

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## From the President

On this Thursday evening, January 24, 2012, the President of the United States is preparing to give the State of the Union Speech... so I thought it would be appropriate to prepare a **State of the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society**... here goes:

The State of our fledgling two year old Historical Society is solidly moving in the right direction. Our membership has grown to over 200 enthusiastic supporters (applause). Our membership renewal rate last year was at 99% and we hope to repeat that statistic in 2012 (applause). The Historical Society's Treasury has grown to \$45K ... with \$18K in the General Fund and \$27K in the Building Fund (applause).

On the brighter side, The Society received a letter from a private foundation that pledges \$10K toward purchase of the historic Fire Hall to serve as our Museum. This \$10K pledge along with the \$25K from the **Peslar Foundation** and the \$27K cash in the building fund, plus \$10K from the General Fund we stand at a total of: \$72K toward our goal of \$140K... better than half way to our goal (standing applause). I am also pleased to report that the **Community Foundation of St. Clair County** representatives visited the Museum on January 5 and were duly impressed with what The Society has accomplished since its inception. It is my opinion that The Society has a reasonably high probability of receiving a grant from this organization (standing applause).

It is also my pleasure to announce that the owners of the old Fire Hall, Mr. Lou Campbell and Mr. Don DeWolf, have committed to extending the Historical Society's lease another year at the present rental rate to allow us to continue fund raising and achieve our goal of purchasing the building (5 minute standing applause).

Your board of directors has appointed two directors. **Joyce Hassen** will fill the position of Treasurer and **Kathy O'Connor** will serve as

*continued on page 3*

## Pictures From The Attic

by Paul Wargo

Here is a picture of **Stokey's Grocery** before it became **Upmals** (then Upmals became **Riverside**). My cousin found the picture in some old stuff.



My grandparents homestead was at 7885 Bates just down from Stokeys. The whole area was called Riverside after the hotel (before it was **Idle Hour**). All the cottages were on separate islands and to this day many of those homes still can only be reached by boat, just like **Lug Island** across from Riverside.

**John Upmal** worked for my grandfather in Detroit. One day John was robbed, beaten, and crippled. He walked with a limp the rest of his life. My grandpa sent him to the island to recuperate and take care of the cottage and while he was there he met Martha and started working for the Stokeys. **John Lynn**, the caretaker for the Mumfords at the Old Club, lived with the Upmals. **Michael Dixon** is a Mumford grandchild and knew John Lynn as a close friend and included a chapter about the Upmals on his books about the island.

The rest is history. Now we wonder what will happen to Riverside this year...

*See page 3 for a follow-up to this story.*

## The Society Pages

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St. Clair Flats Historical Society  
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Join us on Facebook!



Part of our ferry display.

## Museum Happenings

by Nancy Boulton and Chris Wludyka

Since we have opened the museum at the end of May, 2011, we have received many items. We will take you on a tour starting at the point where you first enter the museum. There is a map entitled **Michigan Famous Summer Resorts**. The map has no date but we have concluded that it is from the forties. The map shows many old hotels on the island along with the dance pavilion that was located at **Tashmoo Park**. Some may even remember **Broglin's Ferry** at Pearl Beach. Copies of these maps are available at the museum for only ten dollars.

Continuing on, we have a book where all of the workers recorded their time when they worked on constructing Green Dr. This book was dated in 1926. You will recognize many of the names of the men who worked on this road - **Harry Sampier, Harold Yax, Otis McLane** and **John Stout**. The book shows how much each worker was paid. Can you believe some were paid 50 cents and others received 60 cents an hour?

We also have a letter from the United States Congress dated July 7, 1938. This was sent at the time of the original dedication of the Fire Hall.

**Champion Ferry** has given us many items. Remember the little round tokens we had in the little drawstring bag? We have a blueprint of the proposed ferry dock and a picture of the first ferry with a wooden deck big enough for six cars. Mr. Mumford, who was the president of GM Diesel, later helped design the first steel ferry. This new ferry held twelve cars.

Observe the damaged ferry prop, on which damage occurred during the 2011 ice jams on the North Channel. We also have the wooden steering wheel from one of the first ferries. All the children love turning this steering wheel. We have many pictures of the ice storm of 1984 - the year the Coast Guard was called in. The Captain from the Bramble said it was the worst storm he had ever seen. The children from the island school had t-shirts saying **We Survived the Bramble Scramble**.

If you have any items big or small that have come from the island, would you please keep the museum in mind. We are changing our displays and always adding new items. If you have any items from the old school house or post office we would love to have them. Please keep us in mind when you find island stuff you no longer need.

