

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## 'Under The Radar' visits Harsens Island

*see page 2 for details!*



## Tashmoo Park Carousel

*see page 3*

### From the President

Our wish is that the New Year brings health, happiness and prosperity and that you enjoy every one of the next 365 days.

We have together brought our fledgling Historical Society through 4 full years of steady growth, accomplishment, and contribution to our Island community. A warm **thank-you** to each of you who have worked so hard to make the dream of a Historical Society and Museum on Harsens Island a reality.

Plans for 2014 are being formulated and we hope to announce them soon. They include many of the events and activities from previous years, and hopefully some new ones. We would like to hear from you regarding activities and events. Please send your comments to me as soon as possible so we may include them in the January 11 board meeting discussions. E-mail: [licata@comcast.net](mailto:licata@comcast.net)

Our Lecture Series is an activity that will continue into 2014. Denne Osgood, chairman, has already lined up speakers so please stay tuned for confirmation and specific announcements. The April 26 Lecture is confirmed to be: **Roger LeLievre**, author of *Know Your Ships* who will share his knowledge of Great Lakes Shipping followed by a book signing. If you are a regular user of *Know Your Ships*, join us for the lecture and purchase an autographed 2014 copy. We are targeting to have our full year calendar completed by February and will update the preview of what we have published in this issue.

Our Museum curator, Nancy Boulton, has reported that the second annual **Cookie Walk-Sale**, on December 7, was another rousing success and that it netted enough dollars to cover nearly three monthly payments on our contract for the building.

For those of you who have had the good fortune to escape South to warmer climes, you snowbirds should know that we actually have ice forming on the river this year which is a significant change from the past couple years. This may turn out to be a 'typical winter' here on the Island and the Flats.

And finally, let us not forget those less fortunate who may need a little help.

Happy New Year,  
bernard

## The Society Pages

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Join us on Facebook!

## Under The Radar Michigan

### Host Tom Daldrin Visits Harsens Island

'Under The Radar Michigan' is a television show that features the great people, places to go and things to see in Michigan. It is produced in cooperation with Detroit Public Television and airs on PBS.

A friend of Tom Daldrin's that lives on the island has been after him to visit since the show went on air a few years ago and finally persuaded him to stop by. Daldrin found time over Labor Day and fell in love with the island and wanted to include it on an upcoming show.

Daldrin and his crew visited the island in September and was hosted by Clay Township Supervisor, Artie Bryson.

Featured on this episode will be the Harsens Island ferry, a boat ride on the St. Clair River, a stop at the Harsens Island-St. Clair Flats Historical Society and finally dinner at the Schoolhouse Grill.

This episode is due to air on Saturday, January 11, 2014 at 10:30am on your PBS channel. Check your local listings. The link below will take you to the website. If you miss it, episodes are available online.

<http://www.utrmichigan.com/location-information/season-4>



above: Interview at the Historical Society with Bernard Licata (center) and Tom Daldrin (right).

left: Tom Daldrin (right) interviews Eric Mehl (left) at the ferry.

photos courtesy of Clay Township



## Tashmoo Park Carousel

by Michele Komar

According to a 1970 newspaper article, the "Magnificent Menagerie Carousel" was installed at Tashmoo Park on Harsens Island in 1915.

It was built by the Herschell-Spillman Company of North Tonawanda, New York, one of the leading manufacturers of carousels in America at the time.

Allan Herschell and James Armitage operated from about 1892 through 1902, carving a great number of portable carousels of a fairly simple style. The financial problems of the Armitage Herschell Company caused Herschell to leave and form a new company in 1900 with his Spillman in-laws called Herschell Spillman. This factory started by carving and creating carousels in the old style and also created some large park machines, generally elaborate menagerie carousels.

The Herschell Spillman factory created 18 separate menagerie animals, most of which were on each of the larger carousels. Herschell Spillman menageries can be found all across the country, including Greenfield Village in Dearborn.

In a July 11, 1993 interview with Bill Harm, here is what he had to say about the merry-go-round.

"The merry-go-round is the one which I operated. It originally sat up by the dance hall but was moved to the back of the park. My dad was park superintendant. We had about 30-40 employees that worked in various places around the park. We used to board the crew right there. We gave them all a room and their laundry was provided by the park and of course three meals a day. Most of the fellas that worked there were mostly college students and folks from the island. A lot of the fellas were yard men and would clean up after the boat left and make the place tidy again. We had a fella who was a Teamster and would meet the boat with a wagon and a team of horses. He would pick up the supplies and take it back to the commissary.

I couldn't run the merry-go-round until after 12:00 when the boat docked. I had other duties in the morning. I had to keep the merry-go-round clean. If there weren't enough people to ride the merry-go-round, then I would get the job of cutting grass along with some of the other fellas.

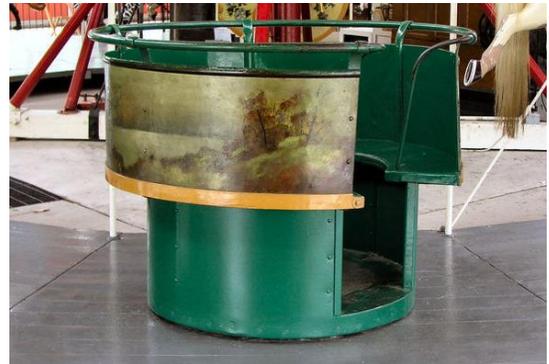
In the event of rain, the merry-go-round building was quite large and could hold a lot of people. The old merry-go-round sat on the corner of the park. After the merry-go-round was gone they kept the building as a shelter. It was a big round building, oh, about 70-75 feet across. In the winter time we would use it for storage for the tables and

benches. There were shutters that had to be put up on the outside in the winter. It was a job I hated. They were very heavy and it took two men to put them up.

The powerhouse was a corrugated metal building and we had a boiler in there that provided steam for the park. In those days the water was pumped from the river to the boiler. There was also one of Edison's first dynamos in there. I understand that it is now down at Greenfield Village. The main power for the merry-go-round was steam and was run by what we called a double action engine. There was the main engine that would drive the merry-go-round and a smaller one that would drive the organ.

Eventually, they were replaced by electric motors and steam went out. That was better because steam is hard to run. You almost had to be a steam engineer to run them. They were also dirty as they need to be oiled a lot and oil would get all over everything. I spent a lot of time keeping everything clean!

The merry-go-round at Greenfield Village is pretty close to the one we had. It was a three abreast with various types of hand carved animals. The two inner rows were on a crank and would move up and down and the group of animals on the outside were stationary. Of course, they all had a brass pole in the center.



The Spinning Tub. photo by Gary Nance [www.nca-usa.org](http://www.nca-usa.org)

They had horses, a giraffe, frogs, lions, tigers and a dragon. When I was a little kid, that dragon sure used to scare me! Also a pig, deer, ostrich and a zebra. Then we had a tub. You get in the tub and you could make it spin around. We eventually took the bearings out of the tub to stop the tub from going around. With people moving in two directions they were getting sick. We didn't like cleaning up behind them all the time. We had what you call a rocker and that would hold 4-6 people with seats on both ends. You could make it rock as you were going around in a circle. There was a chariot that would seat about 4 people with a seat at both ends but it didn't move. The organ would play music as it went around. I liked to run the ride about 5 minutes from the time they got on and we stopped it. Too many kids were getting sick if the ride was longer. That prevented a lot of mop jobs!

*continued on page 4*

## Tashmoo Park Carousel *continued*

It was a beautiful ride. It had a lot of mirrors and a lot of the animals had jewels and there were pictures painted around the crown. The crown was the center part of the merry-go-round that turned with it. On the end of the sweeps (spokes) were painted carvings. It was quite beautiful.

The original animals we had were all hand carved wood. The horses were quite detailed and even had the veins in the face carved in. One of the horses we had was for a knight and was decked out in armor with a lot of jewels and a headdress.

They had dismantled the merry-go-round but left the building. I don't know what happened to it. I understand it ended up in some park on the east coast. At one time I could have bought the lot it sat on, the merry-go-round and the building for \$700. But that would have been like \$3 million today. I just didn't have it."

