

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Night The Fitz Went Down

On October 8, the Lions Club was the venue for our guest speakers; Don Erickson, age 85, retired captain of the *SS William Clay Ford* and Malcom McAdam from the Great Lakes Maritime Institute. It was an informal discussion with Mr. McAdam asking the questions and Captain Erickson responding. It was well attended with close to 200 people and attendees as far away as Florida and Ohio.

Captain Erickson related the events leading up to, during and after that fateful day the *SS Edmund Fitzgerald* sank with 29 lives lost on November 10, 1975. His ship, the *SS William Clay Ford*, had reached the relatively safe harbor in the lee of Whitefish Point on Lake Superior.

"It was like the Perfect Storm," Erickson said, "with two storm fronts converging on the sea."

continued on page 3

From the President

We have arrived at the month when the leaves begin to fall and we begin to reflect on what has happened in the past year. We look back, take time to gather with family and friends and say 'thanks' for those things that have made our lives better; **and, learn from those things we have not done so well.**

When you gather with family and friends this year, give a little thought to The Historical Society. In a small way it has brought some measure of 'better' to our community and to each of our lives. We had a building in Sans Souci that remained unoccupied for many years that is no longer an eyesore. We have a Museum that has now surprisingly gathered many artifacts of our history that has been shared with many hundreds of people.

Our initial foray into our guest speakers' series, **The Night the Fitz Went Down**, was in October. Which, by the way, brought nearly 200 people to the Lions Hall for the event; over half came from off Island and some came from as far as Ohio, Holland, Ann Arbor, Brighton & Port Huron and one who came from Florida. They came early; had lunch, visited the Museum, and stayed late to have dinner...the restaurants were very full that day!

The last event of the year is scheduled for November 19 at the Lions Hall. It is an **Old Fashioned Square Dance and Fried Chicken Dinner**. Come dressed in your favorite bib overalls or jeans and enjoy the evening.

Reflecting on the past months, The Historical Society has brought some 'better' to our lives and we want to thank each of you who helped make this happen. For those of you who have not had the time or opportunity to participate in this endeavor; there is still time 'this year' to do so...we look forward to hearing from you. My cell phone is always open for your calls at: 586-530-7100, to answer any questions.

-bernard

ps.... Also, we are most gratified by the contributions to the building fund that have been received. While we have not yet achieved our goal, we are hopeful that those planning tax deductible charitable contributions for 2011 will consider the **Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society**.

the Society Pages

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Museum Happenings

On Sunday afternoon October 16, the Board held a small private showing of the Museum for a group of prominent residents and members of The Society. Those in attendance were amazed at the accomplishments that have been achieved to date and the generous donation of artifacts. Those attending were very pleased with the progress that has been made; and, the positive impact the Museum has made to Sans Souci and the Island.

The Board has planned a private showing & reception for community business leaders on Sunday, November 6, from 2-4 PM.

Nancy Licata reported that the **fundraising** brochure mailing has generated **\$16,835** to date.

The **Speaker Series** is in the planning stages for next summer and will be held at our General Membership Meetings. We will have a very short meeting and then the speaker. The meeting and speaker events may be held on Saturdays at 7 PM in June, July and August.

Thank You to Tom Korthals for cutting the lawn this past summer.

Upcoming Events Are Being Planned!

- Peggy Osgood is chairing the Square Dance on Nov. 19, 2011
- Nancy Boulton is chairing the Christmas Sale on the weekend of December 3. Call her at 810-748-3802.
 - We need donations of antiques to sell
 - Items are needed to decorate the Museum
- Memorial Day 2012 – 1st Year Anniversary – Open House
- Rum Runner Party will be in July 2012 – Ruth Roth to chair
- Annual Meeting will be in August
- John Chamberlain will head up the Labor Day Parade

SAVE THE HISTORIC FIRE HALL CAMPAIGN

The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society is launching a Major Donor Campaign to garner funds to purchase the Old Fire Hall in Sans Souci to be the permanent Museum and headquarters for The Society.

