

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Upcoming Events

**Members & Public
Welcome!**

October 13

2012 Lecture Series
presents

Joel Stone

*curator at the Detroit
Historical Society*

Committed To

The Deep:

Exploring

Underwater

Treasures of the

Great Lakes

3 - 5pm

Lion's Club

\$10 per person

see page 2 for details!

December

Christmas

Cookie Walk

Dec 8 • 10-3

**Purchase a tin and fill it
with cookies
at the museum**

Cookie Bakers needed!

Antique Sale

Dec 8-9 • 10-3

Antiques needed!

Call Nancy Boulton for info
810-748-3802

From the President

September is gone but not forgotten. Kicking off the month, your Historical Society was a **big hit** in the annual Turkey Shoot Parade with the fully restored former *Harsens Island Fire Department RESCUE VEHICLE*. The vehicle was fully refurbished by Historical Society Member, **Mr. Mark Gentile** and his company **Gentile's Collision** of Shelby Township. Please take a moment to send Mark a *Thank-you* for his generous donation, and remember him if you or anyone you know ever have the misfortune to encounter a fender-bender incident. (Please send your 'thank you' to: Mark@GentilesCollision.com).

September also included the second annual **Square Dance** that turned out to be another fun evening for all who attended. *Square Dancing is not just for squares*. Most folks that I've talked to seem to think that square dancing was something we all did in grade school or were pushed into doing in high school; and, want nothing to do with it. Well...let me help you to understand...if I can...that square dancing is not just for squares. Square Dancing is and activity that has multiple mental and physical health benefits. If I may...let me articulate a few:

1. Square Dancing is a social event.
2. Square Dancing is an activity that helps all ages to develop better coordination and balance.
3. Square Dancing is a memory exercise. (and supports hand/body/eye coordination.)
4. Square Dancing is an aerobic experience that supports your cardiovascular health.
5. Square Dancing is an exercise in 'listening' and 'learning'. (...that some of us need to hone.)
6. Square Dancing is an activity that allows us the opportunity to laugh at ourselves.

The Society Pages

Volume 3 / Number 10 / October 2012

a publication of the Harsens Island/
St. Clair Flats Historical Society

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Join us on Facebook!

From the President continued

7. Square Dancing is an activity that promotes the known health benefits of laughter.
8. Square Dancing is just plain FUN.

Square Dancing is an activity that is not just for 'those older folks'. Hunters - duck and otherwise, fishermen & women, macho athletes, and couch potatoes alike can benefit from the benefits of Square Dancing...and because it was such a hit for a second year in a row...look to 2013 for multiple Square Dance events.

In other news...

DO NOT FORGET...we still have more activities scheduled for fall:

- **Saturday, October 13**, we are all looking forward to the Lecture by **Joel Stone** of the Detroit Historical Society, who will be here to present: ***Committed to the Deep: Exploring Underwater Treasures of the Great Lakes.***
- Nancy Boulton is organizing a **Christmas Cookie Walk** through the Museum. Purchase a tin and fill it with a variety of cookies for the holidays...more information to follow. If you are interested in baking holiday cookies, please contact Nancy at: 810-748-3802.

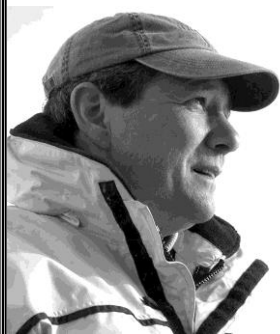
The **2012 Lecture Series** are being produced to DVD's and are scheduled to be available at the Museum Gift Shoppe and through our website by the end of October.

Your board and executive team cannot function without your input. Any questions or comments should be sent directly to me at: president@hiscfhs.org.

*thank you
bernardo*

Joel Stone

Committed to the Deep: Exploring Underwater Treasures of the Great Lakes.



Joel Stone is Senior Curator for the Detroit Historical Society, which oversees the Detroit Historical Museum, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, and the artifact collection of the City of Detroit.

Raised in the Detroit area, Joel studied journalism, history, archaeology, and archival management at the University of Detroit, Wayne State University, and the University College Cork, Ireland. He supports a number of regional history organizations, and is a board member of the Association for Great Lakes Maritime History

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.

Pictures From The Attic

Fishing With Gramps

By Bob Carroll

I hope you've read the story **Venice Memories**, printed in the September edition. That story introduced readers to "Gramps", my grandfather, **John Frances Carroll**. Born in 1892, he married in 1912 in Detroit, had his first and only child in 1915, and was widowed just three or so weeks after his son, **John William Carroll** – my father – was born. Gramps died in 1964.

Gramps was the son of Irish immigrants who purchased the Carroll Cottage on the Venice on July 3, 1911. Like his father and grandfather before him, Gramps was a skilled Irish plasterer. I remember him as 6'4" tall, muscular, bald, and quiet and thoughtful. He also had some carpentry, plumbing, and electrical skills; common among the early summer residents of the St. Clair Flats. If they couldn't build or fix something themselves, it didn't get done. No phones to call for help; no roads to the Flats until about 1938. Gramps and his Island contemporary summer residents were hardy and self-sufficient.

