

The SOCIETY

PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

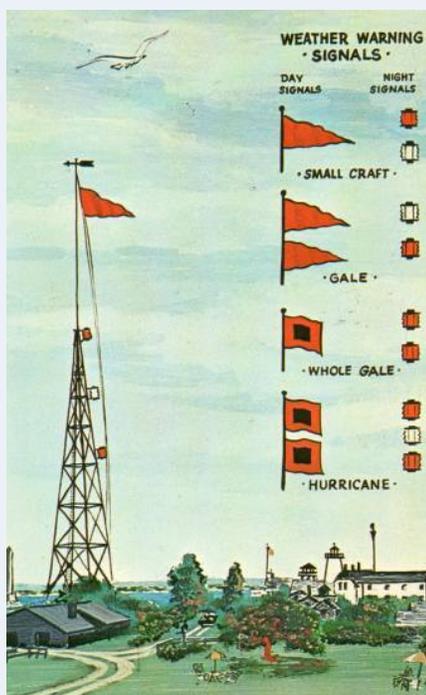
DEATH TOLL ON LAKES MAY BE 273

DISASTER GROWS AS NEW REPORTS COME IN

stated the headlines from *The Detroit News* from November 13, 1913. From the storms of the 1860s to the gale that sank the *Edmund Fitzgerald* in 1975, one Great Lakes storm stands out as the deadliest. The **Great Lakes Storm of 1913**, nicknamed the "White Hurricane", was a blizzard with hurricane-force winds that devastated the Great Lakes area including Ontario, Canada from November 7 through November 10, 1913. The storm was most powerful on November 9, battering and overturning ships on four of the five Great Lakes, particularly Lake Huron. Deceptive lulls in the storm and the slow pace of weather reports contributed to the storm's destructiveness. Whiteout conditions and accumulation of ice on the ships turned an already dangerous situation into a deadly one, as ship captains were unable to maintain navigation on the lakes.

The Great Lakes Storm killed more than 250 people, destroyed 19 ships, and stranded 19 others. The financial loss in vessels alone was nearly \$5 million in 1913 dollars. This included about \$1 million in lost cargo. The devastation on harbors, cities and economic hardship was untold.

The storm originated as the convergence of two major storm fronts, fueled by the lakes' relatively warm waters - a seasonal process called a "November gale". It produced 90 mph wind gusts, waves over 35 feet high, and whiteout snowsqualls with up to 24" of snow dumped along the Ohio coast. *continued page 3*



Weather Warning Signals

Following the Civil War, the Army began a process of systematic reduction in personnel as the post-war budget was slashed. It was in this environment that a Joint Resolution was passed in 1870 authorizing the Secretary of War to take observations at military stations and to warn of storms on the Great Lakes and on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. With this modest beginning, an agency was born under the Signal Service which would become one of the more popular and well known federal agencies known as the "Weather Bureau" or "National Weather Service."

Telegraphing ahead current weather conditions had been used since 1845 but was a slow process. Eventually, the Army was fed up with its personnel being too busy with weather duty and not with military concerns and the Weather Service was transferred to the Department of Agriculture in 1890 as a civilian outfit.

Maritime weather warning flags were developed in the early 1900s. Originally, combinations of red/white pennants and red flags with black square centers were used to warn mariners that a storm was coming. Today, mariners rely on marine broadcasts and other efficient forms of communication. Discontinued officially by the Weather Service in 1989, signal flags are still used by the Coast Guard today.

The Society Pages

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From the President

Dear Members,

October is here and the *pumpkin is rising* which means the colors in the trees have started to change, the harvest is well underway and we can all start the process of buttoning-up for winter.

The Museum will be doing a button-up as well. The process was started a couple weeks back when Dan Persyn donated his time and energy to remove a scrub-tree that had planted itself and grown out of control on the downstream side of the building. That removal will clear the way for the repairs needed to maintain the building. John Eidt, building operations manager, has assessed needed repairs and submitted a list of minor issues to be addressed which includes removal of broken/spalled concrete, tuck-point and repair, repointing around windows, caulking, and replacement of rotted door surround, power washing and painting. Some of these repairs should proceed before winter, the power wash and fresh coat of paint can wait till the spring of 2015. Volunteers will be needed!

Your Historical Society is well underway to full ownership of the building and it needs to be maintained as we move forward. We extend our thanks to John Eidt, Dan Persyn and others who are keeping our Museum building in good repair.

Speaking of full ownership, we continue to make headway toward that goal. The **Buy a Brick Program** is doing well. More bricks were added to the wall during the past month and more folks are asking about how to purchase a brick. If you have questions or interest in the brick program, please contact Bob Williams for more information at 248-388-0465. Bob and our Museum curators have agreed to assemble a binder of *stories behind the brick* that may be submitted by those who have or will participate in the program... so if there is a *story behind your brick*, you may submit it and have your history included in the binder.

October will bring additional good things to the Island starting with the **Annual October Pie Sale**, the **Square Dance** and the last of the

2014 Lecture Series "**Soused and Serene, The Era of Prohibition along the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers**", presented by **Arthur Woodford**. As a heads-up for November 8, The Society will once again manage the refreshment-concession for Islanders Kathy and Tom Vertin's **Snug Theatre** in Marine City. The Society thanks Kathy and Tom for inviting us to do this fundraising activity at Comedy Nights this year; and for offering our members a discount for Comedy Night Tickets. (Phone the Snug Box Office at: 810-278-1749, and identify yourself as a Society Member for a 50% discount on your ticket). Take a minute to thank those organizing these events for The Society.

We look forward to seeing all of you at these upcoming events.

Thank you,
bernardo

Prelude to the Storm

Thursday, November 6 - on the western side of Lake Superior, the storm moved rapidly toward northern Lake Michigan. The weather forecast called for "moderate to brisk" winds for the Great Lakes, with occasional rain for the upper lakes and fair to unsettled conditions for the lower lakes.

Around midnight, the steamer *Cornell*, while 50 miles west of Whitefish Point in Lake Superior, ran into a sudden northerly gale and was badly damaged. This gale lasted until late November 10, almost forcing the *Cornell* ashore.



Downed power lines and frozen street cars in Cleveland

Friday, November 7 - at 10:00 a.m. Coast Guard stations and USDA Weather Bureau offices at Lake Superior ports raised white pennants above square red flags with black centers, indicating a storm warning with northwesterly winds. By late afternoon, the storm signal flags were replaced with a vertical sequence of red, white, and red lanterns, indicating that a hurricane with winds over 74 mph was coming. The winds on Lake Superior had already reached 50 mph, and an accompanying blizzard was moving rapidly toward Lake Huron.

Saturday, November 8 - the storm's status had been upgraded to "severe" and was centered over eastern Lake Superior. A false lull in the storm allowed traffic to begin flowing again, both down the St. Mary's River and up Lake Erie, and the Detroit and St. Clair rivers, into Lake Huron. Gale wind flags were raised at more than a hundred ports, but were ignored by many ship captains. Long ships traveled all that day through the St. Mary's River, all night through the Straits of Mackinac, and early Sunday morning up the Detroit and St. Clair rivers.

Sunday, November 9 - by noon on Sunday, weather conditions on lower Lake Huron were approaching a November gale, but in some areas the barometric pressure actually began to rise, bringing hope of an end to the storm. This false hope prompted some ships to leave port.

A rotating low that developed around Buffalo, NY continued along its northward path, bringing its counterclockwise winds in phase with the northwesterly winds already hitting Lakes Superior and Huron. This resulted in a quick increase in northerly wind speeds and swirling snow. Ships on Lake Huron that were south of Alpena, Michigan—especially around Harbor Beach and Port Huron and Goderich and Sarnia, Ontario

were battered with huge waves rolling southward toward the St. Clair River.

From 8:00 p.m. to midnight, the storm became what is called a "weather bomb" with sustained winds of more than 70 mph. The worst damage was done on Lake Huron as numerous ships scrambled for shelter along its southern end.

