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The SOCIETY

PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HARSENS ISLAND

TA S E M M O O

DAYS

SPECIAL EDITION

July 2013

The Society Pages

Volume 4 / Number 7 / July 2013

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

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From the President

There is much to report this month and little space in this **First Commemorative Issue of *The Society Pages***; therefore I will be brief and report in bullet form.

- Your board approved making an offer for the Old Fire Hall that will meet the owner's asking price of \$140K, with terms that are suitable to us. The offer should be delivered before this issue is released. More next month.

Our upcoming **Tashmoo Days Event** is shaping up to be a great day. In the last few days we have gained significant publicity for this event. It has to do with media coverage for the: **Message-in-the-Bottle** that has hit the local, national and international news. Here is what happened:

- On Sunday, June 2, while at the Museum we learned of a bottle with a message in it that had been found by divers in 30 feet of water near the Tashmoo Dock. Not certain if this was 'just a story' we contacted the dive shop on Friday, June 7, to discover that the 'Bottle' and the 'Message' find were in fact real. We made arrangements to visit the shop on June 12 to verify its existence, take photos and request that this artifact be exhibited at our museum for Tashmoo Days.
- We also asked the Leander's if they would mind if we launched a search for descendants of the authors of the message, **Tillie Esper** and **Selina Pramstaller**. These young ladies had written their names and Detroit addresses with a message that said simply: **'Having a good time at Tashmoo'** ...and it was dated: **June 30, 1915**. The message, written in pencil on the back of a White Star Line receipt document, was perfectly readable and intact.
- We then sent a request to the media soliciting their help to find the descendants of these two young ladies and a Press Release describing the Historical Society's Tashmoo Days Event planned to replicate many of the activities that occurred on the Island a century ago. That's when it got crazy.
- On Monday and Tuesday, June 17 & 18, the *Detroit News*, the *Free Press*, Channel 4 (WDIV) and Fox2 Detroit covered the story.
- First thing Tuesday morning, Erick Schiebold and Janet Baccanari, two grandchildren of Tillie Esper contacted me. They were 'really taken' by this news.
- Last evening I received a call from Patricia (Esper) Leone from Delaware. Patricia and her sister are the only two surviving members of Tillie Esper's family of 9 children. (32 grandchildren) She said: "...the family was delighted and excited to hear of this discovery". She had not seen the media coverage so we e-mailed photos to her last evening. She will be 88 this year.

- Local, national and now international coverage of this story is still underway and follow-up coverage is expected.
- We fully anticipate that some of these relatives will visit to see the: **'Message-in-the-Bottle'** at Tashmoo Days July 20.
- The Great Lakes Divecenter owners, Pam and David Leander, have confirmed that the **'Message-in-the-Bottle'** will be on Exhibit/Loan to the Museum on July 20 and expect that it will be donated to The Society in the future.

Your fledgling historical society has 'brightened the day' for these two families and provided them an opportunity to connect with their past and this remarkable discovery. We expect family members to attend Tashmoo Days and enjoy Harsens Island as Tillie and Selina did in 1915. Please come and meet them.

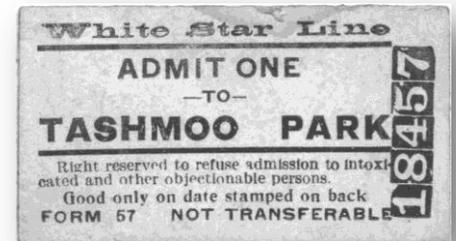
The world is learning about the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society and Museum. More next month...Please sell and/or purchase Raffle Tickets for some great prizes, and to support your Society....and be sure not to miss **Tashmoo Days**.

thank you.....
bernard

A Day at Tashmoo Park

by Michele Komar

an'tic'i'pa'tion. The act of looking forward; *especially* : pleasurable expectation. For the 3,000 people aboard the steamer *Tashmoo* on a fine summer's day in the early 1900's, that definitely applied. But what were they excited about? According to Margery Bean, a young lady just out of finishing school and about to embark on a trip to Tashmoo Park in 1913, "The day was beautiful – a June day. I felt like screaming, I was so crazy with excitement."