We are also planning another **Antique Sale** in the spring or summer. We are looking for antiques to sell. If you have any you can donate, please contact **Nancy Boulton** at **810-748-3802**.



Our attractive lobby and reference center.

**From The President** *continued*

director. I am personally pleased to have these two dedicated individuals to serve The Society (applause).

On the fun side, we will celebrate the first anniversary of our grand opening on Memorial Day weekend; we are bringing back the highly successful and fun **Rum Runners Party** and are scheduling another **Square Dance** (applause).

On the educational side, we have organized four outstanding speakers to fill our **Speaker Series for 2012** thanks to chairman **Denne Osgood** (applause). We are also planning, with direction from committee chairperson **Sue Wrobel**, a **First Nations Day**. This event will be in the form of a **Mini Pow-Wow** with singers, dancers, educational presentations, artists and crafts. Venue and date are yet to be determined (applause).

Your board has discussed and is in agreement that we should identify a mural artist who will work with the Society to paint a **giant mural** of the **Steamer Tashmoo** on the downstream face of the Museum building. This painting will allow those wishing to make a donation to the building fund to purchase a portion of the painting and have their name permanently listed on the passenger manifest that will be posted near the entrance of the Museum. Stand-by for details as they emerge (standing applause).

Thank you for being active participants in the mission established by your Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society: ***To collect, protect, preserve and share with the public the unique historical artifacts and information that represents the diverse cultural composition of the people that occupied the area of the St. Clair River Delta that is Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats.***

....and that is the State of the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society.

Respectfully,  
**bernard**

**Time to Renew Your Membership**

New Year's Eve has come and gone and it is time to renew your membership with The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society. Last year we had a 99% renewal rate and, with your help, we will make it 100% this year. Things are moving along well, reference the Presidents message that details our growth.

Every Member will be receiving a filled out application form. Please check your personal information to make sure it is correct and amend if necessary. **Lifetime Members**, please mark the form **correct** or **amended** and mail it back to us so our records will be current. **Annual Memberships** please do the same and mail it back with a check. Membership rates have remained the same for 2012.

We expect to have the membership mailing to you shortly. Please mail them back by March 15, 2012.

Thank you for your continued support!

**Nancy Licata**  
Secretary

**Pictures From the Attic** *continued*

**Follow-up:** Riverside was sold pending a one year trial basis in spring of 2011 to the **Tyvert** family on the island. Everything was great the first month then right after Memorial Day the county health department shut down the kitchen because of the septic, so there were no more pizzas or famous **boat knots**. The health department said they warned the previous owners but nothing was said about it to the Tyverts when they made the deal. The Tyverts wanted out right away but kept it open the rest of the summer selling gas and beer. As far as I know they walked away after Labor Day. There are no for sale signs. I will be up there the next two Saturdays and will drive by and see if anything is being done about the septic. Sad. We bought a lot of gas and food there.....

**by Paul Wargo**



Happy days at the Riverside.

