



Message from the President . . .

Hi All,

Building Addition Status

Progress on the addition has slowed for now. We cannot install the concrete floor until the ferry dock is fixed and concrete trucks can get to the island. We had intended to work on furring, insulation, and drywall over the winter, but there is a lot of moisture entering the building by way of the exposed soil in the building. Dehumidifiers were installed in December to resolve the humidity problem, but we were unable to get the humidity low enough to feel comfortable with continuing. If the humidity is high when insulation and drywall is installed, it can be trapped within the walls and create a possible future mold problem, nobody wants to take that chance.

We plan to continue with construction in the spring, when the ferry dock is expected to accommodate the concrete trucks. Based on this schedule we do not expect to move into the museum addition until the fall of this year.

Fundraising for the Addition

In mid-October a mailing was sent to all members and friends of the Historical Society outlining the status of the addition to the museum, including a list of items which still need to be funded to complete the addition. You may recall that all work completed so far was funded in full by a generous bequeath from the estate of Clayton Evans, an islander who was in attendance at the dedication of the original fire hall back in 1938.

Donations have been arriving for completion of the addition, and we are pleased to say that we have received about \$9,000 so far. Our fundraising will continue into the spring, so it is not too late to donate if you had intended to but have not yet done so.

Membership Renewal

Membership renewals for 2020 have been arriving. If you have not renewed your membership yet, you can use the form available in this newsletter.

The museum is closed for the season, but it can be opened for visitors. To schedule a visit call Chuck Miller at (810) 748-7209 or Corinne Trexler at (313) 530-9173.

Bob Williams, President (xharpspah@aol.com)

What Was It Like Back Then?

This year's newsletter is going to feature a new section called "What Was It Like Back Then?". Each month this section will highlight how people lived in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Back in the late 1700's when Harsens Island was settled by Jacob Harsen, transportation from and to the mainland was one challenge. But what about the day to day challenges? What were the hardships of our ancestors who had to endure weather, transporting goods from the mainland, illnesses, food, and shelter?

Food Preservation

Today we have packaged foods, frozen foods and refrigerators. If we need lettuce or tomatoes, we just jump in our car and head to the grocery store.

In the 18th century, people worked within the boundaries of seasonality. Produce was only available in the warmer months, crops were harvested in the fall, even hens reduced or stopped laying eggs in the winter. Therefore, food preservation was an essential part of life. There were four types of food preservation; drying, salting, pickling and jellifying.

Drying is the process of removing moisture from food thus preventing decay. Drying food was done by air

continued on page 2 . . .

What Was It Like Back Then? . . . continued from page 1

drying, sun drying, wind drying or drying by a fire. Smokehouses were commonly used for drying pork and other large pieces of meat. Drying (curing) the meat could take several weeks. Typical food that was dried included pork, fish, grapes, apples, and herbs.

Salting is the process of adding salt to meat to draw out the moisture. The salt also prevents bacteria, fungi and other disease-causing organisms from growing. Meat salted in cold weather could last for years. Salted meat was often smoked too. Typical food that was salted included beef, pork, fish, and poultry.

Pickling is another method of food preservation which involves placing food in an acid like vinegar. The acid environment prevents bacteria growth. Most of the pickled food was salted or put in a brine to remove moisture that would water down the vinegar. Some examples of food that was pickled in the 1700's were mushrooms, peaches, cabbage, radishes, cucumbers, eggs, onions, and garlic.

The final method of food preservation is jellying which is the process of adding sugar to fruit. There are different types of jellying; jellies, jams, conserves (mixture of fruits, nuts and raisins), preserves, and marmalades. Examples of fruits that were preserved using this method were apples, pears, plums, cherries, strawberries, and tomatoes.

