

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## 2012 LECTURE SERIES

### Robert McGreevy



The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society is pleased to sponsor Artist and Historian Robert McGreevy who will present in words, paintings and drawings: *The Fate of the Steamer: Key Stone State - November 1861*, on Saturday July 14, 2012, 3:00 to 5:00 pm at the Lions Hall on Harsens Island. Mr. McGreevy will also conduct a book signing for his latest book: *Lost Legends of the Lakes*, immediately following the presentation.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Robert McGreevy is a Great Lakes historian and maritime artist whose family history is steeped in the shipbuilding industry. McGreevy's grandfather and father worked for Harland & Wolff, Belfast's biggest shipbuilder; additionally, in 1912, his grandfather worked on the building the Titanic. During his formative years McGreevy began building models and sketching ships.

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## From the President

As president of the Historical Society, it is my responsibility to report recent events. The following fictitious story was found in a local un-named publication.

Sunday June 24, 2012. (Harsens Island Michigan) A raid by the FBI and local authorities was made in the late hours of Saturday June 23 on an alleged illicit Rum Runners Party sponsored by the Harsens Island Historical Society at the Middle Channel Golf Club on Harsens Island.

Authorities were successful in nabbing the notorious couple *'Trixi and Guido'* for involvement in numerous nefarious activities in Ohio, Indiana and Ontario Canada. They were taken in to custody prior to their unsuccessful scam to fleece the Historical Society of proceeds that were marked for The Society Museum Building Fund. The raid was successful at the hands of a local 'snitch' (informer). They will be arraigned in court and it is likely that charges will be pressed. In addition, the couple faces possible extradition to Ontario Canada for open charges pending; and, the States of Ohio and Indiana are filing to have the couple extradited.

Now in custody without bail, the couple faces hard time in a Federal Penitentiary for crimes committed. At long last the alleged scammers have been nabbed. Authorities and the court system will determine their future fate.

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## The Society Pages

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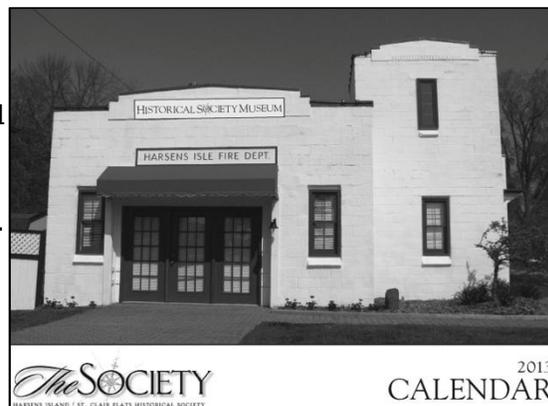
## Museum Happenings by Nancy Boulton

The museum has been very busy since we opened for the summer. Many of our visitors are folks that grew up on the island, have left to move out of town and returned for a visit on the island. They tell us of the great times they have had when they were young and grew up on the island. Many remember going to the Island School and they even sit a minute in the old school desk! They love reading the school house rules and everyone laughs when they read the teachers must not go to the ice cream store after eight pm, or the teacher must wear two petticoats. Everyone laughs and says who is checking? Also for the children they also have rules like no climbing trees, or no playing with girls when school is in session.

Over Memorial Week end our re-opening was very successful. Many enjoyed the hot dogs, lemonade, chips and cupcakes. People went home very happy with their new purchases from the antique sale and were pleased with the items we had in the museum store.

The **2013 Calendar** is available for sale. It features **Businesses From the Past** and can be purchased at the museum store. They make great gifts and are only \$10.00.

We are always looking for items from the island we can put on display in the museum. If you have any donations, please call Nancy 748-3802.



## Membership Update by Michele Komar

I am pleased to report that our membership is up overall from 2011. We have 193 memberships comprised of 309 people. 45% of our membership have been members since we started in 2010. An additional 36% joined in 2011 and 19% joined this year.

I would have liked to see our retentions rates from 2010 be a little higher. I am working to get some of those folks back and bring in new members.

**Survey Results** – it was disappointing that only 5 people responded – 3 with positive feedback and 2 with less than positive results. First of all, **thank you** to those that did respond. Your feedback is welcome and insightful. To those that did not sign your names, please contact me at 734-620-3769 to discuss. The results will be presented to the board and we will continue to improve. It is not too late to submit your surveys; please find the time to give us your feedback. We need it to move forward in a positive way that meets the needs of our members.

## From the President *continued*

It is sad to report that your president and The Society were taken in by this couple. They worked long and hard on the 'long con'. They set-up a really successful Rum Runners Party in 2011 with the intent of a big-bundle take-down score at this year's event... fortunate for us that did not happen. The Fed's and the Cops showed up... just-in-time! (They had their cars packed and were ready to roll when the Feds & Cops arrived). We will keep you informed of the fate of the notorious *Trixi and Guido* team of con-artists as their future unfolds. If they are sent 'up the river' (no pun intended), they will likely not be available to organize a 2013 Rum Runners party... we'll keep you informed.