During the late 1800s, competition was fierce among the steamship companies that traveled the Great Lakes especially in the Detroit area; not only for freight but for passenger service as well. A popular destination for passengers was the St. Clair Flats at the north end of Lake St. Clair, near the mouth of the St. Clair River. This area was known as Little Venice or the Modern Venice of America.

Being only about 30 miles north of Detroit, this area attracted "gentlemen" hunters and fishermen. Private hunting and fishing clubs were built on piles and from earth dredged up from the river bottom and protected with sheet piling. This was known as "made" land. The Lake St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club (1872) was the first to be built and over time became known as the Old Club.

Gradually other clubs sought the same grounds. Rushmere, Mervue, Joe Bedore's; these were just a few of the many clubs and hotels that lined the channel. Club members built cottages above and below their club houses. Then private parties, not club members, began to take the hint and build on the Flats. By the early 1900s mile after mile of cottages stretched away along the channel, and what was once exclusively private shooting and fishing grounds became a summer resort that was only reached by boat. The Star Island House could sit 500 people at a single sitting. What a great place to escape the summer heat of the city!

In 1897, a group of investors called the White Star Line bought land just below Sans Souci for a permanent picnic ground called Tashmoo Park. On June 27, 1897, the steamer *Greyhound* conveyed the first excursionists to the island.

The park was a strategic move for them. Hotels, as a destination, were losing their popularity and picnic grounds with a dance hall and all the amenities of the time were the rage. They could accommodate huge crowds and the financial gains were enormous.

By 1905, The White Star Line had 5 ships – *Tashmoo*, *Greyhound*, *Owana*, *City of Toledo* and *Wauketa*. The best charters were assigned to the *Tashmoo*. Benevolent societies, church and youth groups, political moonlights and business companies took advantage of Tashmoo Park and its many amenities. For years, the pharmaceutical giant, Parke-Davis, would close its plants down and invite the employees and their families for a paid day out. To transport four thousand people often took 2 or 3 ships working in tandem to get everyone to the island. The White Star Line transported 508,000 passengers that year. By 1907, they serviced over 700,000 passengers plus a large volume of package freight. 



This 1913 White Star Line map shows the route of the steamer *Tashmoo*.

courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1913

A typical day started early. To catch a ride on a steamer from Detroit to Tashmoo Park on Harsens Island, one had to be at the White Star Line dock at the foot of Griswold promptly at 8:45am for the 2-1/2 hour trip across Lake St. Clair to the lower St. Clair River known as the Flats.

Tashmoo and her sister ships stopped at all the clubs, hotels and river towns from the Flats up to Port Huron to load and unload passengers and freight. As the ship would approach each landing a cabin boy would yell out the stops, "Old Club," "Star Island," "Bedore's," as the *Tashmoo* made its way upriver. At each landing there would be a scramble for passengers to disembark. If you were lucky enough to catch a ride on the steamer *Tashmoo*; it was about the fastest ship on the Great Lakes. Known for its flying stops along its route, the *Tashmoo* kept to its timetable. Once docking at Tashmoo Park, passengers had to quickly disembark as the ship needed to arrive at its next destination at Grand Pointe in 10 minutes!

menu featured over 200 items including Steak a la Tashmoo for \$.70 to Russian Caviar for \$.50 and Broiled Live Lobster for \$1.25. One could have a choice of 22 different salads or 20 egg dishes!



Interior scenes of the steamer *Tashmoo*.
courtesy of Detroit The Beautiful, 1902

While the main dining room featured cut crystal and silver table settings, the beer garden offered much simpler fare and place settings. 



On the deck of the *Tashmoo*, approaching the Flats.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1913

A band traveled on the *Tashmoo* to provide entertainment and dancing. Bandleader William Finzel and the 8-man Finzel's Orchestra held that position longer than any other *Tashmoo* band. Once at Tashmoo Park, the band entertained at the 10,000 square foot dance pavilion and then played on the return trip to Detroit.