Gramps had rebuilt the Cottage on the Venice during World War II for a honeymoon present for my parents, **John and Virginia Carroll**, who were married in 1943 while Dad was home on leave from the US Army. Dad would go to Europe to fight from right after D-Day all the way through the Battle of the Bulge and beyond, with George Patton's Army.

As part of the honeymoon gift, Gramps bought a 24-foot Chris Craft cabin cruiser directly from the Chris Craft plant in Algonac, sometime in the summer of 1943, I'd guess. The cruiser was a classic beauty: white gunnels, gray hardtop, enclosed cabin with a mahogany door that could be latched from inside, mahogany stern deck and trim all around the boat, a small head, a mini-galley and berths for two in the cabin. The wheel was in the cabin as well, no "flying bridge" on this boat. Chrome cleats,

light fixtures, and a chrome slot on the transom for the American flag gleamed in the brilliant summer sunlight on the Flats. The boat could easily hold six or seven adults. During the summers of 1943 and 1944; while Dad was in Europe, Gramps would take the cruiser to St. Mark's Church on Sundays to attend Sunday Mass services.

Stories I heard, from him and Dad, were about Gramps approaching GI's in uniform right after Church, and inviting them to an afternoon of fishing on Lake St Clair with him on the cruiser. These GI's were often "back home" on leave for a short time; and would soon be returning to the war either in Europe or the Pacific. Gramps wanted to show them at least one afternoon of good times, courtesy of Harsens Island, before they had to leave. I seem to remember Gramps talking about picking up Canadian GI's in Port Lambton or along the Chenal Ecarte as well. But like so many other "Harsens Island fish stories", pretty hard to verify all the details.

Now, some real old timers might ask: "How did Gramps get rationing coupons to buy boat gas for these fishing trips?" During the War, if you didn't have a ration coupon, you could NOT buy gas. However, Gramps was a good friend of a "high ranking" police officer for the City of Hamtramck. That officer liked to fish. Somehow, between the two of them, ration coupons, gas money, boat and fishing tackle (along with beer and Irish whiskey) all ended up on the boat at exactly the right time when the fish hopefully were biting. **John Upmal** would fill the tank, and off went Gramps...with the GI's, and maybe even a police officer or two.

One story I heard tells about one HOT July day, who knows what year, when Gramps and his good friend, **Alex McMinn**, who had the Cottage directly across the Venice from the Carroll cottage, decided to go fishing in the lake off the end of the Chematogan Channel. Story goes that they caught a lot of fish; downed a few shots of Jameson, and

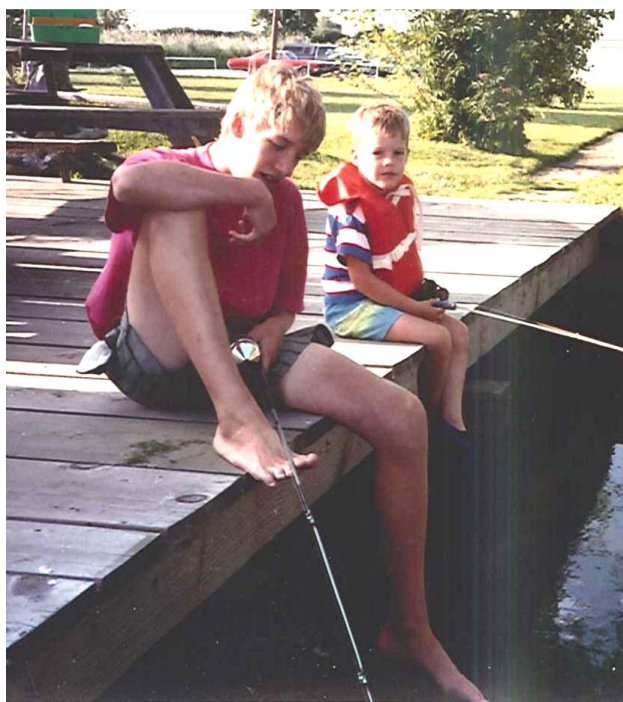
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got “too hot” on the boat. They could retreat to the cabin to avoid the sun, but there was no “air conditioning” back then. Wanting to cool off, both of them jumped OFF the stern of the cruiser into the cool waters of the Lake. Once cool, they had to get back ON the boat. This was a BIG problem; one they hadn’t planned for. Back then, there were NO “built in swim ladders”, or “swim doors” on transoms. If you didn’t bring a step ladder with you, you had a devil of a time climbing back onto a cabin cruiser. Gramps realized HE could climb back aboard the cruiser by standing on the solid steel exhaust pipe sticking out of the transom right at the waterline. The transom was at least 3 feet higher than the exhaust pipe, but he could hoist himself UP and get back on board ... which he did.