Monday, November 10 - the storm had moved northeast of London, Ontario, dragging lake effect blizzards in its wake. An additional 17 inches of snow were dumped on Cleveland, Ohio that day, filling the streets with snowdrifts 6 feet high. Streetcar operators stayed with their stranded, powerless vehicles for two nights, eating whatever food was provided by local residents.

Tuesday, November 11 - the storm was rapidly moving across eastern Canada. Without the warm lake waters, it lost power quickly. This also meant less snowfall, both because of the fast motion of the storm and the lack of lake-effect snow. All shipping was halted on Monday and part of Tuesday along the St. Lawrence River around Montreal, Quebec.

continued next page



Lake Michigan outside Chicago

The Aftermath

Historically, storms of such magnitude and with such high wind velocities have not lasted more than four or five hours. The Great Lakes storm, however, raged for more than 16 hours, with an average speed of 60 mph, and frequent bursts of more than 70 mph. It crippled traffic on the lakes and throughout the Great Lakes region.

Along the shoreline, blizzards shut down traffic and communication, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage. A 22-inch snowfall in Cleveland, Ohio, put stores out of business for two days. The city was paralyzed under feet of ice and snow and was without power for days. Telephone poles had been broken, and power cables lay in tangled masses. There were four-foot snowdrifts around Lake Huron. Power was out for several days across Michigan and Ontario, cutting off telephone and telegraph communications.

The greatest damage was done on the lakes. Major shipwrecks occurred on all but Lake Ontario, with most happening on southern and western Lake Huron. Lake masters recounted that waves reached at least 35 feet in height. Being shorter in length than waves ordinarily formed by gales, they occurred in rapid succession, with three waves frequently striking in succession.

The storm had several long-term consequences. Complaints against the USDA Weather Bureau of alleged unpreparedness resulted in increased efforts to achieve more accurate weather forecasting and faster realization and communication of proper storm warnings. Criticism of the shipping companies and shipbuilders led to a series of conferences with insurers and mariners to seek safer designs for vessels. This resulted in the construction of ships with greater stability and more longitudinal strength. Immediately following the blizzard of Cleveland, Ohio, the city began a campaign to move all utility cables underground, in tubes beneath major streets. The project took half a decade. ♦

Ships and Lives Lost

- ▶ *Argus* – 28 victims
- ▶ *Charles S. Price* – 28 victims
- ▶ *Henry B. Smith* – 25 victims
- ▶ *Hydrus* – 25 victims
- ▶ *Isaac M. Scott* – 28 victims
- ▶ *James Carruthers* – 22 victims
- ▶ *John A. McGean* – 28 victims
- ▶ *Leafield* – 18 victims
- ▶ *Lightship LV 82 Buffalo* – 6 victims
- ▶ *Plymouth* (barge) – 7 victims
- ▶ *Regina* – 20 victims
- ▶ *Wexford* – 20 victims



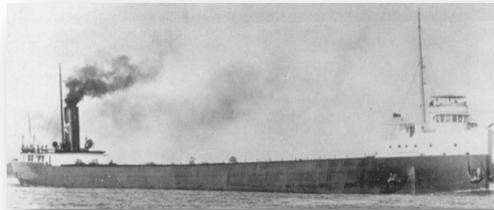
Of the twelve ships that sank in the storm, four have never been found: *Leafield*, *James Carruthers*, *Plymouth*, and the *Hydrus*. The most recent discovery is the *Henry B. Smith*, which appears to have been located in June 2013.



Lightship LV 82 Buffalo

Lightship Reported Lost

Buffalo, Nov. 11.-- The lightship *No. 28*, with a crew of six which has been stationed in Lake Erie off Point Abino is reported lost by incoming vesselmen. It is believed that she foundered during the recent storm. The lightship's wreckage has floated ashore. There were two Michigan men among the crew.



Charles S. Price

"Hardest Blow I've Seen on Lakes."