The dining room on board rivaled the finer restaurants of the time with mahogany-paneled walls and marble columns. A smorgasbord of food from breakfast to dinner was available. A 1914



On the steamer *Tashmoo*.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1913

Edwardian Fashion

Both men and women took great pains to look their best, especially in public during the Edwardian Age (1901 – 1919).

Women wore corsets that thrust the chest forward and the hips back resulting in the S-shaped figure featuring a thin waist and a long flowing skirt. Blouses were highly decorated and often puffed over the waist. By 1908, women were doing away with the frills and wearing a more tailored look with the bottom of the skirt tapered causing more restrictive movement. Imagine taking a long boat ride on a warm summer day and participating in picnics and games at the park!

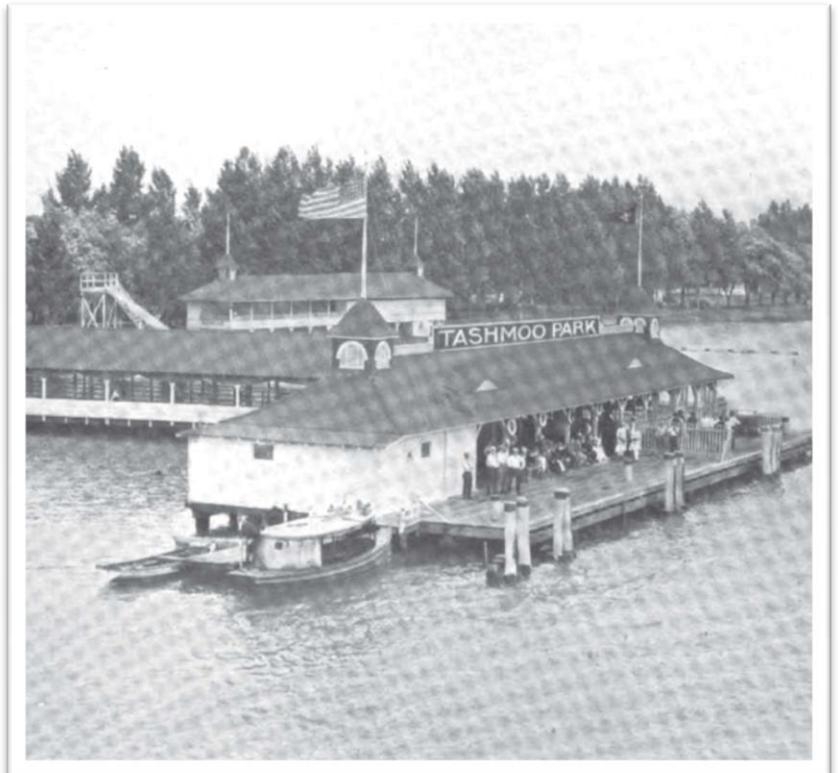


The latest fashion styles from 1910 at Tashmoo Park.
courtesy of Michele Komar

Men did not escape the social trends of the day and wore three-piece suits with close-fitting shirts topped off with a hat. A variety of fabrics were used; plain, striped and diagonal worsteds, navy and black being common shades. Fine finished tweeds in checks and plaids were also used. As tweeds and worsted were made from wool it would have been quite warm to wear in the summer months.

Situated on 60 acres on the St. Clair River, Tashmoo Park boasted a dance pavilion and casino. During this time period a casino referred to “a public building, usually an open-sided structure, where pleasant activities took place.” The park was divided into an athletic field, wooded picnic grove and bathing area.

As described in the White Star Magazine (1913), “Around the athletic field are booths, where the Indians from Walpole Island come across and sell trinkets – bows and arrows, canes, deliciously scented little baskets, moccasins and other pieces of Indian handicraft.” By this time in history, the local natives were nearly wiped out and sent to live on reservations, out of the public eye. They certainly would have been viewed as a chance to see “a real Indian” and could have easily enhanced the draw to the park. 