But for Alex, this was a BIG problem. Alex was born in 1869, and this trip might have been 1944 or even later? Do the math...how does a 75 year old make the climb back up the transom? Together, they settled on a potential solution. Alex would put on a life preserver; Gramps would toss him the stern lines off the boat, Alex would tie the lines around the life preserver, and Gramps would drag Alex, at trolling speed, from the Chematogan back to the Venice, using the Little Bassett Channel (it is no longer there. For those of you wondering...the St Clair Cut Off Canal through Squirrel Island eliminated it). Fortunately for Alex, Gramps dragged him only into shallow water in the Lake. Then, Gramps jumped into the water, hoisted Alex onto the exhaust pipe, pushed him up onto the top of the transom and Alex sort of rolled onto the stern deck of the cruiser. Then, Gramps climbed back on board, pulled in the lines, and after a celebratory shot of Jameson (I am speculating here), back to the Venice they went.

Jump ahead to perhaps 1954. (This story I was part of, having been born in 1947). One sparkling bright Saturday morning, Gramps announced that he, my Dad, and my brothers

John, Mike, and Jim and I (all little kids - ages 8 down to 4) were going perch fishing out on the Lake.”Hooray!” I am sure we all shouted. Gramps and Dad assembled the fishing poles, the minnow pail, the fish stringers, the worm box, and the soda pop in 6 or 7 ounce glass bottles; along with sandwiches, cookies, and apples from Mom. Under an azure blue sky with wisps of white dancing across it like Irish leprechauns, off we went. Most likely, this expedition was ready to go about 11 am—well after prime fishing times for you serious anglers, but hey, you try getting four little boys organized – using 1954 gear, food, and pop bottles-and see what time you finally leave !



Down the South Channel we went, waving to the folks at Kulow’s, then the Idle Hour, past the Coast Guard station, and finally past Miller’s Bar. Dad was the pilot...and very good especially for being an Army guy. Gramps gave advice and kept all the boys from falling overboard. I am certain we dodged a freighter or three, as the South Channel was the only route for the lake freighters at that time. Dad would sound the “salute” from the Chris Craft horn, and more often than not, the freighters would salute back.

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Pretty exciting for little kids to hear those huge whistles from so close! Back at that time, chances are we saw more freighters than pleasure craft going down the South Channel. Gull Island might host four or five boats on a hot weekend afternoon...that was all. To little kids on a cruiser, Lake St Clair was vast, beautifully blue, and very empty.

Our destination was "The Old Channel"...the channel that runs between the Old South Channel lights. Gramps explained that the "perch beds" along there were full of fish, unlike the actual South Channel itself, where the constant freighter traffic stirred everything up and chased a lot of the fish away.

Once we arrived, Gramps dropped the anchor, Dad reversed engine just enough to set the anchor, and the engine stopped, and out came the fishing poles. Soon, we were landing perch and mostly likely rock bass as well. Every fish brought shouts of "got one" from my brothers or myself. Dad and Gramps were busy unhooking fish and baiting hooks for the next try. The stringer filled up quickly. And our bellies got emptier.

Out came Mom's lunch, packed in a basket. Sandwiches, homemade chocolate chip cookies, an apple, and a bottle of pop...all gone in the blink of an eye. We wanted to

keep fishing! Probably around 2 pm, the wispy clouds had turned to billowing puffy cumulus clouds; the wind picked up, the fish stopped biting, and Gramps announced it was time to leave.

Now, remember the pop bottles? What went down little boys stomachs now had to come "out." The cruiser had a head, but Dad and Gramps decided cleaning it after the trip would be too much trouble. So, Gramps would take each of us boys, one at a time, to the rear of the stern deck to take care of nature. First, he told us, "We have to test the wind. Stick your finger into the minnow bucket and get it wet. Then, stick your finger up high over your head...can you feel which side of your finger gets cool FIRST?", he asked. "The cool side is where the wind comes from. You NEVER want to answer nature INTO the wind...it will just blow back all over your legs. Make sure you are going WITH the wind, not against it." Then, he would take us to the downwind side of the boat, we would answer the call of the pop bottle, and none of the boys had any accidents on their pants.

Once we returned home safely and showed Mom all the fish, I am sure they were all released into the Venice. None of the fish I caught ever seemed big enough to be a keeper, but as little boys we still had to show Mom. Later, there would be keeper fish, and fish dinners on the Venice. But not this trip! What I did learn, though, has stayed with me my entire life. Best to "test the wind" FIRST, before deciding on a course of action. Gramps taught me to go WITH the wind rather than against it. Good advice even today. ■



2012 Activities & Events Calendar

Dates and locations subject to change

Museum Hours

by appointment only

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

Contact us at email@hiscfhs.org

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

October	13	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM at the Lions Club
	22	Lecture Series - Joel Stone - Committed to the Deep - Exploring Underwater Treasures of the Great Lakes – 3 to 5 PM, Lion's Club
November	10	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
December	8	Cookie Walk – 10 AM to 3 PM
	8 & 9	Antique Sale – 10 AM to 3 PM