Several of the vessels arriving at the Soo Sunday were half buried in a thick coating of ice. The *Maricopa*, Capt. William J. Story of Ashtabula, seems to have fared the worst. Her upper works forward are coated with ice to the depth of a foot in many places.

Captain Story said to The Evening News today that he left Duluth Friday noon.

"I knew storm signals were out," Captain Story said, "but had no report from the weather station. I called the station on the phone and asked for a report, but the observer replied that he was too busy to give it to me.

It was the hardest and longest blow I have ever seen on the lakes and I have been sailing these waters for many years. We had it all the way, but it came the hardest when we were about 30 miles off Otter Island. We lay in at Rock of Ages, on Grand Marais, for five hours; then I decided that we could weather it through. We were not able to locate the "Rock" owing to the blinding snow. We broke the force of the seas in a slight degree by using oil."

Steamer Cornell Damaged

With battered bow, both anchors and chains gone, the crew's quarters completely wrecked, the roofs of the cabins torn off, the *Cornell* of the Pittsburg Steamship company's fleet tied up at the west end of the south pier this morning. The *Cornell* left the Soo Friday morning for Duluth. Since then she has made a fierce fight against what at that time seemed overwhelming odds.

Hard Fight to Keep Afloat

"It was while we were working our way out of Whitefish Bay that we first felt the severity of the storm," said Captain Noble. "Seeing there was no further uses of endangering our lives and the boat we came to anchor, but for the last three days it has been a terrific struggle to keep afloat. The wind would change and the huge waves throw us around with a jerk. We held our anchoring ground until Monday, when suddenly one of the anchors snapped off. We held into the teeth of the gale with the other anchor for several hours, but it went too and the only thing to do was to ride it out and put back to the Soo as the nearest port.

We will have to make some repairs. My men worked faithfully all the time and we are glad to tie up and get a much needed rest."

Kitchen Was Wrecked

"It was the worst storm I ever saw," said one of the members of the crew.

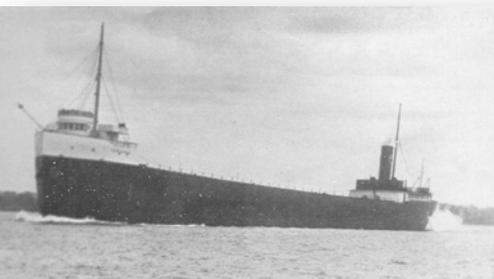
"All this time the storm of wind, snow and sleet lashed the lake into fury and the great waves stove in the fantail of the boat wrecking the dining room and many of the cooking utensils. We did [not] pay much attention to this fact, however, for nobody cared to eat or sleep either. One day I had two apples and that was all."



Henry B. Smith



Hydrus



Isaac M. Scott



Wexford

Many Marine Accidents

Detroit, Nov. 10.--Many reports have reached here of serious marine accidents during the past 24 hours on account of one of the heaviest wind storm that has ever been recorded.

The steamer *Harlow* is ashore on Peach Island. She was struck amidships last night by the steamer *LaBelle* and the captain beached her. The *LaBelle* is uninjured.

The steamer *Victory* is ashore at the east bank entrance of the Livingstone channel, but she is in no immediate danger.

The *W. G. Pollock* is grounded at the entrance of the St. Clair Flats ship canal. A Tomlinson fleet steamer is on off Wees Point, near Port Huron.

The schooner *Charles Chamberlain* which was in winter quarters at Port Huron was blown over and sank. There was no one on board at the time of the accident.

Many Boats Overdue

The steamer *Robert Fulton*, of the Pittsburg Steamship Company, bound down with ore, is on the bottom at Bar Point. The stranding was due to low water and the *Fulton* will be floated as soon as the wind shifts and the water comes up. She will not be damaged much if any. There are a large number of freighters long overdue and it is feared that more accidents have occurred.

Steel Vessel Found Bottom Up in Lake Huron; Owners Worried

A dozen or more staunch freighters have been driven ashore, one steamer capsized and scores of other craft have been driven to shelter in widely scattered harbors.

Probably the worst of these disasters is the loss of an unidentified freighter which was found bottom-up in Lake Huron late this afternoon. The ship apparently was a 600-foot steel freighter, but until daylight

tomorrow her name cannot be learned. There is no trace of the crew, which numbered about 40, and vesselmen tonight expressed the belief that all hands had perished. *(Editor's note: It wasn't until November 15, that the waters were calm enough for a diver to go down and identify the drifting ship. It was the Charles S. Price).*

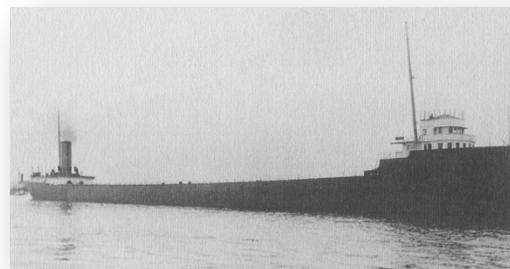
Rescued Tell Stories of Hardship and Peril

CHICAGO, Nov. 10.--The captain, mate and crew of five of the schooner *J. G. Boyce*, with lumber from Fosterville, Canada, were rescued today after a night spent lashed in the rigging of their vessel, which was dragging her anchor three miles off the harbor mouth after an unsuccessful attempt to enter. They told stories of hardship and peril in the storm when they were brought ashore by the United States life-saving crew.

"The storm struck us about 10 o'clock Sunday morning," said Captain Norem. "The wind was from the north and we were obliged to strip off everything but the head sails and run before the gale. The schooner was washed repeatedly by heavy seas that broke clear over her. Off the Chicago harbor entrance we vainly tried to get sail on her to bring her in. I was forced to send up distress signals.

The life savers responded in their motor lifeboat, but were unable to do anything for us. I would not abandon her. We got two anchors over and tried to ride it out. The schooner dragged and about daybreak we were getting close to shore, where we could plainly see the breakers."

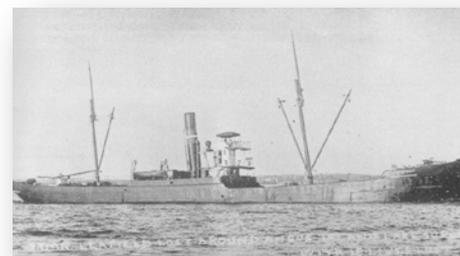
The anchors held here, however, and the crew of the *Boyce* were taken out of the rigging and suffered from frozen limbs and exhaustion. ♦



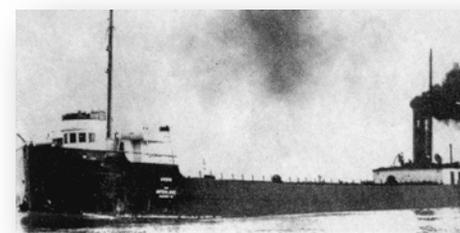
James Carruthers



John A. McGean



Leafield



Argus

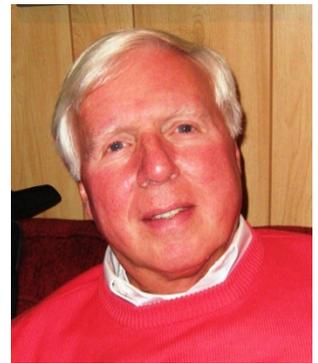


Regina

Lecture Series 2014

The Society is pleased to sponsor **Arthur M. Woodford** who will present: *"Soused and Serene"*, *The Era of Prohibition along the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers*.

After a long and successful career as a public librarian Woodford now devotes his time to writing. He has studied and written extensively in the fields of Detroit, MI and Great Lakes history. His published works include: *All Our Yesterdays: A Brief History of Detroit* (1969); *Detroit and Its Banks* (1974); *Detroit: American Urban Renaissance* (1979); *Charting the Inland Seas* (1991); *Tonnancour* (1994, 1996); *Village on the Lake: The History of St. Clair Shores* (2001); *This is Detroit: 1701-2001* (2001) published to celebrate Detroit's 300th birthday; *Michigan Companion* (2012); *Tashmoo Park and the Steamer Tashmoo* (2012); and soon to be published, *The Village of Grosse Pointe Shores* (2015).



There will be a question and answer/discussion session after the presentation. Please make reservations for this event by contacting Nancy Licata at: 810-748-1825 or via e-mail: nlicata@comcast.net. The Society suggests a \$10 donation to help support the Lecture Series. Reserved seating check-in will be open 45 minutes prior to the 3:00 PM start. (Come early, check-in and enjoy the Schoolhouse patio or spend a few minutes socializing with friends.) A donation in advance will guarantee a seat. Phone and e-mail reservations will be held until 5 minutes prior the 3PM start at which time any remaining seats will be allocated to walk-in's on a first come first served basis.

SQUARE DANCE

presented by the
HARSENS ISLAND ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Grab your favorite gal or favorite guy, and join us for a finger lickin' - foot stompin' good time!

We've even hired an honest to goodness professional 'caller' to guide you through the steps.

AND FRIED CHICKEN DINNER

F * R * I * D * A * Y
OCTOBER 10 ONLY **\$15.00 PER PERSON**

6:00 in the evening

THE LIONS HALL

Tickets available at the Museum, Sans Souci Market, or Licata's (810) 748-1825 or nlicata@comcast.com

CASH BAR AVAILABLE (BEER & WINE)

Just Pies

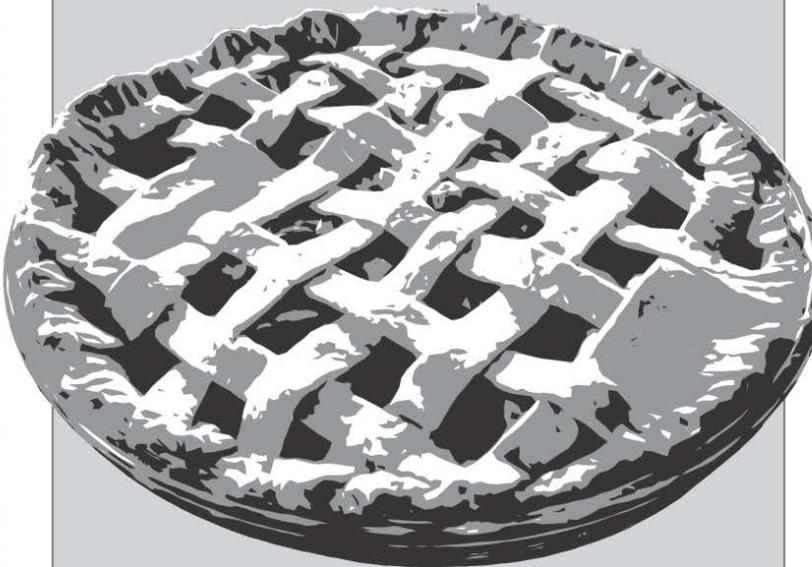
Bake Sale

Sat. October 4

10:00am to 3:00pm

at the
Historical Society Museum

3058 South Channel Drive, Sans Souci, Harsens Island



If you are interested in baking a pie for the sale, please contact Nancy at (810) 748-3802



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

Closed for the season except by appointment or as noted below.

- October**
- 4th – Saturday – Pie Sale – 10 AM to 3 PM at the Museum.
 - 10th – Friday – 6 to 9 PM – Square Dance and Fried Chicken Dinner at the Lions Hall.
 - 11th – Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/Membership meeting at Museum.
 - 25th – Saturday – 3 PM. Lecture Series *“Soused and Serene”* presented by Arthur Woodford at the Schoolhouse Grille.
- November**
- 11th – Saturday – 11:30 AM – Board/Membership meeting at Museum.
- December**
- 6th – Saturday – 10 AM to 3 PM - Cookie Sale and Christmas Sale at the Museum.