Most homes had a root cellar where the preserved food could be kept in a cool and dry environment. Some foods were stored in containers filled with sawdust or similar material. It wasn't until the mid-1800s that refrigeration began to take shape. So, it was common practice to have a springhouse or an icehouse. A springhouse (wooden structure) was built directly over running water, which kept perishable foods from spoiling. Some people kept their food directly in the water. An icehouse was built by digging into dirt banks where there was no sunlight and lining them with sawdust. Ice was cut from the frozen river and put into the icehouses. With proper care the ice would last until the summer.

<https://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/images/factsheets.pdf>

<https://www.ncpedia.org/culture/food/food-preservation>

Prohibition – Part 1

By Chris Knight

The year 2020 is upon us and the Harsens Island Museum will be having a decade celebration this spring. This got me thinking about other events in history that impacted this little community along the U.S. and Canadian border. One in particular occurred January 17, 1920, the ban of alcohol. Join me on a brief tour through history about the prohibition of alcohol. This will be a two-part article; Prohibition - Part 2 will be in the next newsletter.

How It Began

Most people remember the dates when major events in history ended, the end of the Civil War, the end of the Great Depression. And some people can remember the dates when major historical events started. But did you know that 100 years ago on January 17 was the start of the national ban of alcohol. In Michigan, the ban on alcohol actually began much earlier. Prohibition in Michigan went into effect on May 1, 1917.

How did prohibition begin? In Michigan, churches, businesses, and community leaders had been working to ban the sale of alcoholic drinks since 1852. They believed the banning the sale of alcohol would reduce crime and improve both the family life and employee productivity. The campaigning to ban alcohol finally succeeded in 1916, when the citizens of Michigan approved a prohibition amendment to the state constitution.

continued on page 3 . . .

Prohibition – Part 1 – How It Began . . . continued from page 2 . . .

Within hours of signing the prohibition amendment, bootlegging operations and smuggling networks were formed in Michigan. By the time the national prohibition took effect, Michigan and Ontario had perfected the bootlegging trade. It was estimated that 75% of all the alcohol smuggled into the United States crossed the border at the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel.

After the prohibition law was passed productivity in the workplace went up, crime went down and accidents and absenteeism at work went down. As a result, prosperity was on the rise, new homes were being built and people could afford to have 2 cars in the driveway. It was a boom for the automotive industry.



Ford automobiles coming off the assembly line. Source: The American Experience – Demon Run

It is worth noting that one woman, Carrier Amelia Nation, was a radical member of the temperance movement before prohibition. She was remembered for attacking alcohol serving establishments with a hatchet.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrie_Nation

The automobile industry put Detroit on the map, but it also gave bootleggers the mobility they needed to move the liquor. And the bootleggers also found ways to hide liquor during transportation. Liquor was hidden in the seat or false floors of cars and trucks.

It is not possible to talk about prohibition without noting that Harsens Island was part of the bootlegging network. The proximity to Canada and Detroit made Harsens Island the perfect gateway for the delivery of alcohol. Harsens Island had a multitude of canals and small marshy beaches to bring in the liquor from Canada. Cars met the boats and took the bootlegged liquor to different locations near Detroit area.

It was estimated that over 50,000 men, women, and children worked in the “prohibition” trade in the waterways between Michigan and Canada. Ironically, the whole theme of prohibition was to save women and children from abuse in their homes due to men who drank (see side panel).

Prohibition was easy money for those who lived in the waterways. A person could go to Canada, fill their boat with bottles of liquor and race back across the river. This happened day and night. Even if the river froze, caravans of cars, as many as 20-30 at a time, would cross the ice to Canada and load up their cars. Canadian distilleries would set up by the water’s edge to make it easier for the

continued on page 4 . . .

Prohibition – Part 1 – How It Began . . . continued from page 3 . . .

bootleggers. The loaded cars would go across to the island, then to the north channel and the caravan would split up going to places like Ecorse or Pontiac.

Crossing the ice was not without peril. See side panel of a truck that broke through the ice while transporting beer to Detroit.