According to the same newspaper article that opens this article, in 1970, the carousel was broken into pieces and sold separately for prices ranging from \$15,000 to \$26,000 at New York auction House, Christie's. Collectors paid \$268,565 total for 47 hand-carved animals.

Here is where there is a conflict of dates. The article states that the merry-go-round was at Tashmoo Park from 1915-1946. Yet the photo of the lady in front of the merry-go-round says 1914. Minnie Harm's diary mentions that in August 1944, Bill (her husband) tore down the old merry-go-round building. I have to think that this was the one at the front of the park and not the one in the back where the merry-go-round was moved to. According to *The Billboard*, October 12, 1946, "Spot (location) had only one ride this year, a Merry-Go-Round, but more may be added next season."

Then it was reported in the May 30, 1947 issue of *The Billboard*, "Project to move the Merry-Go-Round, a 64-passenger unit to Belle Isle Park, operated by the City, has been presented to the city council by the park owners, and is now pending official action." However, by August, that plan was dropped and the ride was retained as one of Tashmoo Park's major attractions. In January of 1948, an ad appeared in *The Billboard* to sell the entire operation – 20 acres, all the buildings, caretaker's home, contents, 1 excursion steamer and the Merry-Go-Round for a cool \$125,000. Minnie Harm's diary mentions in March that "Mr. Fleming has sold the merry-go-round and it is being carted away to some lake park by Syracuse, NY."

I have been unable to trace the park it may have gone to. One thing for sure is that the merry-go-round does not exist anymore except as cherished menagerie animals most likely in private collections. If you ever make it to Greenfield Village and ride the carousel, try to imagine what it was like almost 100 years ago on an island in the St. Clair River. ■



**The Museum has a  
"Commemorative Bookmark"  
available with a century old,  
original merry-go-round ticket  
laminated on it for a \$10.00  
donation to the Building Fund.  
Contact any Board Member for  
information.**

## Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society 2014 Calendar of Events

### 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  
 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month 6PM - 8PM  
 Oct, Nov, Dec – closed – open by appointment and for Xmas sale  
 Contact any Board Member to schedule a Museum Opening for your Group

<b>January</b>	11th - Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting
<b>March</b>	29th - Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting
<b>April</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> - Lecture series - <b>Roger LeLievre</b> , author of <i>Know Your Ships</i>
<b>May</b>	Possible Lecture Series – Date to be determined 10th - Saturday - 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum (with final call for nominations for board election) 24th – 26th - Saturday, Sunday, Monday - Memorial Day Open House (special open times 11am – 4pm) 31st - Flea Market at the Museum
<b>June</b>	13th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM 14th – Saturday - 10:00 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum
<b>July</b>	4th – Friday – Museum open special for the holiday 11th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM 12th - Saturday - 10:00 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum
<b>August</b>	8th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM 9th - Saturday - 10:00 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum 16th – Saturday – 5 to 7 PM Annual meeting followed by spaghetti dinner (Election results announced) 30th, 31st & Sept. 1 – Saturday, Sunday, & Monday – Labor Day Weekend – Museum open
<b>Sept.</b>	Sept. 1 –Monday – Labor Day Weekend – Museum open Possible Lecture Series – Date to be determined 12th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM 13th - Saturday - 10:00 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum
<b>Oct.</b>	4th – Saturday – Pie Sale at Museum 10AM - 3PM 11th - Saturday - 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum
<b>Nov.</b>	8th - Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting at Museum
<b>Dec.</b>	6th – Saturday – Cookie Sale at Museum - 10AM - 3PM

Members are welcome to attend any Board meetings on the calendar to keep apprised of Society activities and to bring issues before the Board.



*The* SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 44  
Harsens Island MI 48028

## **Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society 2014 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 – Mar** - closed - open by appointment

**April, May** – Saturdays – 10 AM – 3 PM

### **January**

11th - Saturday – 10:30 AM – **Under The Radar** with **Tom Daldrin** on **PBS**

11th - Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting

### **March**

29th - Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/membership meeting

### **April**

26<sup>th</sup> - **Roger LeLievre**, author of ***Know Your Ships***

Here is your chance to purchase an autographed 2014 edition! Look for details at a later date.