

The SOCIETY

PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2013 LECTURE SERIES

Lee Chaney

presents

**Early 20th
Century**

**Harsens Island &
St. Clair Flats**

Saturday

May 11, 2013

3:00 – 5:00 PM

Lions Club

Harsens Island

see page 3

**1905 Sunken Ship
at Tashmoo Park
- A Mystery
Solved!**

**The Sinking of
the *City of Rome***

By James MacDonald

see page 4

From the President

Will We Have To Shut Our Doors?

May 30 (Memorial Day weekend) of this year, will mark the two year Anniversary of the opening of the Museum located in the old Fire Hall in downtown Sans Souci.

March 1 of this year marked two years of renting the old Fire Hall building. The owners, Donald DeWolf and Lou Campbell, partners in Blue Water Land Development have provided The Society the opportunity to occupy the building at a low rental rate for these two years. They have asked that we come to the table with a purchase program that we can afford and one that will achieve their objective of recovering a portion of their original investment.

The Society is faced with a critical decision. Our benefactors, The Karen and Drew Peslar Foundation and The Weber Foundation, offered us sums of money to be the *last funding amount* (\$35K total) we would need to achieve the purchase of the old fire hall property.

The Society board and membership have worked diligently to grow our financial base and accumulate sufficient funds to take advantage of these two generous foundation offers; however, we are not there yet. In simple terms, we have \$60K cash accumulated. Blue Water is asking \$140K for the property. To take advantage of the Foundation commitment, we need another \$45K, plus a cushion of \$5-10K operating capital for a total of \$55K. It is an open question whether the foundations will allow us to assume debt to achieve our goal.

If *assuming debt* is acceptable to the foundations, our alternatives moving forward are as follows:

- Take a bank note for the funds if we can find one.
- Negotiate a land contract with the owners at affordable rates & terms.

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The Society Pages

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From the President *continued*

If *assuming debt* is not-acceptable; then our recourse is as follows:

- Find person(s) to fund a 5 year no-interest loan for \$55K, (with a lien on the property).
- Find other generous benefactors.
- Find another home for the museum.
- Or...pull the proverbial plug.

In my opinion, we have come too far and achieved too much to even consider the last alternative. Your board of directors is dedicated and hard-working; and is taking seriously the decision on how to proceed to secure the old Fire Hall property. We are thoroughly researching, and will negotiate the best financial alternative available to The Society. However, I am asking each of you your opinion, please do one of the following:

- A. Send an e-mail to a board member noting your opinion.
- B. Attend the May 11 board meeting at the Lions Hall and participate in the discussion and decision process.

This is one of the most important decisions The Society's Board will make. Please let us hear from you or see you at the meeting to voice your opinion, discuss our options, or offer a new idea.

Other things you should know:

The **TASHMOO DAYS** committee continues to make steady headway and we can all look forward to a fun and mutually beneficial event in 2013 and beyond.

The **Freighter View Park Proposal** has been rejected by Clay Township. A letter from Supervisor, Artie Bryson states: ***"The committee determined that the benefits do not outweigh the costs for the township at this time."*** The Community Foundation of St. Clair County has not yet weighed in on the proposal. The Society has been invited to meet with the Foundations grants committee on June 5. Any news will be shared as soon as it is available.

The **2013 Lecture Series** was kicked-off on Saturday April 13 with certified PADI Dive Master, **Tony Gramer**. It was a great presentation that was enjoyed by the 65 attendees, some from off-Island and some first time visitors to Harsens Island.

Our next lecture, on May 11, will feature, **Mr. Lee Chaney**, a longtime resident of the area and member of the Algonac/Clay

Historical Society. Lee will share his collection of rare photos that will describe the Hotels, Clubs and Tashmoo Park that existed in the **Early 20th Century Harsens Island & St. Clair Flats**. Make a day of it on May 11 - attend the board meeting at 11:30 AM at the Lions Hall, and then come back for the lecture at 3:00 PM. Call for reservations now by phoning 810-748-1825, or e-mail: nlicata@comcast.net.

If you have not renewed your membership, we hope you will do so soon. Current issues of **The Society Pages** newsletter, is only available to members.

Attend a meeting, get involved and help make The Society a success. Any questions or comments should be sent directly to me at: president@hiscfhs.org.

thank you,
bernard

∞ 2013 ∞
LECTURE SERIES
presents

MR. LEE CHANEY
EARLY 20TH CENTURY HARSENS ISLAND
& ST. CLAIR FLATS

The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society is pleased to sponsor **Mr. Lee Chaney**, a longtime resident of the area and member of the Algonac/Clay Historical Society. Lee will share his collection of rare photos that will describe the Hotels, Clubs and Tashmoo Park that existed in the **Early 20th Century Harsens Island & St. Clair Flats**.

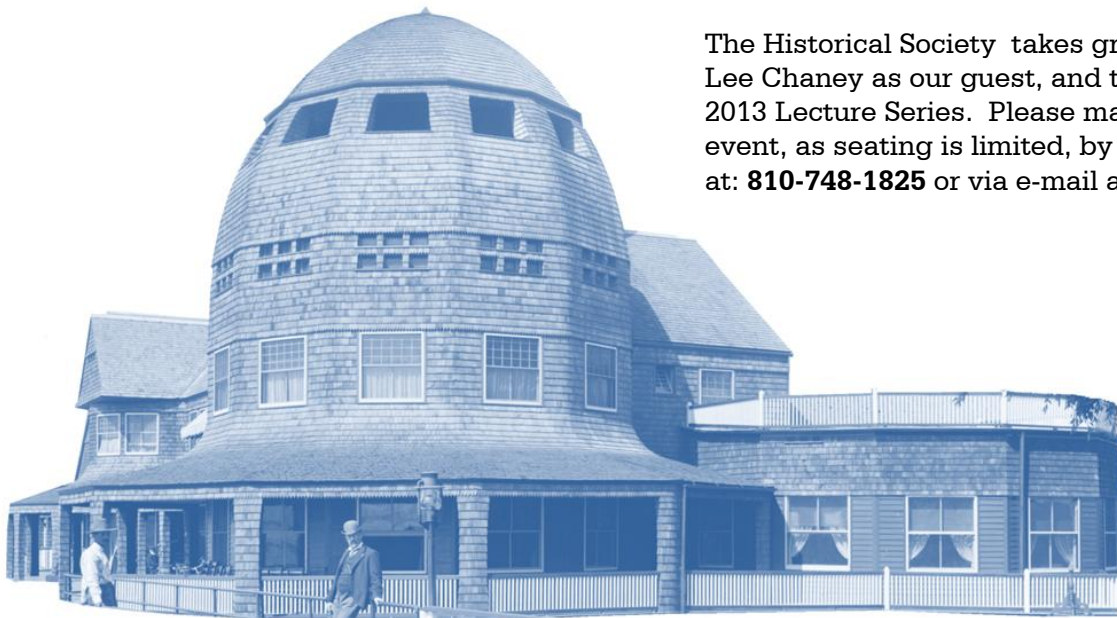
As a youth, Lee and his friends would take scouting trips to the islands in the St. Clair River. Dickinson Island and Harsens Island were the most exciting for them to explore. They canoed the cuts and canals, fished and hunted frogs which were plentiful in the first half of the century.

Lee admits he didn't think too much about the history of the area as a youth. However, when he became the electrical inspector for Clay Township, he was then able to get into some of the remaining hotel and club buildings such as the Idle Hour Hotel, Four Winds, the Old Club and others that were still standing. This access gave him the opportunity to explore some of the secrets of these old buildings when renovation work was being done, As Lee notes, "I was able to see the bones of the buildings".

"After retirement, I was asked to organize a presentation on *Tashmoo Park*", he said. After some significant research of the archives at the Algonac/Clay Historical Society Museum, along with direct input from, as he puts it: "...some old timers born and raised on the Island", he was able to assemble the presentation you will see and hear about at this lecture. Lee's research gave him a large database to work with. "The Flats area is the most interesting", he said. "I spent a lot of time as inspector looking for streets, only to discover that most of the streets were canals". It took Lee a lot of time to get some of the pictures cleaned up to project on a screen. Lee said, "I would like, one afternoon, to sit quietly in the *Tashmoo Dance Pavilion* and listen for the ghosts of the past".

The Historical Society has made those arrangements for Lee, if he chooses, after his presentation on May 11; while the attendees are visiting the Museum after the lecture.

The Historical Society takes great pleasure in presenting Lee Chaney as our guest, and the second in The Society's 2013 Lecture 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.



1905 Sunken Ship at Tashmoo Park - A Mystery Solved! The Sinking of the *City of Rome*

By James MacDonald

The *City of Rome* was down bound past Russell Island on June 23, 1905 at 3:55 AM with a cargo of iron ore. The *Linden* was up bound when the suction of the passing steamer *Francis Widlar* caused the *Linden* to sheer in front of the *City of Rome*.

When the boats struck, the *Rome* hit the *Linden* just abaft the bow tearing the upper works of the *Linden* from the deck. Pilot house and after deckhouse went overboard. Imprisoned in the after deckhouse, the cook and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Hardy, were drowned. Capt. J. H. Warwick of the *Linden* was borne downstream, clinging to the pilot structure until it finally grounded on a shoal. He was finally taken off by men who rowed out from the Old Club. The hull of the upbound *Linden*, although badly damaged, kept afloat until off the head of Russell Island, where she sank in the channel.

The *Rome*, badly damaged and leaking, floated down the river until she went down in deep water sixty feet off Tashmoo dock and ending up facing north with only the top of her upper work and smokestack showing. Capt. W. W. Holmes was in charge of the *City of Rome*.

The *City of Rome* was built at Cleveland in 1881 and belonged to the J. C. Gilchrist fleet. The *Linden* was built in 1895 at Port Huron and was owned by the Sandusky Box and Lumber Company of Sandusky.

The *Linden* was a wooden lumber hooker 206-feet in length built in 1895 at Port Huron. The *Linden* was an unlucky ship. She was raised in 1908 and rebuilt only to sink again near Sarnia in 1911. She was finally lost in November of 1923 when she caught fire at her dock in Tawas City, then drifted out into the bay and sank 1,800 feet southeast of Water Works City Dock. She had been waiting for tug since November 22, for tow to Bay City, MI. Her crew of fifteen were rescued by U.S. Life Saving Station team at Tawas. The wreck was removed by Corps of Engineers in 1941.

But if the *Linden* was an unlucky ship, the *City of Rome* was just as unlucky. After the wreck at Tashmoo Park she was raised and salvaged and put back in service. But fate had more in store for the *City of Rome*. While making a passage on Lake Erie during the great storm of November 1905, the *City of Rome* was blown aground on Lake Erie's Middle Island. But once more she was successfully returned to service. Eight years later the *City of Rome* was caught in the great storm of November of 1913. But this time she successfully weathered the storm. The fact she was on Lake Erie when the storm struck probably saved her as the majority of lake boats lost or damaged in the 1913 storm were on Lake Huron.

By 1914, after more than three decades of service, "the *City of Rome* had gone from being the largest coarse freight carrier on the Great Lakes, a combination schooner steamer, to being an aging steamer in need of repair."¹

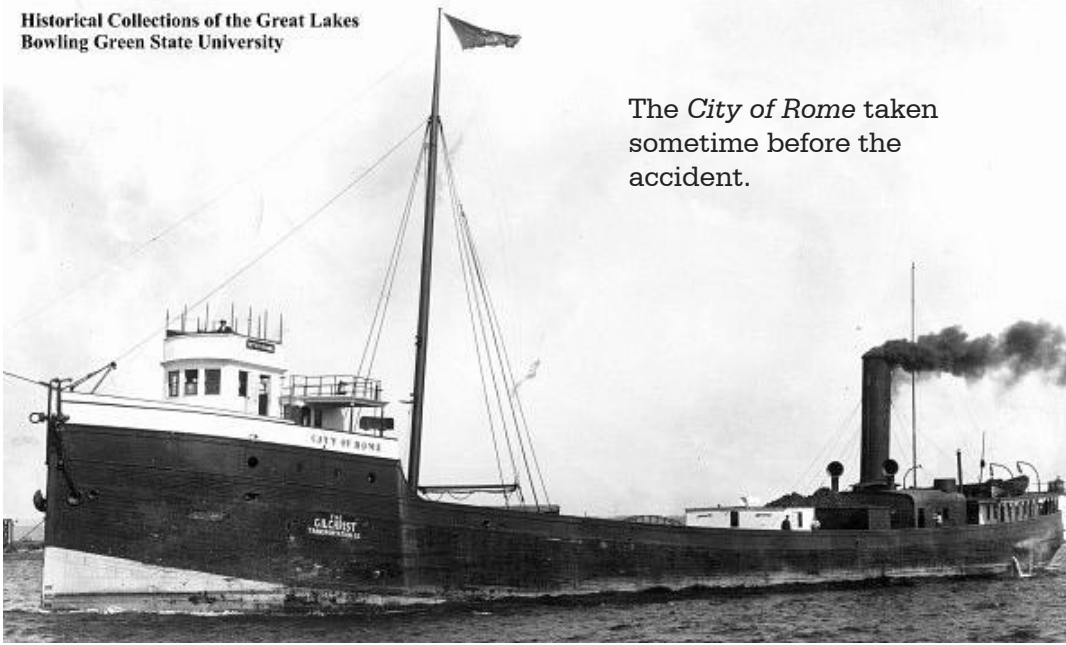
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Tashmoo Park Dock, St. Clair Flats, Mich Credit: Library of Congress - Prints and Photographs Division

In 2007, the author of this article discovered this picture at the "Library of Congress - Prints and Photographs Division" website. However, the *name of the ship* was not identified! After some further research on the Internet, the ship was finally identified as the *City of Rome*. It sunk in 1905 opposite Tashmoo Park on Harsens Island being involved in a collision, which not only involved the *City of Rome*, but two other ships: the *Linden* and the *Francis Widlar*.

Historical Collections of the Great Lakes
Bowling Green State University

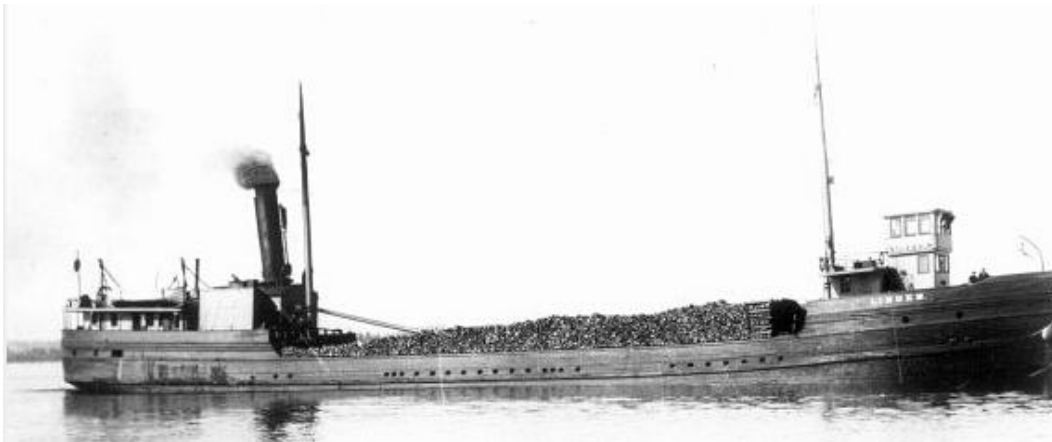


The *City of Rome* taken sometime before the accident.