Canadian distilleries also set up beer scows along various locations in the river along the Canadian shoreline. The beer scows were big barge-like vessels where beer and liquor were sold.

As mentioned earlier bootlegging was easy money. It was also very lucrative. Jobs were scarce or paid very little, 20-30 cents an hour. A job like cutting ice in the river paid a \$1 per day, working at Ford paid \$5 a day, but smuggling a case of whiskey from Canada could get you \$50 for one case. A bootlegger could get between \$500 to \$1,000 per trip depending on the liquor or beer being moved.

Early in the prohibition there were three major bootlegging operations in Port Huron. But downriver the local freelancing bootleggers thrived. Prohibition turned family homes into speak-easies (blind pigs) and neighbors into bootleggers. Just average people trying to make a dollar during lean times. Some speak-easies offered alcohol, food, and dancing and others offered alcohol and a game of cards.



A beer laden truck breaks through the ice on Lake St. Clair in route to Detroit from Ontario. Circa 1920s



Cutting ice blocks from the frozen river for \$1 a day.

continued on page 5 . . .

ALGONAC-IRA-CLAY COMMUNITY EVENTS

March 29

“Know Your Ships” Roger LeLievre & Freighter Frank with “History of Great Lakes Cruise Ships”. Doors open at 2PM, start at 3PM. \$5 donation. paulaburgess@comcast.net.

Algonac Clay Community & Maritime Museums Open 1PM-4PM WEEKENDS (April through October)

May 13

Algonac Clay Historical Society AYCE Perch 5PM -8PM \$20 Johnnie Lega’s. GUN RAFFLE!

Prohibition – Part 1 – How It Began . . . continued from page 4 . . .

Not all liquor was smuggled in from Canada, some people made their own beer. The necessary supplies to make beer were readily available at the local markets. The speak-easies and home brewing were so common, no one ever said anything. And neighbors were a close-knit group and relied on each other. The local smugglers and operators were rarely violent so the relationship with the local lawmen was friendly. One story that is an example of this friendly relationship is told by Howard Blakemore, the chief inspector for the U.S. Immigration Service's Border Patrol in Marine City (see article below).

'SHE EVEN KISSED ME'

Howard Blakemore once trekked across the frozen St. Clair River in search of smugglers.

Before the night was out, a cordial bond would form between him and the man he had been sent to arrest. He also got to dance with a young woman.

The story began when Blakemore stumbled on a store filled with beer while searching for a smuggler's road through the St. Clair Flats.

He returned later that night with a U.S. Customs inspector. But before they reached their destination, the ice broke and Blakemore became drenched.

They trudged on and found the store. Banging on the door, they were met by the owner Nelse Osbourne, 67, and his young housekeeper, Clara.

"The man just said, 'Thank God, you're not hijackers,'" Blakemore wrote in one of many essays he has written on Prohibition.

Osbourne was an amiable sort. He noticed Blakemore was wet so he built a fire and got the inspector a dry coat.

The group joked freely while the law went about its business.

The inspectors discovered Osbourne's stash of liquor and money. "Nelse, how much do you have there?" I asked," Blakemore said. "He said, '\$8,000.'

"Gee, you ought to keep that

in a bank,' I warned. 'Someday you'll lose it if you don't.'

"The atmosphere was getting quite friendly. (The customs man) asked Nelse if he had anything to carry the liquor in to the car three miles away, and the old man said he had a big sled. Then (customs) asked where the best place to destroy the beer was. Nelse showed him a spot behind the store."

The inspectors planned to head back to the mainland that night, but the friendly bootlegger protested. He was worried about thin ice.

"I added, 'How about Clara getting us some breakfast, and we'll stay here until daybreak?' Everyone seemed happy over the suggestion," Blakemore said.

"We turned on the phonograph and Clara let breakfast go for awhile to dance with us. It almost became a party, but there was no drinking."