The dock at Tashmoo Park.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1918



The Landing at Tashmoo Park.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1913

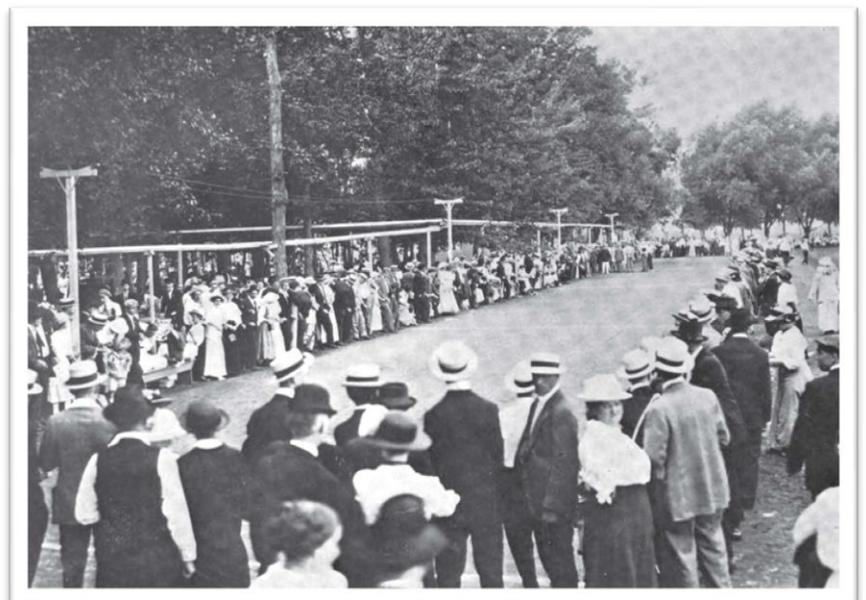
Tashmoo Park offered something for everyone.

Baseball was popular and most groups brought along a roster of players; sometimes enough to field several teams! Women also played and had regular league play. The park had an athletic director and provided sporting equipment for games and for exercise and boasted a running track and two ball diamonds.



The National Pastime.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1918

Organized games were popular for children and more often than not, the adults. Pie eating contests, races for men, ladies, boys and girls; sack races and tug-of-war were often played for prizes. The prizes were furnished by the companies that sponsored the excursion for the day. Island folk looked forward to and often participated in these events. The Candymen's Day was highly anticipated by the island kids as they were able to reap some candy prizes for themselves. 



Waiting for the games to begin.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1918

If sports didn't appeal, there were rowboats to row and swimming in the river. A large bath house provided nearly full-length dark blue cotton swim suits, stockings, bathing caps and towels for rent. One wonders, though, how much modesty was retained especially when cotton gets wet!

on the right – The giant waterslide.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1918



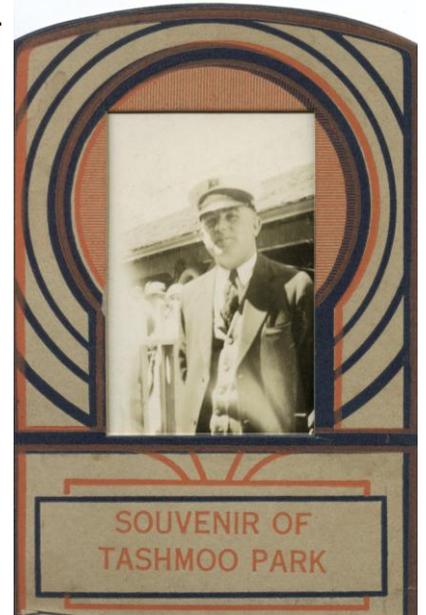
below – St. Mathias Sunday School Picnic.
courtesy of White Star Magazine, 1913

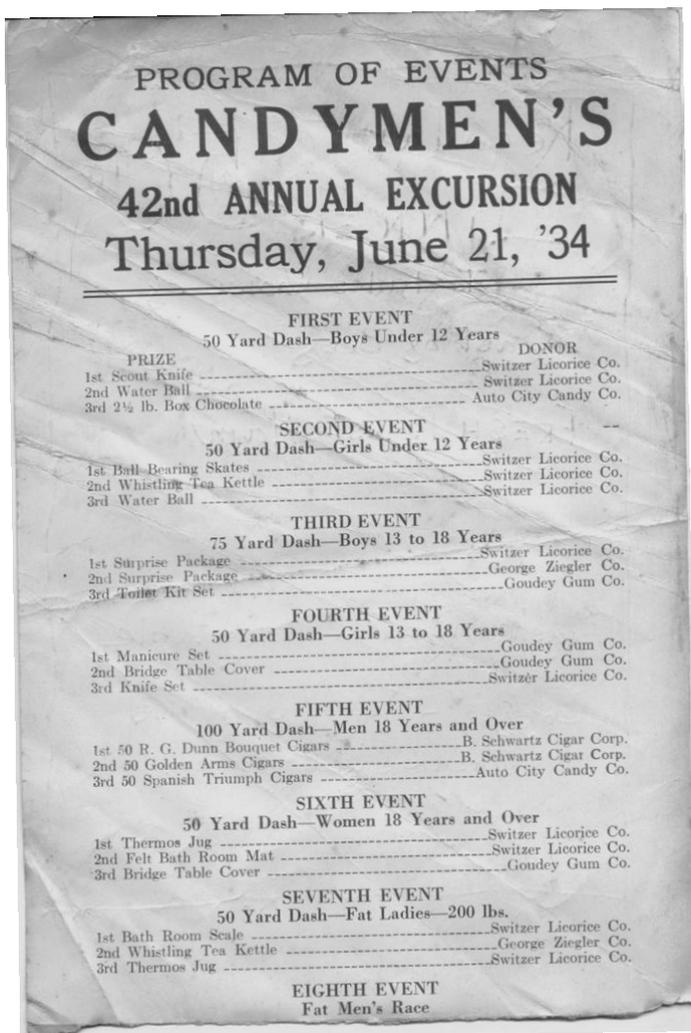


A stroll among the woods led to a carousel powered by steam. It featured jumping horses as well as menagerie animals including a dragon, lion and rooster. Rides were only a nickel. In the 1920s other rides were added including a Ferris Wheel and a Whip. There were swings and slides for the kids as well as tandem rockers that would seat two comfortably. There were plenty of benches and picnic tables placed beneath shade trees where visitors could find refuge from the sun, take advantage of the cooling breezes off the river, and watch the flotilla of ships go by. 



courtesy of Michele Komar





above – Program from Candymen's Excursion
courtesy of Michele Komar

below – Steamer *Tashmoo*
courtesy of Michele Komar

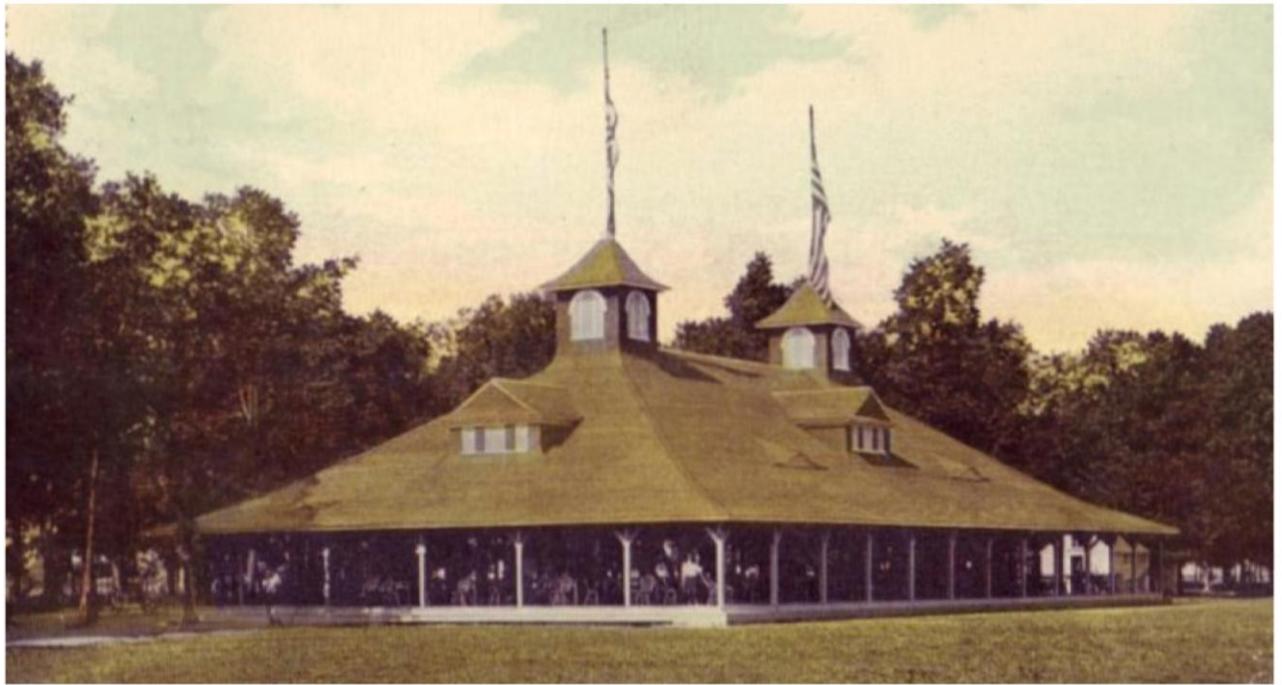
Trinkets, souvenirs and postcards were available for purchase. Tintype photos were available on site by photographer, W.L. French. A nursery offered all the amenities to take care of small children and babies; mothers often left the children in charge of the matron so they could participate in the frivolity of the day.

While Tashmoo Park relied exclusively on ships to deliver its guests, a threat to its existence loomed in the near future. The White Star Line and Tashmoo Park were well suited to be victims of the growing mass appeal of the automobile. During the winter of 1924, the White Star Line went bankrupt and was liquidated. The *Tashmoo* was bought by the newly formed White Star Navigation Company and would be under the ownership of two more companies, the Tashmoo Transit Company and then in 1934, the White Star Steamship Company. By then, the *Tashmoo* was the only ship left in its fleet.

In June 1936, the steamer *Tashmoo* struck an underwater object and sank at the Amherstburg (Canada) dock while on her way back from a moonlight cruise to Sugar Island in the lower Detroit River.

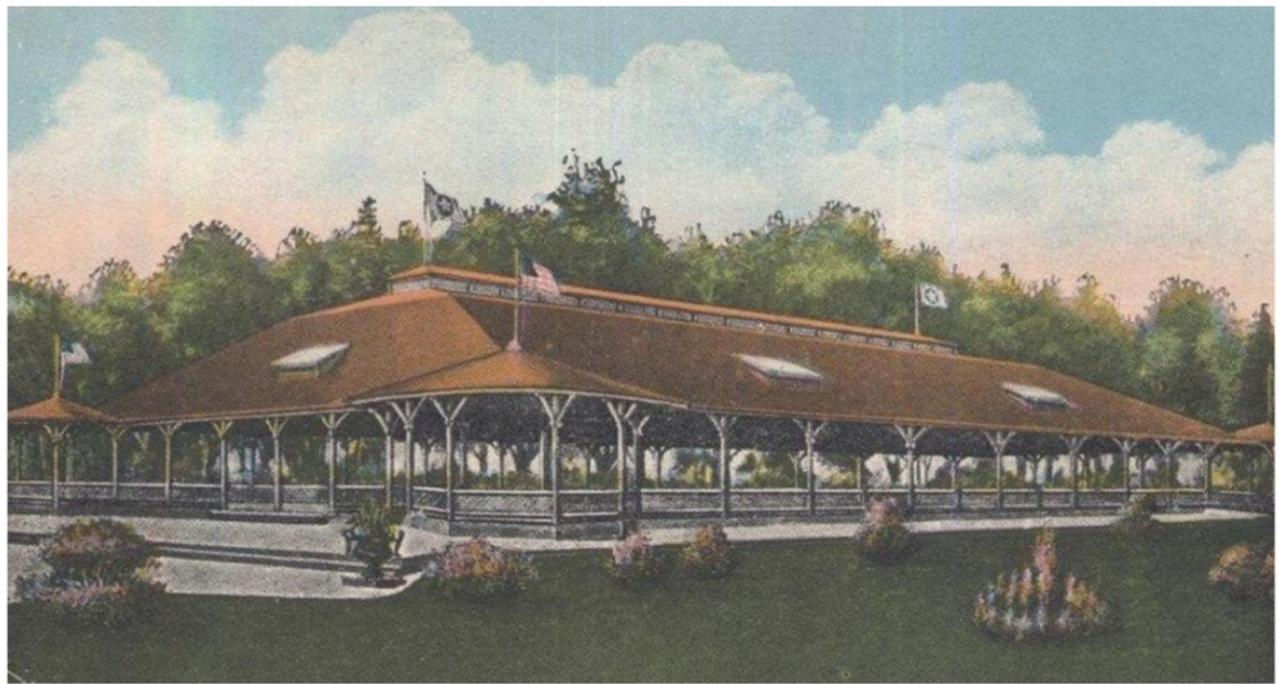
Tashmoo Park started catering to the automobile crowd in the 1930s and 40s but could never recapture the crowds it had in its heyday. The Park went through several changes of ownership in an effort to revitalize but eventually closed its doors in 1951. Currently, it is known as Tashmoo Marina, with the dance pavilion and casino the only remnants of a bygone era. ■