Letters requesting donations have gone out to all Community Business Leaders in Clay Township and surrounding area as well as to those business leaders who provide goods and services to the Township and its residents.

“It is their relationship to the community, Harsens Island and the Flats that lead me to believe that they will be interested in being a significant part of our long-term success,” said Bernard Licata, president of The Society. “It appears The Society can robustly operate and contribute to the general good in the community on a continuing basis. However, sustainability is one thing and the one-time extraordinary cost of developing a permanent home for the Museum is quite another.”

“This is where we hope the Business Leaders of the Community will be able to help. In order to secure our location and afford necessary atmospheric control for the collection, we have initiated these Major Donor and Corporate Sponsorship Campaigns,” said Licata. “Our goal is to secure ownership of the old Fire House and thereby secure long-term stability, by raising \$160,000 for that specific purpose”, he continued.

Currently, The Historical Society is holding \$45,000 in gifts and pledges in our Building Fund, leaving a balance of \$115,000 yet to be raised before the lease expires in February.

The Night The Fitz Went Down

continued

Waves were easily 30 foot high and the winds were blowing close to 70 mph with intermittent snow squalls. The *SS Arthur M. Anderson* had been closely following the *Edmund Fitzgerald* as they headed for the shelter of Whitefish Point, but reported to the Coast Guard when the *Fitzgerald* disappeared from radar. The Coast Guard, with no available search ships, sent out a request to the ships safely in harbor if anyone would go back out in the storm to search for survivors. Initially, no one wanted to go back out in the raging storm but the *William Clay Ford*, captained by Don Erickson, went back out and attempted to search with no luck.

While there are many theories about why she sank, Captain Erickson was of the opinion that she had run too close to Six Fathom Shoals and damaged her sides or bottom allowing her to take on water. A combination of wind and waves coming from the stern could have pushed her bow under and she nosed-dived into the bottom meeting her end quickly.

If you visit the Dossin Museum on Belle Isle, the pilot house of the *William Clay Ford* has been incorporated into the museum itself. Take a walk back in history as you and your imagination stand in the pilot house and picture what it was like on the night of November 10, 1975. ■



SS Edmund Fitzgerald, photo credit unknown

The Night The Fitz Went Down

Congratulations to the DOOR PRIZE WINNERS!

- Randy Ralph - East China - won the big prize and electronic picture frame and a DVD of the event when it is ready.
- William Franzel - Marine City
- Irma Simon - Harsens Island
- Tod Loeding - Lexington, MI
- Noreen Donaldson - Harsens Island
- Cheryl Bryson - Marine City
- Liz White - Burtchville, MI
- Lisa Ralph - Marine City
- Melissa Bartyal - Vermilion, OH
- Florence Felt - East China
- Nancy Eldridge - Harsens Island
- Jerry Jolly - Naples, FL
- Tammy Treppa - Warren
- Iris Olmin - Harsens Island
- Ellen Bindek - Harsens Island



Edmund Fitzgerald Artifacts at Museum

The Society Museum has a hand-built model of the SS Edmund Fitzgerald, a book about the ship and a flag that came from the actual ship. These items were donated by Ellen Barsheff. Stop by and see our collection!

The Art of Square Dancing

The art of dancing is about as old as man itself. It has been used to express emotions, pay homage to the gods and to have fun.

Modern square dancing has its roots in the English Morris Dance, Scottish reels, Irish jigs and the ballrooms of France. These traditional dances were brought here when immigrants came to America.

In America, two types of square dancing evolved – the Appalachian Mountain Dance and the New England Country Dance.

Everyone danced. It was just the thing to do. Many people supplemented their income by teaching dancing in its many forms. Some of the more enterprising ones had a couple of lessons first and then held a dance, reaping the benefits of both.