## The Clubs of the St. Clair Flats

### by E. Hough

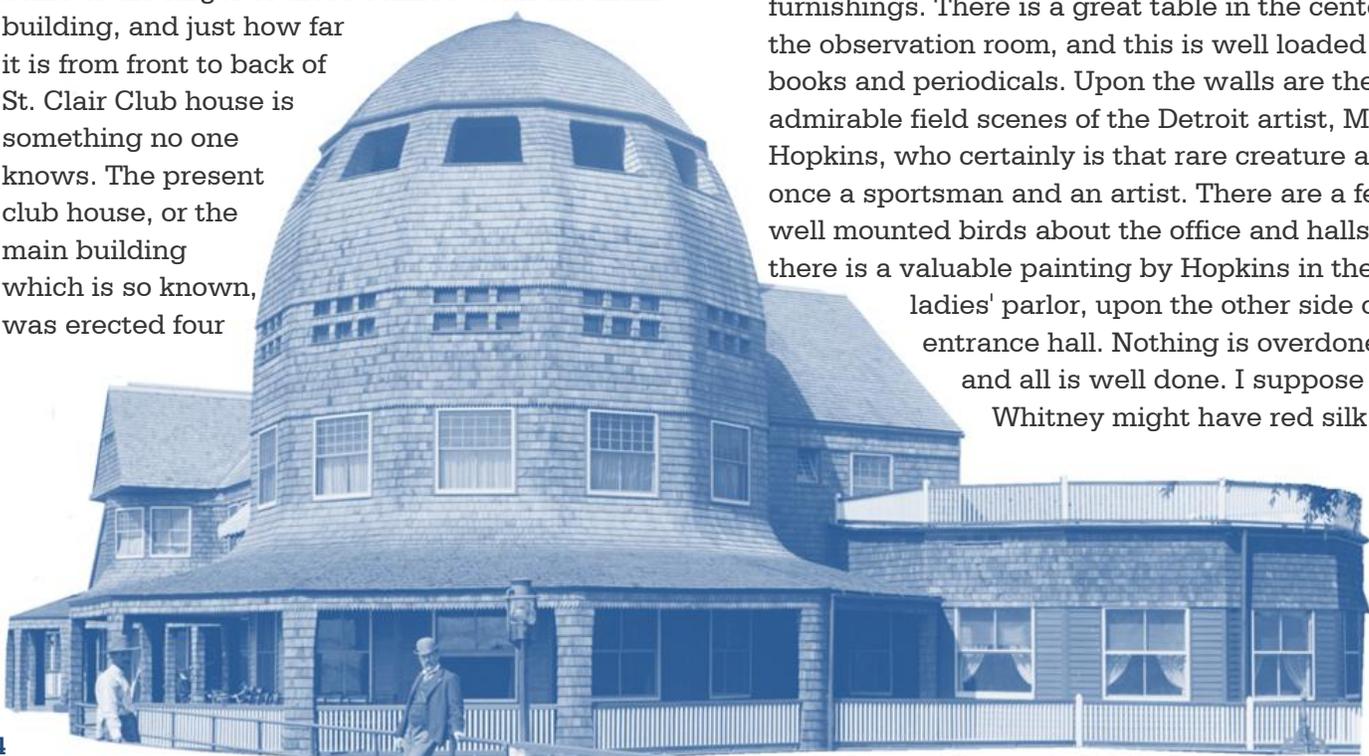
*Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of a multi-part series originally published in Field and Forest in August and September, 1890.*

**The St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club** is the oldest organization on the flats. It was founded in 1869, and may therefore be said to have reached its full majority, and at the same time to be lawfully the head of the family of clubs. The buildings of the club are very considerable in extent and architecturally very noteworthy. The main building is very happy in its conception, being simple, strong and comfortable looking to a degree. You may look long and far and you will not find a club building which will impress you better. But this is modern. The first building was a small frame house, only 18 x 80 ft. in size, with no dock at all. First one addition was made to this, and then a second, until it had fourteen rooms, at which point it was thought that the height of all reasonable architectural dreams had been reached. This old structure was formerly up on the dock, after the latter was built, but was in course of time moved back.

Behind the main club house there are now so many bath houses, boat houses, etc., that the place looks somewhat like the quarters on an old plantation. Some of the larger of these connect with the main building, and just how far it is from front to back of St. Clair Club house is something no one knows. The present club house, or the main building which is so known, was erected four

ago, and after it was finished had cost over \$27,000. It is 200 ft. in front, and about 200 ft. from front to back. In front of it lies 355 ft. of dock. The passenger boats can tie up at the front door, and the great steamers of the lake pass constantly by, to and fro, only a few yards distant from the wide verandas. Further on, across the channel, lies the line of rushes on the Canadian side.

Mr. D. A. Whitney, the urbane steward, who presides over the practical workings of the club during the open season, received the inquisitive visitor with ready courtesy and hospitality. The front door of St. Clair house is a grand wide affair, solid and well ornamented in stained glasses. Within that, there appears a vista of highly waxed floors and hard-oil finish in pine, bright and cheerful, which stretches across a noble hall, a long parlor and observation room to the right and up a wide and stately staircase which admits no insinuation of a difference between upstairs and down. The arrangement of this lower floor is superb. Fine as this club house is in its exterior, it is only at its best within. The long halls and the gracious expanse of easeful room which stretches away from them leave an impression of sheer magnificence. The finish in the natural grain of the wood, the immense fire-place, and the shining waxed floors heighten all this, and the effect is further continued by the quiet elegance of the furnishings. There is a great table in the center of the observation room, and this is well loaded with books and periodicals. Upon the walls are the admirable field scenes of the Detroit artist, Mr. Hopkins, who certainly is that rare creature at once a sportsman and an artist. There are a few well mounted birds about the office and halls, and there is a valuable painting by Hopkins in the ladies' parlor, upon the other side of the entrance hall. Nothing is overdone, and all is well done. I suppose Mrs. Whitney might have red silk



curtains at the windows that front from the office on the water, or she might have maroon, or a bright blue of some sort or other; but she doesn't. She has just exactly the amount, kind and quality of blue in her silk window curtains, which serve to make them a comfort and not a query. Everything else is just so. You can go into St. Clair Club house and have perfect comfort with your shoulder blades.

Moreover, Mrs. Whitney took me through the big dining-room, and through the big kitchen, and through the pantries, and through so many other

rooms, further and further back, and to one side or the other that my head swam, and I pledge my word and honor it was the same all the way through, and the cleanest place I ever saw. I would as soon be struck by lightning as to look at one of those dishpans again, and as for the silver it was

bright-shining as the sun. The world lost a great house-keeper when Mrs. Whitney married, although her husband and St. Clair Club gained one by the same token. Mr. and Mrs. Whitney have been in this present position for 9 years, and they ought to be there about 99 more.

The steward's office is railed off just to the left of the entrance, and with his formidable keyboard and set of books looks something like a hotel office. A good deal of system is necessary in conducting an establishment as large as this, for sometimes seventy-five or one hundred persons will be on hand daily in the summer, or even more if there is a grand bull or unusually large fish supper on band. There are eighty-nine bed-rooms on the second floor. Any overflow beyond this is taken up by the extra house down at the end of the dock, which is devoted entirely to sleeping purposes.

It should be borne in mind that this is a very large as well as very wealthy club. Its membership includes what we may call the aristocracy of

Michigan. You are liable to go in there and fall down over a postmaster-general fixing his fishing rod or a Senator on his yacht. The Hon. Russell A. Alger, whose name the breezes which sigh through the lumber regions whisper in connection with the White House; the Hon. Don M. Dickinson, ex-postmaster-general, Senator McMillan, of Michigan, and a number of other big guns all belong to this old and select sporting organization, but so far as I could learn they get treated just as well as anybody else.



It should not be supposed that this club is devoted altogether to social or summer resort purposes, or to such diversions as dancing, or eating fried perch all night. Doubtless during the summer season many Detroiters avail themselves of the privilege of taking the afternoon boat simply for a cool

ride up to the club house, and for the pleasure of an evening there, without any fishing or shooting; but there are many ardent anglers and hard-working shooters in this body, and much good and genuine sportsmen's work is done.

It was something in the way of news to learn that neither the shooting nor the fishing lies very close to the made ground, rather long journeys being required for either. The question may be asked, Why were the buildings, then, placed where they are? This was done so that the big boats, which have to stick to the channel, could get up to the building sites, before and after building. From this "made ground" where all the club houses stand, the smaller boats take out the seekers after sport. For instance, the best bass fishing is now ten, twelve, or even fifteen miles or more from the club houses, away over on the Canadian side.

For such journeys as are necessary or pleasant among the fishing grounds or to and from the city, there are owned by members of the St. Clair Club

a number of steam yachts, some of them of a very high grade of excellence. The Vita, belonging to Mr. M. S. Smith, Mr. Alger's partner, I saw in the docks of the Detroit Boat Works, down at the city, undergoing a refitting, and if I am not mistaken it was the Idler also that I saw there. The latter boat had undergone a complete rebuilding, her lines being materially changed. Idler is owned by Senator McMillan. Both Idler and Vita are grand boats, among the best of their class on fresh waters. There are twelve club boats for general touring purposes, and about sixty-five small boats scattered around among the numerous boat houses.



St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club Cottages

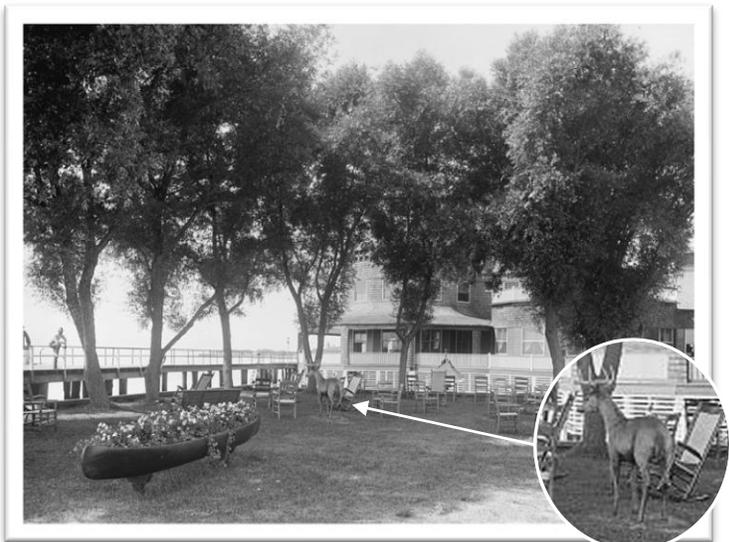
The typical boat, if we may so speak, among the various sorts used upon the St. Clair Flats, is a good stiff skiff, clinker built, about 16 to 18 ft. long, with provisions for stepping a mast well forward. On a journey of ten miles or upward the sail is an esteemed ally to the oar. Most of the bass fishing is done from such boats as these. The typical rod, if such a thing may be where all kinds of bass rods are brought and used, is a single-piece cane, about 8 ft. long. This makes a stiff but springy rod, which not even the bait caster always despises, for much of the fishing for the small-mouths is deep water work, as it is in Lake Erie about the islands.