Credit: Historical Collection of the Great Lakes: Bowling Green State University

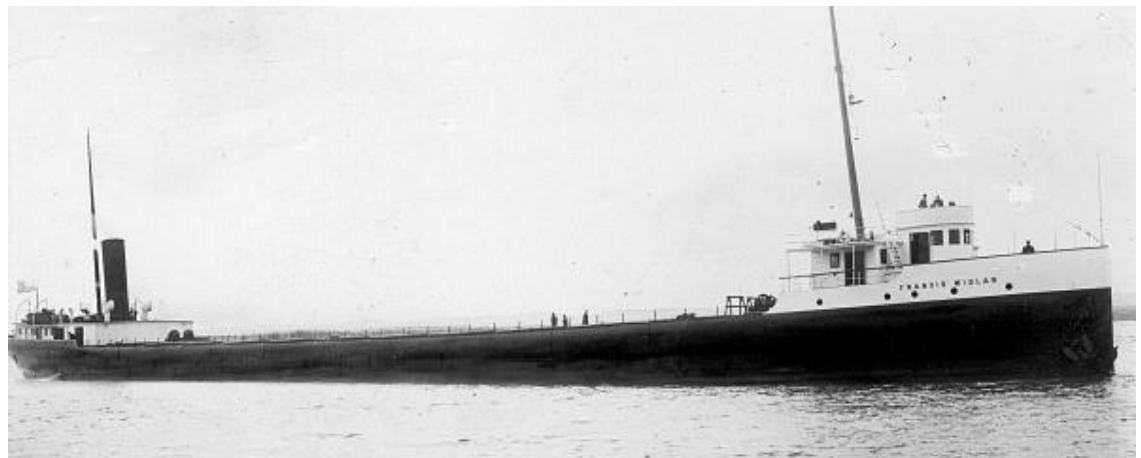
The end of the steamer was to come on May 6th, 1914. The *City of Rome* had shipped a load of grain to Buffalo, and was travelling light on her way to Toledo to pick up a cargo of coal. Around 11:00 PM, Captain Dunn was roused from his sleep by first mate John McNamara with news that there was a fire in the dunnage (baggage) room. All hands were called to help put out the fire, but after two hours had passed it became clear that the fire was not going to be contained. Although the crew wanted to abandon the ship in the life boats, Captain Dunn insisted on running the ship onto shore. At 2:00 AM she was run aground at Ripley, New York. Two life boats were launched, but with no safe place to land, the crew had to head east until day break when a beach was spotted that would offer safe haven. The entire crew was saved and walked to a nearby farm house to seek shelter and report the loss of the vessel. ■

Sources: Library of Congress - Prints and Photographs Division. Daily News, Marshal, Michigan Sat., 24 Jun 1905. Chicago Evening Post, 23 Jun 1905. BoatNerd.com. Historical Collections of the Great Lakes, Bowling Green State University, Ohio 1. Watcher, Georgann; Watcher, Michael. *Erie Wrecks East, Second Edition*. Corporate Impact; 2nd edition (March 30, 2003) p. 55



The *Linden*. Credit: Historical Collection of the Great Lakes: Bowling Green State University

The *Francis Widlar* was a steel bulk freighter 416 feet in length built in 1904 by the American Ship Building Co., Cleveland, Ohio. In 1921 she was turned over to Canadian interests and renamed the *Bayton*. She remained in service until 1966. In addition to her involvement in the sinking of the *City of Rome* and the *Linden*, she herself had several unfortunate accidents, including being stranded on Pancake Shoal, Lake Superior, November 12, 1920; striking the lighthouse and west breakwall at Lorain, OH, during 35 m.p.h. gale on May 10, 1949 tearing an eight foot hole on starboard side amidship; and losing her rudder on a downbound trip in June, 1966, with cargo of grain bound for Port Colborne, Ontario.



The *Francis Widlar*. Credit: Historical Collection of the Great Lakes: Bowling Green State University



PO Box 44
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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

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)

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 – 11am – 4pm Memorial Day Open House (Museum)

June

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

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

July

4th – Thursday – Museum open for the holiday

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

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

20th – Saturday – Tashmoo Days