Unfortunately for square dancing, it soon took a back seat to the exciting new dances of the Roaring 20's. Scarcely anyone was interested in keeping this dance form alive and to keep it from sinking into oblivion. Surprisingly enough, a local Detroit named Henry Ford was responsible for keeping this art form alive. Mr. Ford used to vacation at Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts. There he became interested in the dance program conducted by a dancing master named Benjamin Lovett. The program included the the Virginia Reel, and other squares and rounds. Mr. Ford tried to hire Mr. Lovett, who declined, pointing out that he had a firm contract with the Inn. This posed no problem for multi-millionaire Ford, who simply bought the Inn and Mr. Lovett's contract and took Mr. Lovett back to Detroit with him. In the Detroit area, Mr. Ford established a broad program for teaching squares and rounds, including radio broadcasts and programs for schools. Mr. and Mrs. Ford built a fine dance hall with a teakwood floor and crystal chandeliers in Greenfield Village in Dearborn, and named it Lovett Hall. It is still in use.



The Art of Square Dancing

continued

Square dancing began its transition from the traditional, visiting couple type of dancing into all-four-couple-working kind of dancing in the late 1940's. Square dance callers discovered they could move everyone at the same time and create more interest.

Meanwhile, the development of the electronic amplifier aided the transition, since it permitted the caller to manage large crowds. It was no longer necessary to shout, use a megaphone, or have a caller in each square. The improved public address equipment allowed the caller to be heard well enough so that the dance routine could be invented as it was called. No longer was the dancer expected to know the dance pattern that went with a particular tune as was common in traditional dancing.

Currently, there are about 75+ basic moves used in square dancing. The caller will sing out the commands creating endless dance patterns. A square consists of four couples, with one couple stationed on each of the four sides of the square. Everyone starts facing the center of the square. Each couple consists of a man and a lady, with the man standing on the left. The actual sex of the dancer is unimportant as long as everyone remembers who is the man and who is the lady. Each member of a couple is the other member's partner. The lady on a man's left is his corner, and conversely the man on a lady's right is her corner. Couples are numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 starting with the couple closest to the caller and moving counterclockwise. Couples 1 and 3 are the heads, and 2 and 4 are the sides.

Common calls are allemande left or right, do sa do, bow to your partner (or corner), forward, back, promenade and circle left or right. It may sound confusing until you actually start dancing and it is easy to muddle through it if you have never square danced before. Your editor recalls square dancing in 6th grade when the boys still thought girls were icky and insisted on holding hands with their shirt sleeves pulled over their hands so they wouldn't catch cooties! But it was a lot of fun once we got the hang of it.



What to Wear

Current dress consists of the man wearing a Western style shirt with jeans and boots and the ladies wear a type of a decorated skirt with a flair. This looks attractive when the ladies are swirling around the dance floor. Petticoats are popular underneath. Blouses can be long or short sleeved and the bodices are decorated with colorful trim.

On Harsens Island we have our own flair. Wear what you are comfortable in, especially shoes. We look forward to seeing you at the Square Dance on November 19!

THE NIGHT THE FITZ WENT DOWN!

The story of Great Lakes Freighter Edmund Fitzgerald

DVD

Presented by
HARSENS ISLAND
ST. CLAIR FLATS
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Reserve your exclusive DVD of the interview with Captain Don Erickson and Malcom McAdam. Copies will be available around mid-November. This was professionally filmed by **Paul Dingeman** and the DVD and cover is being designed by graphic artist, **Larry Zelensky**. This will make a great Christmas gift to anyone that enjoys the Great Lakes. DVD's will be \$20 each. **Call Nancy Licata at 248-770-2103 to reserve yours.**

2011 Activities & Events Calendar

Dates and locations subject to change

Museum Open

Saturday's 10am – 2pm

November – December 2011

Museum will be closed January, February and March 2012

For museum information, contact Nancy Boulton at 810-748-3802

Visit our gift shop!

General Membership Meetings held at the Old Fire Hall

3058 S. Channel in downtown Sans Souci

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| Nov | 19 | Square Dance & Fried Chicken Dinner at the Lions Hall, 6-10pm, \$15 per person |
| | 26 | <i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i> |
| Dec | 3 | Christmas Sale at the Museum |
| | - | <i>No General Membership Meeting</i> |