When daylight arrived, Osbourne was taken to Port Huron, where he pleaded guilty to violating the 18th Amendment. He was fined \$500 fine and court costs. Afterward, the customs officers gave him a ride back to the Flats.

"A month later, I patrolled through the area again and stopped at the store where Nelse and Clara greeted me like an old friend. She even kissed me," Blakemore said.

Sources for this article:

Times Herald, February 4, 1990

An American Experience - Demon Run written and produced by Thomas Lennon, 1989 WGBH Educational Foundation.

<https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/prohibition>

Prohibition – Part 2

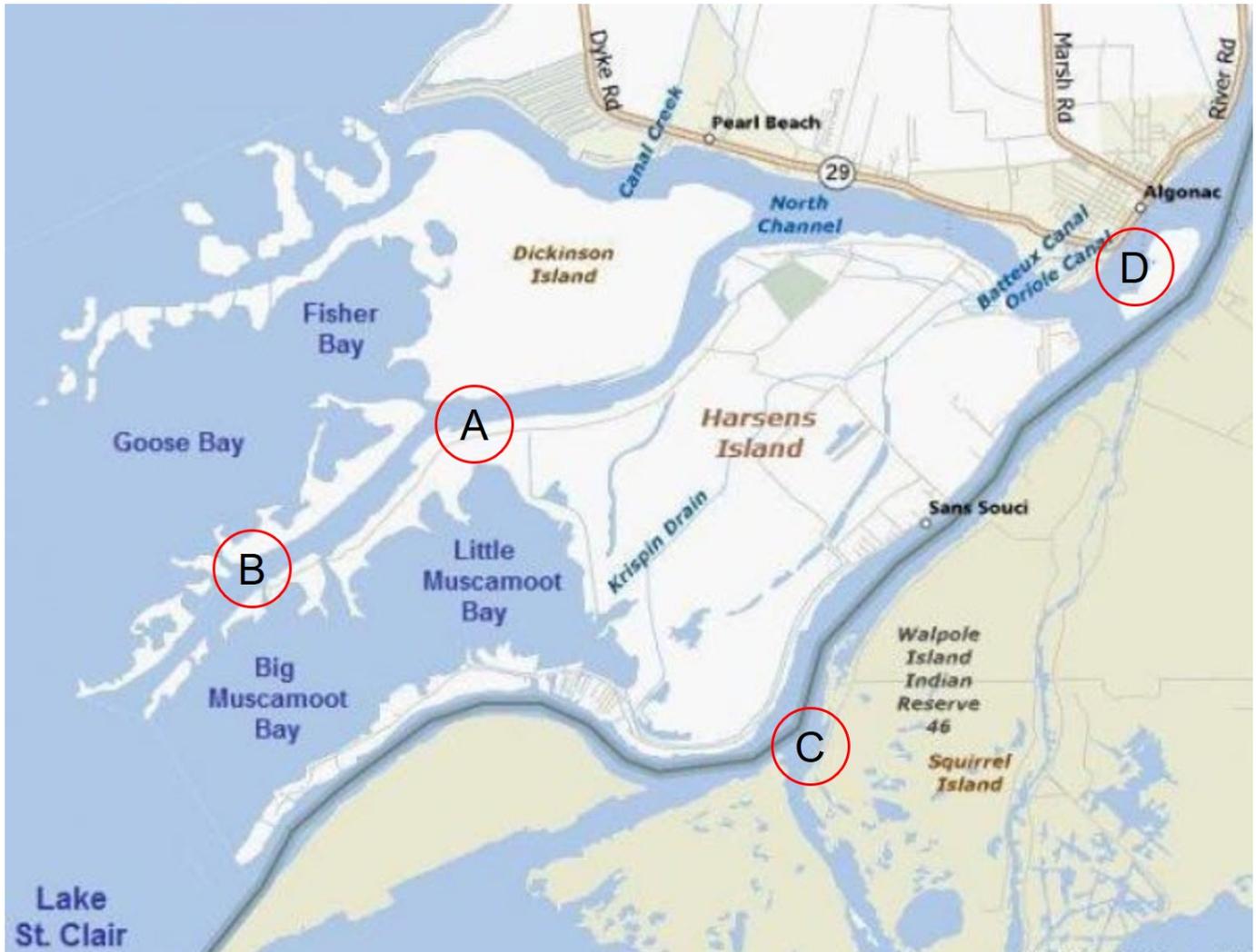
Continues in the next Historical Society Newsletter

Times Herald, February 4, 1990

Shipwrecks Around Harsens Island

By Chris Knight

It was October 26, 2019, the peak time for the fall colors on Harsens Island, Erik Mehl took me on a plane ride. The reason for the ride was two-fold; to get some pictures of the amazing fall colors and to take aerial photos of some of local shipwrecks. Although the water level was still high, we were able to see some of the wrecks. The map below shows the locations.

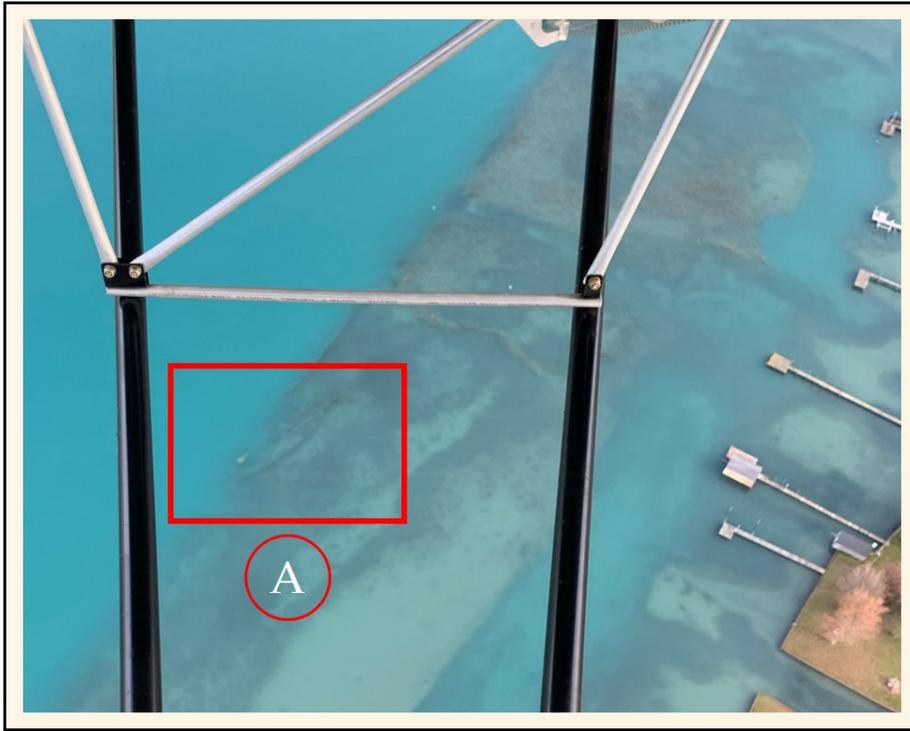


One famous wreck that we could not see because of the high water was the one by the Boys Club; Badger State. The wooden steamer, Badger State (213' x 33' x 11'8") was launched on April 17, 1862. The vessel was reduced to a lumber carrier in 1905. On December 6, 1906, the Badger State caught fire while docked in Marine City. The boat was cut loose and drifted downstream, burned itself out, and sank by the Boys Club. (Source: The Great Lakes Diving Guide by Cris Kohl, 2nd Edition).