### *In other news...*

July 14 will bring **Robert McGreevy**, marine artist and historian who will present the fate of the **Steamer Key Stone State - November 1861**. Bob will also conduct a book signing of his recent publication: *Legends of the Lakes, an Illustrated History* at the conclusion of the lecture. Members can get a \$6 off coupon off the purchase of the book at the lecture and will be good that day only.

The **Ourselves** folk singers, affiliated with the **Bluewater Folk Society**, have committed to sing sea shanty's and other music of the period at the open and close of the third scheduled Lecture in the 2012 Series. A **shanty** (also spelled "**chantey**," "**chanty**") is a type of work song that was once commonly sung to accompany labor on board large merchant sailing vessels.

Your board and executive team cannot function without your input. Any questions or comments should be sent directly to the board at: [info@hiscfhs.org](mailto:info@hiscfhs.org).

bernard

# Upcoming Events

## First Nations Day Festival

AUGUST 11 • 11AM – 4PM

DOWNTOWN SANS SOUCI

Dancers • Drum • Food • Crafts

THIS IS A FREE EVENT

**Drum: White Eye Singers**

**Edwin Taylor: Anishnaabemowin songs  
on the guitar**



## ANNUAL MEETING

& Spaghetti Dinner

August 18

Lion's Hall - \$20 per person

## REMINDER TO VOTE

Everyone should have received an election ballot in the mail.

Please return your ballots by  
July 17, 2012

# Pictures From The Attic

## A Summer Day on Harsens Island By David Chamberlain



Cottage at 7400 Venice Blvd purchased in 1914

Sometime back my daughter, Lynda, asked me to write a memoir for my grandson, Luca – this is an excerpt of those memoirs...

My Grandfather (Gramps), **Alex McMinn**, was born in 1870 in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. In 1914, Gramps, with a group of male friends purchased a 'cottage' at 7400 Venice Blvd to be used as a bachelor hunting and fishing club. History says that Peter Yax who married Matilda Bedore built the house as a summer home, living by the school in the winter. In 1907/1908, Matilda drowned in front of the cottage.

It was known as the Nereus Club. As I understand it, the agreement was that if a member died or left the Club, his share would revert to the remaining members. As time passed, only two members remained - Gramps and Richard Sprunk. Gramps bought out Richard and became the sole owner of the large two story frame structure with 4 bedrooms up and 2 down, a spacious kitchen with a hand pump for water, substantial living and dining room, and a wrap-around porch- partially screened. There was a long

narrow boathouse to the north and an outhouse to the south. It is in this cottage my brother John and I spent every summer of our early lives.

Our typical day would begin by doing minor chores (it should be noted, my Mother stayed in the city). First and foremost dishes had to be washed. A red & white sign above the sink read "Dishes must be washed immediately after each meal" and so we did with Gramps washing and my brother and I drying. I recall an occasion where I returned a dish to be washed a second time since it had a spot on it. Gramps turned and said "bar down on the towel, boy". After dishes we might work in Gramps' vegetable garden weeding and/or cultivating.



Alex McMinn's 26' round boat Johnson boat (in the background is the Burgett and Gagnier cottages.

Following the necessary chores, we were free to swim, fish, go boating or whatever. We had a 16 foot flat bottom boat with a 2.5 HP Johnson motor, not much speed. So, while boating on the St. Clair River we soon learned to time our approach to the waves/wash of the other larger faster boats including the cruise ships and riding the crest as if surfing. This allowed us to move up and down the river a bit quicker.

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## Robert McGreevy *continued*

McGreevy's parents also accomplished artists, immigrated to the United States in the early 1950's. McGreevy's father and uncle worked for the Great Lakes Engineering Works in Detroit during the construction of the Edmund Fitzgerald. McGreevy studied art at Detroit's Cass Technical High School. He also attended the Society of Arts and Crafts / Center for Creative Studies. After a career in industrial arts at Chrysler Corporation where he developed an eye for technical detail Bob and his wife Suzanne retired to Harbor Beach, MI.

McGreevy has completed over 300 paintings of Great Lakes ships, encompassing all historical periods of shipbuilding design and development. As historian and artist with technical training and an eye for the perspective Bob has brought to life many of the sunken treasures of the Great Lakes. Bob's study of ships historical records, which provided dimensional information, coupled with information from divers surveying these wrecks has allowed him to depict in his paintings how the ship looked when it sailed the Great Lakes.

McGreevy was named Historian of the Year by the Marine Historical Society of Detroit. He is a past board member of the Great Lakes Maritime Institute and member of the Great Lakes Historical Society, Marine History Society of Detroit, Lake Huron Lore, International Ship Masters Association, and many others.

Bob's research continues. He is currently working on research and paintings for his second book. The Historical Society takes great pleasure in presenting Robert McGreevy as our guest in The Society's 2012 Speakers Series. Please make your reservations for this event, as seating is limited, by contacting Nancy Licata at: 810-748-1825 or via e-mail at: [nlicata@comcast.net](mailto:nlicata@comcast.net). Members can get a coupon good for \$6 off the purchase of his book good at the lecture only.

HARSENS ISLAND  
ST. CLAIR FLATS  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

BUILDING for  
THE Future  
PRESERVING  
Our PAST

Presents  
**The Fate of the Steamer**  
**KEY STONE STATE**  
**NOVEMBER 1861**

Featuring  
ARTIST & HISTORIAN  
**Robert McGreevy**

{ This is no. 3 in the 2012 Lecture Series presented by the Historical Society }

Saturday  
**July 14 2012**  
3 to 5 pm

Harsens Island Lions Hall 262 Lacroix Rd. / Harsens Island, MI 48028  
Seating is limited. Please make your reservations by contacting Nancy Licata at: 810-748-1825  
or by e-mail at: [nlicata@comcast.net](mailto:nlicata@comcast.net) Suggested donation: Ten Dollars

## A Summer's Day on Harsens Island continued

Sometime later Dad bought a fourteen foot Wolverine cedar strip boat with a 10 HP our Johnson motor which obviously increased our sphere of operations.

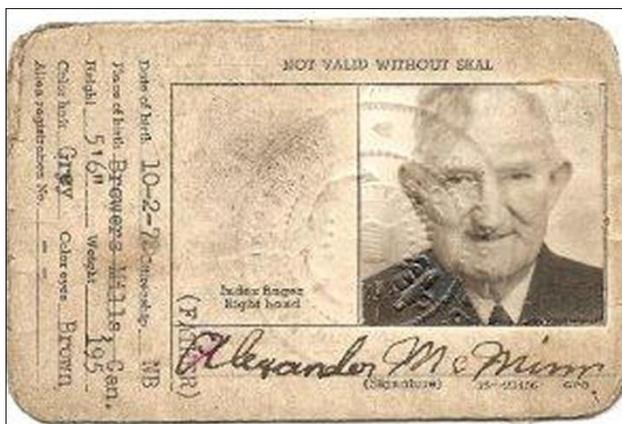
Or...we might be found at the large wooden bridge built with massive timbers, which waters of the Venice flowed into Muscamoot Bay. We had options of fishing, jumping off the middle timbers of the bridge (no diving allowed per Mom) or swimming through it – against the strong current. I recall one occasion where we noticed three girls in a boat (actually the Chris Craft featured in June's newsletter article) approaching the bridge, we dropped a dead snake into their boat...what a scene! Remarkably, and much later, my brother and I each married one of those girls. Our usual calling card consisted of a dead fish or snake tied to the end of a fish line which was dangled from the top of the bridge so that the fish or snake was suspended in the center of the bridge.



David Chamberlain 1934 in boat later to be called the *Iwo Jima* in the Venice before the road was built, in the background Muscamoot Bay.

Dinner might consist of Gramps' fried fish or a bowl of stew from the pot that seemed never to empty in that when it ran low Gramps would add fresh vegetables from the garden, an inexpensive cut of meat and water as needed. The 'perpetual' pot had new life. We even had a clean table cloth with each meal, as he reported to Mom, which was true in that the table was covered with several sheets of newspaper and at each meal we turned a page.

Finally bedtime, Gramps stood at the foot of the stairs, said good night and switched off the light. I recall one occasion when as he switched the light off, we turned the upstairs light on. He again switched off and we switched on – with such timing that it appeared as through the switch was defective. Gramps soon realized what we were up to and that ended that – along with another pleasant day on Harsens Island. ■



Alex McMinns U.S. Coast Guard ID (must have during WW II).



## Rum Runner Party Recap

The Rum Runners Party sponsored by the Historical Society attracted folks from Algonac and surrounding areas as well as many Islanders. Most guests arrived in 'Period Dress' such as off-islanders Kris and Walter Dombrowski. They enjoyed music by **UP Events**, Disc Jockey **Jason George**, a prime rib dinner and a Magic Show by magician **Bill Flounta**.

A Silent Auction was held with such items as a print of the painting *Race Around the St. Clair Lights c. 1900*, by artist and historian **Peter Rindlisbacher**. Prints will also be available for sale at the Museum.

Long time Islander, **Peggy Krispin** was the winner of the Kayak Raffle, and she could not stop smiling. "I've never won anything like this before", she said. Peggy was thrilled with having won the kayak. A good time was had by all and the event helped by adding \$1,890 to the building fund for the Museum.



**THANKS** to Ruth Roth, Peggy and Denne Osgood, Kathy O'Connor, Nancy Licata and Larry Z-graphic-arts for working very hard to make this event successful; and, those who stayed late to help with clean-up.



## 2012 Activities & Events Calendar

*Dates and locations subject to change*

### Museum Hours

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

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.

July	4	Museum open special for the holiday – Wednesday – 10am – 4pm
	11	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	14	Lecture Series and General Membership Meeting 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	First Nations Day Festival – downtown Sans Souci – 11am – 4pm
	12	Board Meeting Sunday – 10:00 AM
	18	Annual Meeting followed by Spaghetti Dinner – 5 PM at the Lions Hall
	22	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM