

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Captain William LaCroix **Sans Souci Pioneer**

*see story on page 5*



## From the President

As reported in the December Society Pages newsletter, your board made a Grant Application to the **Community Foundation of St. Clair County** (CFSCC), Grants Committee on November 28. We received an email from Randy Maier, President of CFSCC, on December 4 that noted:

*"Thank you for coming in to talk to our Grants Committee about your plans for Freighter View Park. Our committee had some interest in the project, but also some concerns. Next week we will take their findings to our board of directors for their input. What may happen as a next step is another meeting with your volunteer leadership to discuss our thoughts and feedback, and to discuss what role we might be interested in playing, and under what circumstances or conditions. This would probably happen in January."*

So we will not know of our success in this endeavor until after you receive this January Issue of The Pages. We will keep you informed of any news.

Your board also made a similar presentation to the Clay Township Board of Trustees on the **Vision for Freighter View Park**; and, asked how the Township might support this Vision. You will find an overview of the presentation made to both the Community Foundation and the Township in this edition of *The Society Pages*. The Trustees moved and agreed to appoint a committee to review the proposal and make recommendation to the Board. Your Board will work with the committee to assist in the process.

### *In other news...*

Nancy Boulton did a stellar job organizing the first annual **CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK** through the Museum. I for

## The Society Pages

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St. Clair Flats Historical Society

**Mailing Address:** PO Box 44  
Harsens Island MI 48028

**Museum Address:**  
3058 S. Channel Dr.  
Email@hiscfhs.org



www.HISCFHS.org

scan the code to go to the HISCFHS website

Editor: **Michele Komar**  
734-620-3769

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Join us on Facebook!

## From the President

continued

one can report that the Museum was a virtual aromatic pleasure from all of the many varieties of cookies available to purchase. Folks started showing up at the opening bell at 10:00 AM, purchased a cookie tin or two and filled them with cookies for the holidays. This was a great event for those who did not have time to bake holiday treats and a great event for the Museum. It was a fun time and we had many new visitors.

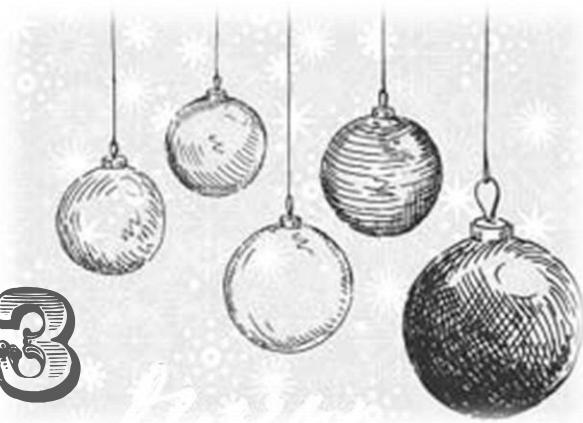
DVD's are now posted for sale on the website. You may go to: <http://www.stewartfarm.org/hiscfhs/store.htm> to find an Order Form and instructions for ordering.

The Board of Directors and I wish you a Healthy, Safe and Fruitful New Year. We hope you will continue to support The Society and the good things it brings to Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats.

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

thank you  
*bernardo*

HAPPY  
2013  
NEW YEAR!



I'd like to send a big **THANK YOU** to everyone who baked and donated cookies for our first annual **COOKIE WALK**. And, I'd also like to send a BIG THANK YOU to all the folks who came to the Museum and bought a tin or two of cookies. The cookie walk was a resounding success and because of you it was a great day. Thanks once again to **Arlene Earl, the Famous Flower-Lady**, for the beautiful flowers. Arlene has beautified all of our events with fresh flowers and we are truly appreciative.

We were so gratified with all of the positive comments and accolades about the Historical Society and the Museum. We were glad to hear so many comments and hear that everyone is so pleased we have started the Historical Society and opened the Museum. It has made all of our efforts worthwhile.

I personally want to thank all of the volunteers who worked at the Museum last year and everyone who has helped make The Society and the Museum a success. I wish to each and every one a **Healthy and Happy New Year!**

- Nancy Boulton, Curator

# Freighter View Park

## A Vision to the Future?

**Harsens Island Freighter View Park: A VISION** was presented to the Community Foundation of St. Clair County and to the Clay Township Board of Trustees in December. The idea came to our building committee over the past few months when the historic Captain William LaCroix home (aka the Ship'N Shore Inn) was put on the market. The c.1905 Victorian home is just across Williams Street from the Old Fire Hall (now serving as our museum) in downtown Sans Souci.

The building committee presented a **3-Phased Plan**.

**Phase I** is the purchase of our current home, the Old Fire Hall. We have about \$55K in the Building and General Fund and \$35K in private foundation pledges...about \$90K total against the \$149K goal to purchase the building.

**Phase II** is the purchase of the LaCroix home. A dialog with the current property owners has been initiated.

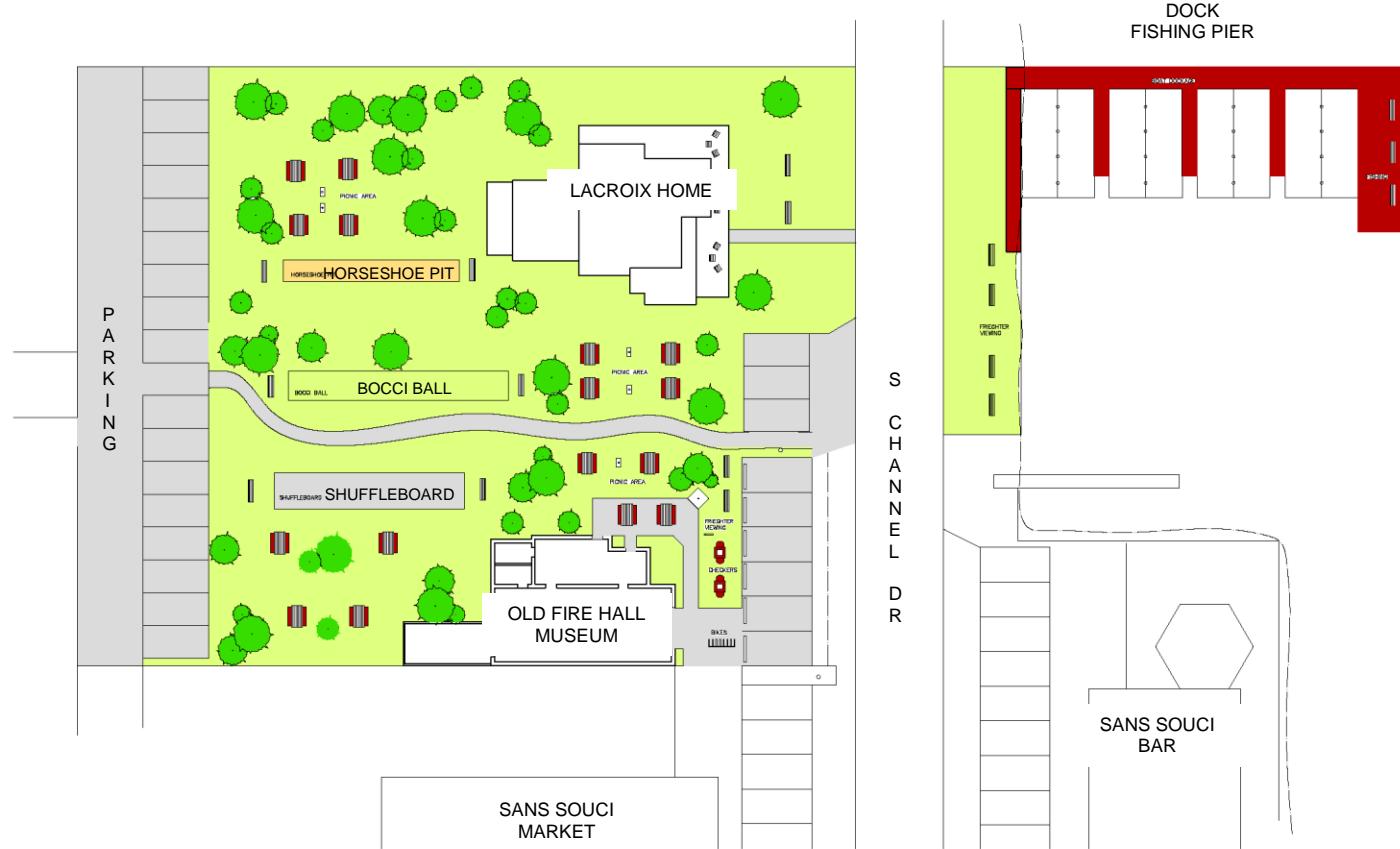
**Phase III** requires the closing of Williams Street at the back property line. Some discussion has taken place with the



A 3-phased plan would eventually join the Old Fire Hall on the left and the LaCroix house on the right. Williams Street would dead end at the back property line. The adjoined properties would be developed with park benches, grills, shuffleboard and horseshoe pits for everyone to enjoy.

residents to see how they would feel about closure of the street. The park would further be developed with benches, picnic tables and grills. A games area with shuffleboard, horseshoe pit and bocci ball would be added. On the riverside, dockage and a fishing pier would be available. The Old Fire Hall would continue to serve as a museum. The LaCroix home would serve as a Harsens Island Visitor Center and additional areas for museum display and storage.

*continued on page 4*



Looking upriver from Sans Souci, this artist's rendering shows the completed park.

There are many hurdles to overcome to achieve this vision. However, with some creative thinking and determination on the part of the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society, the Township and the Community Foundation, this vision could become a reality.

We have established a ***sense of pride*** in our community with the creation of the Historical Society Museum and have in the process helped reclaim and improve a part of Sans Souci by:

- Cleaning up a building that had been unoccupied for over 5 years.
- Enhancing the ***Island Community Spirit***.
- Opening a Museum that will continue to bring new visitors to the Island and Clay Township.

The Historical Society and Museum are supporting the community and will continue to enhance and preserve the ***unique small town atmosphere*** of Sans Souci and make Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats a better place to work, play and live.

***Freighter View Park***, with its historic buildings, museum experience, educational and cultural events, visitor center, freighter viewing observation decks and fishing pier will boost the overall experience of visiting Sans Souci, Harsens Island and Clay Township and will establish this place as a desired destination for visitors. This park would be the ONLY Township funded public space on Harsens Island.

***We encourage you to write a letter to the Township or The Society and offer your opinion on this proposed project.***

# Captain William LaCroix

## SANS SOUCI PIONEER

*excerpts from The Flats Golden Era Vol II by Mike Dixon*

Before permanently settling on Harsens Island, William LaCroix had been successful in the lumbering business on land near Marysville. As owner of several sailing ships used for hauling lumber, he had earned his captain's papers. In the early 1880s Captain LaCroix settled in Sans Souci and applied himself to the construction business, building roads and docks for himself and others throughout the area.

He was married to Annie Bruscoe whose brother Louie was a local legend as a hunter, punter guide and custodian at the Old Club. Together they had 12 children.

Captain LaCroix built many of the docks and pavilions throughout the Flats including those at the Old Club, Maple Leaf, Tashmoo, San Souci and Algonac. In 1898, he built a store with a second story residence, a precursor to the current Sans Souci Market.



original LaCroix store  
photo courtesy of The Flats Golden Era Vol II by Mike Dixon

In addition to a well assorted stock of goods, coffee and lunches were served from 7am to 6pm. By 1905, his prosperity was obvious when he completed his new home. The home was luxurious by standards of the day: large, elegantly paneled, appointed with marble counter tops and equipped with hot and cold indoor plumbing. Today the home has been beautifully restored but many of us remember it as the Ship'N Shore Inn. This enterprise tried to take off in the 1950s but failed and the building sat in neglect for many years.