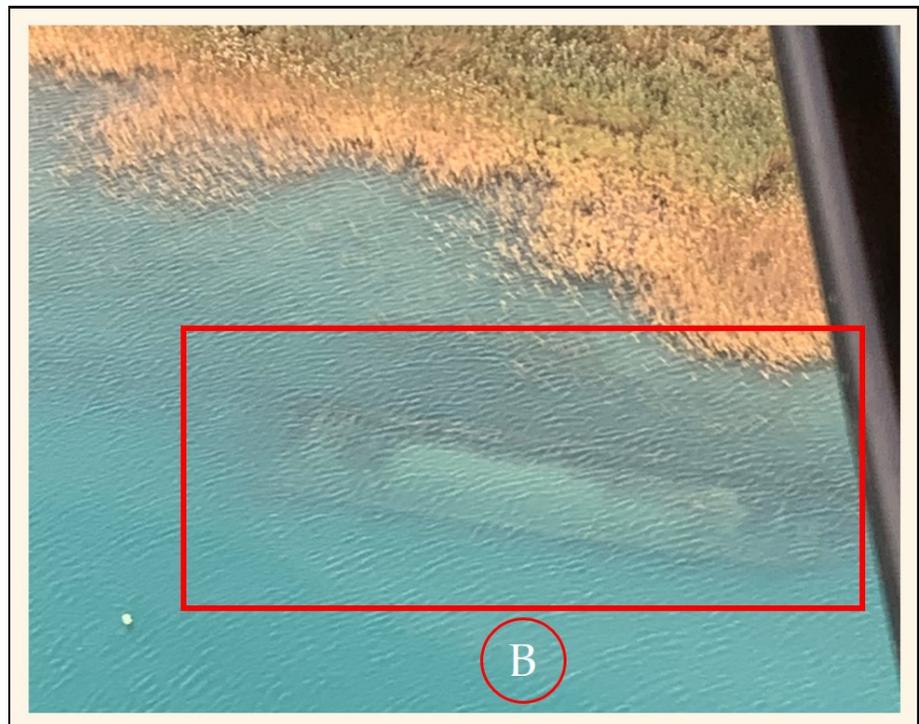
Eric Mehl said that this wreck is very hazardous for diving because of all the snagged anchors and ropes and thousands of feet of fishing line.

continued on page 5 . . .

Shipwrecks Around Harsens Island . . . continued from page 6 . . .

