at <b>BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL</b> -- Invite folks to stop in for Free Peanuts & Popcorn Day @ Fire Hall
	<b>21 ANNUAL MEETING &amp; GALA EVENT:</b> Dinner Dance & Entertainment -- Fundraiser @ Old Club -- Details TBD
	<i>21 4:00 PM General Membership ANNUAL Meeting @ OLD CLUB</i>
<b>Sept 3</b>	<b>PARADE DAY</b> -- Hot Dogs & Potato Chips - Peanuts & Popcorn Day
	<i>24 2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Oct 9</b>	<b>HOT SOUP &amp; MUSIC</b> -- Details TBD
	<i>22 2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Nov 6</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Dec</b>	No General Membership Meeting