Tashmoo Park Casino

The casino was built in 1899. Over the years, the casino would contain a cafeteria, games of chance such as Skee-ball and pinball and a tobacco and candy stand. There was an area where the older folk could gather around a radio and listen to the baseball game. It also provided refuge in the event of a rainstorm. During the winter months it was closed off and picnic tables and benches were stored inside.



Tashmoo Park Dance Pavilion

Sources indicate that the 10,400 square foot dance floor was built in 1912. It featured curved roof trusses that allowed for an unobstructed dance floor. It had hardwood maple floors and a raised area for the band. During the 1930s it was a rite of passage for the daring youngsters of the island to climb a truss from one side to the other. Today it and the casino have been enclosed and are used for boat storage at Tashmoo Marina.

Message In The Bottle

In June 2012, Dave Leander, owner of Great Lakes Divecenter in Shelby Twp, was diving in the St. Clair River in 30 ft. of water when he saw the proverbial “message in a bottle” buried in the silt. The note was still legible and only a small amount of moisture had formed inside. Dave and his wife, Pam, brought the bottle home, let it dry out and replaced the cork.



© Great Lakes Divecenter

The message is written on the back of a White Star Line deposit ticket and reads, “Having a good time at Tashmoo.” The note, dated June 30, 1915, included the names and addresses for Tillie Esper and Selina Pramstaller.

Michael Brodzik of Roseville, a diver and friend of the Leanders, learned about the bottle and immediately took interest. He is the president of the Metropolitan Detroit Antique Bottle Club.

Brodzik said the bottle “pretty much sunk where they threw it” because it wasn’t buoyant enough to float. The bottle would have held cherries or olives. His article about the find appeared in the October 2012 issue of *Antique Bottle and Glass Collector Magazine*.

The article came to the attention of our president, Bernard Licata a few weeks ago. He started a media campaign to bring attention to the find in hopes of tracing the descendants of Tillie and Selina. The find was picked up by the local media and soon went international.

Response was overwhelming and many descendants have contacted the historical society and some plan to attend Tashmoo Days to see the “Message In The Bottle” and reconnect to their ancestor, Tillie or Selina. The bottle will be on loan to the museum July 20 only.

Who Were Tillie and Selina?

Mike Brodzik and his twin brother, Joe, and sister-in-law, Jenni, who live in Northville, did genealogy searches on the message writers. They found when the writers were born, their parents and their occupations.



Tillie (Matilda) Esper
courtesy Janet Baccarani

Tillie (Matilda) Esper was born Sept. 1893 to Mathias (Matthew) and Caroline Esper, the youngest of 9 children. She lived on Maybury Grand in Detroit until she married Joseph J. Schaefer, a saloon-keeper, in 1917. Tillie was a milliner or ladies’ hat maker.