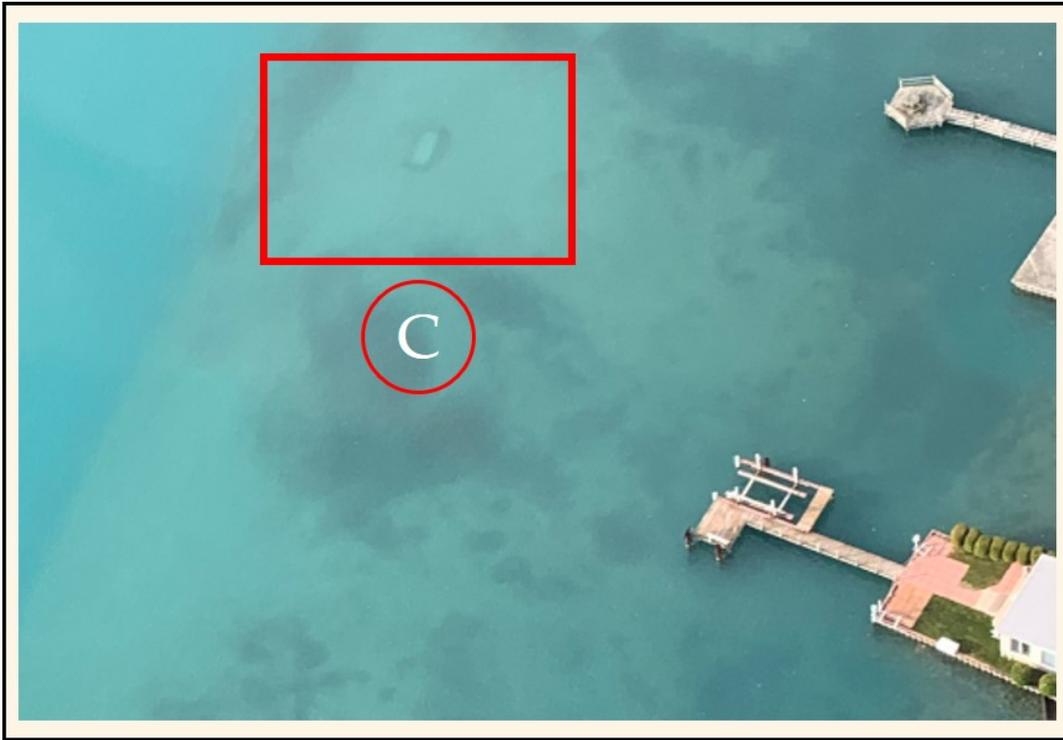


Shipwreck down river from Browns (can be seen on Google Maps Satellite)



*Shipwreck across the river from Bruckner Island (can be seen on Google Maps Satellite)
continued on page 8 . . .*

Shipwrecks Around Harsens Island . . . continued from page 7 . . .



John McLane's Bunny Barge near Walpole Island



One of four ships that were scuttled during WWI near Russell Island (information shared word of mouth a couple of the wrecks can be seen on Google Maps Satellite)

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2020

Date	Day	Time	Event
January 4	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
March (First Week)	NA	NA	Board Meeting will be done via Email
May 2	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board / Membership Meeting at the Museum
May 23	Saturday	12:00 PM	Historical Society 10th Anniversary Celebration
May 23 - 25	Saturday Sunday Monday	11:30 AM – 3:00 PM 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Memorial Weekend Museum Open House
May 30	Saturday	9:30 AM	Museum Orientation at the Museum
June 6	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board / Membership Meeting at the Museum
June 12	Friday	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Social Hour at the Museum
July 3	Friday	8:00 PM	Board / Membership Meeting at the Museum
July 10	Friday	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Social Hour at the Museum
August 1	Saturday	5:30 PM	Board Meeting and Dinner
August 14	Friday	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Social Hour at the Museum
August 15	Saturday	4:30 PM – 5:00 PM 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Wine and Appetizers at the Museum Annual Membership Meeting (Election results)
September 13	Friday	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Social Hour at the Museum
October 3	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Pie Sale at the Museum
October 10	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board / Membership Meeting at Museum
December 5	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk at the Museum
December 12	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum

Museum Hours

Memorial Weekend May 23 – 25

Saturday 11:30 AM – 3:00 PM

Sunday 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Monday 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Summer Schedule (June, July, August, September)

Second Fridays 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

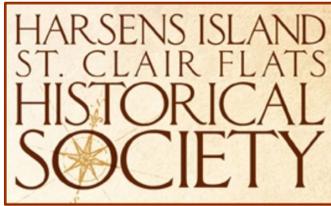
Saturdays 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Sundays 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Winter Schedule (October through April)

Closed but Open by appointment





A publication of the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society

Mailing Address:

PO Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

Museum Address:

3058 S. Channel Dr.

<https://harsensislandhistory.org/>

HISCFHS Board of Directors

Chairman of the Board
Open Position

President
Bob Williams

1st Vice President
Sue Wrobel

2nd Vice President
Corinne Trexler

Treasurer
Joyce Hassen

Secretary
Nancy Bonacquisti

Directors
Terry Wiggins
Donna Krispin
Christine Knight



The historical society is still collecting photos and stories about the high water of 2019. Please contact our curator, Chuck Miller (cmiller5179@gmail.com).



Volunteer to be a Host at the Museum this Summer

Volunteer for 3 (2 hour) shifts and get a Free T-Shirt from the Museum Gift Shop

Orientation - May 30 at 9:30 AM

Contact Corinne Trexler for additional information 313-530-9173