The typical duck boat is called the *lying-out boat*, from which their open water shooting at bluebills and the other deep-water ducks is done. It is very flat and low on the water, almost sneak boat

build, for it must be both boat and blind.

Variations from this model are made according to the fancy of the individual shooter. In this open water shooting the gunner lies upon his back in the boat, his decoys being arranged, of course, as for blind shooting. There is often a very considerable sea on, and it requires practice to learn how to shoot ducks from a swaying boat in this way, as many a fair marsh shot has discovered upon trying it. It is cold, rough work lying out in a small boat all day, and it requires the fullest quota of duck hunter hardiness. There are some of these stubborn and stiff-necked fellows among the members of the St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club, and some good bags were made this past season, during which, by the way, the ducks are said to have been more plentiful than for many years past.

But, after all, to wander through the luxurious abode of this great and wealthy organization, and to note the provisions for more than ease and comfort, could give one no hint of duck boats, of leaden skies or stormy winds. One could hardly imagine hip boots and corduroys or canvas creaking and dripping along these elegant halls. Far more fitting to all this seemed the thought of warm days, and gentle winds, and skies blue as the river that rolls by. ■



The area just south of the clubhouse. There is a very realistic deer on lawn by the middle tree.

**Look for Part 3 in the next issue!**

## 2012 Activities & Events Calendar

*Dates and locations subject to change*

### Museum Hours

Open by appointment in February and March 2012

May: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM

June, July, Aug, Sept: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM and Sunday Noon – 4 PM

Oct & Nov: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM

Dec: closed – open by appointment and for Christmas Sale

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

Contact us at [email@hiscfhs.org](mailto:email@hiscfhs.org)

All events and meetings held at the Old Fire Hall Museum unless noted  
3058 S. Channel in downtown Sans Souci.

Members are welcome to attend any Board meetings on the calendar to keep apprised of Society activities and to bring issues before the Board.

|           |          |  |
|-----------|----------|--|
| March     | 31       | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
| April     | 14       | General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM         |
| May       | 12       | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
|           | 12       | General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM         |
|           | 26 – 28  | Memorial Day Open House & First Year Anniversary Saturday, Sunday & Monday |
| June      | 9        | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
|           | 13       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
|           | 16 or 23 | Rum Runners event date to be determined – Saturday                         |
|           | 27       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
| July      | 4        | Museum open special for the holiday – Wednesday                            |
|           | 11       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
|           | 14       | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
|           | 14       | General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM         |
|           | 25       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
| August    | 4        | Society booth at HISCFA Field Day – Saturday                               |
|           | 8        | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
|           | 11       | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
|           | 18       | Annual Meeting followed by spaghetti dinner Saturday – 5 PM                |
|           | 22       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
| September |          | Square dance proposed in September. Date to be determined                  |
|           | 1, 2, 3  | Museum open Saturday, Sunday & Monday – Labor Day Weekend                  |
|           | 8        | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
|           | 12       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
|           | 22       | Square Dance – tentative date  |
|           | 26       | Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM  |
| October   | 13       | General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM         |
| November  | 10       | Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM  |
| December  | 1 & 2    | Christmas Sale at the museum Saturday and Sunday – 10 AM to 4 PM           |

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 44  
Harsens Island MI 48028



DVD running time: 1 hour 40 minutes

**The story of the Great Lakes freighter S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald is well known, but few have heard it from someone who was there that fateful night.**

**Captain Donald Erickson** and his crew aboard the lake freighter S.S. William Clay Ford - upon receiving word that the Fitzgerald had disappeared from radar - left the safe anchorage of Whitefish Bay during the ferocious November 1975 storm to search for the Mighty Fitz and her crew.

As part of its Guest Speaker Series, The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society invited Captain Erickson to share his insights and memories of that night - fireside chat style - along with moderator Malcolm McAdam of the Great Lakes Maritime Institute, in front of a packed house at the Harsens Island Lions Hall. This DVD captures their conversation.

**\$20.00 each** plus \$5.00 shipping/handling if you cannot pickup. Contact any board member to pickup or send a check made payable to the HISCFS to PO Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028.