By the 1930 census, Schaefer is vice-president of the Schaefer Lunch Co. and they lived in Dearborn with their 7 children. They have 2 more children by the 1940 census.

Tillie Schaefer passed away at the age of 91 on January 26, 1984.

Selina J. Pramstaller was born Jan. 18, 1898 to John P. and Elizabeth Pramstaller. In 1915, they lived on Wabash in Detroit.

She held down several occupations through the years, including stenographer at Caille Perfection Motor Co. in 1917 and as a clerk at Standard Computing Scale in 1921.

She married Stanley L. Kellum, a switchman for the railroad, in 1921. She was listed as divorced in the 1930 census and living with her parents with her daughter Elizabeth.

By 1940, she is living with her widowed father and daughter and working as a private family nurse. It is unknown when she passed away.

Tashmoo Days Raffle Ticket

Raffle Tickets are now available for Tashmoo Days. Your help is needed to sell tickets and encourage friends, family, colleagues and the stranger you meet in the grocery line to attend Tashmoo Days and to purchase a Raffle Ticket.

While admission is free and open to anyone wishing to attend, purchase of a Raffle Ticket will provide the following **VIP PRIVILEGES** to ticket holders:

- Seating at the Museum Stage Entertainment venue.
- Free Admission to all educational, historic and cultural lectures.
- An opportunity to **WIN** a **CLASSIC YACHT CHARTER** for a Party of six; and other valuable prizes.

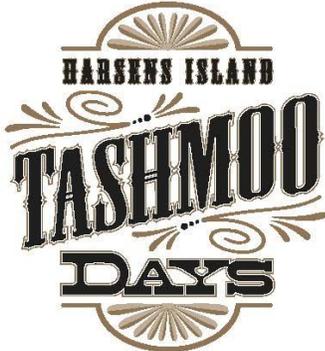
Tickets are available at the museum, Sans Souci Market, Waterfront Shoppe, School House Grille and the Sans Souci Bar. If you want tickets to sell or cannot attend and want to purchase tickets for the raffle, please call Bernard Licata at 586-530-7100. Tickets are \$10.00 each.

Thank you for being a Member.

Thank you for bringing your friends and family to this event.

Thank you for helping us attain our goals.

0125



July 20, 2013
RAFFLE DRAWING

First Prize drawing at 5:30pm for:
Classic Yacht Charter
for Party of Six

PLUS additional prizes to be announced the day of the event. Need not be present to win

This ticket also entitles the bearer access to VIP seating areas and special presentations

1000

License no. R22225 issued to The Society

To be entered in the drawing, this stub **MUST** be submitted to the designated area at Tashmoo Days

name

address

phone

0125

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Your financial support through Membership dues allows The Society to continue to provide quality educational and cultural programs to the community as well as provide support and upkeep to the Old Fire Hall museum. We are a 501(c)(3) organization.

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____ Spouse: _____
 Mailing Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Home Phone: _____ Cell: _____ Spouse Cell: _____
 E-Mail: _____ Spouse E-Mail: _____

Additional Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Home Phone: _____

Annual Dues:

_____ Individual (1 Member) \$15.00
 _____ Family (1-2 Adults plus children \$20.00 under 18 years)
 _____ Business \$25.00

Life-time Dues

_____ Life Individual \$150.00
 _____ Life Family \$200.00

Building Fund Donations: \$ _____ Other Donation (Please Specify) \$ _____

Please complete this form and send with a check made payable to: **The Society**, P.O. Pox 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028



PO Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

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

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)

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 - 11am - 6pm (Sans Souci)
For more information and complete list of Tashmoo Days activities & events,
visit: www.tashmoodays.com or contact: Bernardo Licata (586) 530-7100

August

3rd - Saturday - Society Booth at HISCFA Field Day
14th - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)
11th - Sunday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)
17th - Saturday - 5:00 PM Annual Meeting followed by Spaghetti Dinner