Ship'N Shore Inn photo courtesy of The Flats Golden Era Vol II by Mike Dixon

The first post office opened in the general store in 1900. When the store burned in 1910, the post office was moved to the wing of his former home, where it remained until 1934. The store was rebuilt with blocks along the same lines as the original.

When the ships stopped using the San Souci landing, the pavilion found new uses. Once an ice cream parlor and then a dance pavilion, it later became a tavern. A gas station was built alongside and the original dock property was filled with land. Next to the general store another building went up and became home to the hardware and patent medicine stores, next came the bakery, which drew long lines in the 1960s.

Captain LaCroix passed away in 1922, survived by his wife and 6 children. The Harsens Island line was passed down mainly through his son, Peter and his daughters Esther Earl and Thelma Baker.

Esther was known for her fried chicken and Thelma or Suzy as she was known and her husband, Rex, ran the gas station just outside town on the highway for many years. ■



Captain William LaCroix home today

# **Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society**

## **2013 Calendar of Events**

*subject to change*

Members are welcome to attend any Board / Membership Meeting to keep apprised of Society activities and to bring issues before the Board.

### **Museum Hours**

**Jan, Feb, March** - closed - open by appointment

**April, May** - Saturday - 10 AM - 3 PM

**June, July, Aug, Sept** - Saturday 10 AM - 3 PM and Sunday Noon - 4 PM

**Oct, Nov, Dec** - closed - open by appointment and for Christmas Sale (Dec)

### **January**

**12th** - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board /Membership Meeting (Museum)

### **February**

No Meeting

### **March**

**30th** - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)

### **April**

**13th** - Saturday - 3 to 5 PM - Lecture Series I (Lions Hall)

### **May**

**11th** - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Lions Hall)

**11th** - Saturday - 3 to 5 PM - Lecture Series II (Lions Hall)

**25th - 27th** - Saturday, Sunday, Monday - Memorial Day Open House (Museum)

### **June**

**8th** - Saturday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)

**12th** - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)

**22nd** - Saturday - Tashmoo Event (Sans Souci)

### **July**

**4th** - Thursday - Museum open special for the holiday

**10th** - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)

**13th** - Saturday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)

### **August**

**3rd** - Saturday - Society Booth at HISCFA Field Day (Browne's Field)

**10th** - Saturday - First Nation Day - 11 AM - 4 PM (Sans Souci)

**11th** - Sunday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)

**14th** - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)

**17th** - 5PM Annual Meeting followed by Spaghetti Dinner (Lions Hall)

**31st** - see September Labor Day weekend

### **September**

**1st, 2nd** (with Aug. 31) - Saturday, Sunday, & Monday - Labor Day Weekend - Museum open

**7th** - Saturday - 10:00 AM - Board Meeting (Museum)

**11th** - Wednesday - Social hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)

**14th** - Saturday - 3 to 5 PM - Lecture Series III (Lions Hall)

### **October**

**12th** - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board Meeting (Lions Hall)

**12th** - Square Dance with Chicken Dinner - 5 PM dinner, 6 PM dancing (Lions Hall)

### **November**

**9th** - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board Meeting (Museum)

### **December**

**7th & 8th** - Saturday and Sunday - 10 AM - 3 PM - Christmas Sale (Museum)



PO Box 44  
Harsens Island MI 48028

## Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society DVD Order Form

Mail with your check to: The Society, PO Box 44, Harsens Island MI 48028

**Qty:**

Night the Fitz Went Down

Warships on the St. Clair River

Committed to the Deep

**Qty:**

Steamer Keystone State

Tashmoo

Jolly Trip on the Steamer Tashmoo

Total DVD's @ \$ 20 each: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**10% Discount for three-(3) or more DVD's**   Less Discount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping & Handling: \$ 5.00 \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Check#  Enclosed

Ship to:

Name:  Phone:  e-mail:

Address:  City:  State:  Zip: