



Message from the President . . .

Hi All,

Building Addition Update

Since last month interior painting has been completed on all the roof joists, underside of the roof deck, which acts also as the ceiling, and the walls. Next week the electricians come back in to install lights, plugs and switches. When that is complete, we will be installing the flooring. That will just about wrap up the addition and allow us to move the exhibits in. We are all looking forward to that big day.

First Anniversary Celebration of Our Tenth Anniversary

Prior to the pandemic we had planned for this past May to be a big celebration of the tenth anniversary of our historical society. It was not to be. It would have been unwise to gather together to celebrate when it might have resulted in members spreading the Covid-19 virus. This summer we have made it through these difficult times by having the museum open, by appointment only, for groups of up to five individuals who maintain social distancing and wear masks. Now the Board has begun planning for a major celebration in the spring of 2021. We will be celebrating, belatedly, our tenth anniversary along with the opening of the museum building addition which we have been working on for 18 months now. We hope by then the pandemic will be under control and that we have resumed some level of normal activity and socializing.

2021 Membership Fee Waived

Due to the pandemic the Board of Directors has voted to carry

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What Was It Like Back Then?

This year our newsletters have been featuring a new section called "What Was It Like Back Then?". Each month this section has highlighted how people lived in the 18th and 19th centuries.

With the upcoming holidays, I thought it would be fun to share some of vintage holiday favorites that people don't eat anymore.

Plum Pudding - Like many Christmas favorites, plum pudding is a dish with British roots. Fact: There are no plums in plum pudding. The pudding (which is more like cake) was made with stale bread crumbs, scalded milk, raisins, figs, currants, wine brandy, suet, and spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. The adored dessert was made up to a year before Christmas because it was considered best when aged.



<https://www.eatthis.com/vintage-christmas-dinner-dishes-dont-eat-anymore/>

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President's Letter . . . continued from page 1 . .

2020 memberships over to 2021 without fees. So, if you were a member in 2020 you are now automatically renewed and paid through 2021. You will not receive any renewal reminder in the mail at the end of December this year. If you have already paid your 2021 dues that payment will be credited to your 2022 membership. The Board would like to thank all of the members for their understanding and continued support during this year's difficult situation.

2021 Historical Society Officers

Last month the Board of Directors met via a Zoom to elect officers for 2021. Here's the results.

President - Joyce Hassen

1st V.P. - Chris Knight

2nd V.P. - Ellen Probst

Secretary - Nancy Bonacquisti

Treasurer - Corinne Trexler

Chairman of the Board - Robert Williams

I have been on the Board for eight years now and have enjoyed serving as your President during the past five. I appreciate all of the help I have received along the way from great Boards of Directors and volunteers. Keeping the Society operating and improving is a big job but made easy when there are so many people who pitch in to share the load. Joyce Hassen will be taking over as President beginning January first. I will now move into the position of Chairman of the Board, whose job it is to support the President with anything they need. Joyce has served on the Board since August of 2011, so, we will be in good hands.

Robert Williams, outgoing President

**On behalf of the Board of Directors Have a Merry
Christmas and a Safe and Happy New Year!**



What Was it Like Back Then . . . continued from page 1 . . .



Fruit Cake - The brunt of bad jokes, the outcast fruit cake certainly gets a lot of flak. And only a fruitcake gives someone a fruitcake as a gift for Christmas, right? Fannie Farmer featured a recipe in her 1896 cookbook, and it was a desired dessert.



Mince Pie - Traditionally made with chopped meat, by the turn of the century, the meat in this two-crust pie was commonly replaced with suet or butter, and it also included chopped apples, brandy or rum, dried fruits, and spices. This was also included in Fannie Farmer's cookbook in 1896.



Sugar Plums - Visions of sugar plums danced in children's heads and the sweet confections appeared on Victorian Christmas tables, too. Dried plums or prunes were mixed with cinnamon, cloves, nuts, and other fruits, formed into balls and rolled in sugar, for a very special Christmas candy.

A Letter to Jean Nelson from Clayton Evans (November 2013)

By Chris Knight

Curator's Note: Clayton Evans' estate provided us with an endowment that has made the museum expansion possible.

"Dear Jean,

I nearly fell asleep the other night while reminiscing about the life I had, especially about the island and while I lived there in early days. I then finally decided to write it down on paper. I hope you will enjoy it but if you don't, do not hesitate to start the fire in a woodstove. I trust all is well with you.

With kindest personal regards,

Sincerely,

Clayton

A little boy came to an island. It was a big island to a little boy. He had been brought there by his parents in the early spring, early spring but it was warm enough to swim. He saw death then. A man who had been swimming in a roped off area had drowned. He had been there watching the men in the row boat drag for the body. They brought him to shore and the little boy saw him lying in the water by the break wall. It didn't take long for his mother to see him looking down, so they quickly moved on.

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Help Us Record This Historic Time

By Bob Williams

This is truly an historic time in the world and right here on the island. The island, as you know, is also dealing with the high-water crisis and the ferry dock problem, which led to a lack of being able to bring sand to the island to aid in shoreline protection.

I have a favor to ask.

Decades from now people visiting our museum will be asking what was happening on the island during the pandemic and how did it affect the islanders. I believe that, as a Society, we need to not only make available the history we know of but also to record history as it happens.

Recently I received an email from the Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) describing a project they have undertaken for the Library of Michigan, to record stories of this time in Michigan's history. Some of the text from that email is copied for you at the bottom of this message. HSM is asking Michiganders to write their story of their experiences during this historic time.

Being quite involved in family tree research, I have many times wondered what my ancestors were doing and thinking during events such as the Great Depression, the world wars, or the pandemic of 1918. As a result, I began a diary about eight weeks ago, for the purpose of leaving a record for my descendants. I also plan to leave a copy of that diary in the files of our museum. I would like to encourage you to add to that file by writing a bit about your experiences during this time in your life on the island. It is our intent to collect all of the articles received and compile them into one document that will not only be on file at the museum but will also be submitted to the Library of Michigan to become a part of their project.

If you are interested in being a part of this project, please send your writings to me at xharpspah@aol.com. If you would like a few ideas to get started, you can see the HSM webpage about their project at: <https://bit.ly/2ynT8rj>

Thank you and stay safe.

Robert Williams

BELOW IS PART OF THE EMAIL I RECEIVED FROM HSM ABOUT THEIR PROJECT

The Historical Society of Michigan is sponsoring an effort of the Library of Michigan to collect your stories of life during the coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in many different ways, and we are all eyewitnesses to the events that have been unfolding in the last few weeks. This is a time for us to record our daily experiences, thoughts, and feelings in diary form, either in writing or video.

The Library of Michigan and the Historical Society of Michigan envision collecting and preserving these stories of our daily lives during the crisis to provide future historians, researchers, and students with information and data on life in Michigan communities during the pandemic.

Please take the time each day to record your activities, thoughts, and/or feelings in diary form. The entries can be handwritten, typed, or in video format, and they can be as long or short as you want. Don't worry about handwriting, spelling, or punctuation. The goal is to capture your personal experiences.

Please consider saving and sharing your story of life during this pandemic for the Library of Michigan.

A Letter to Jean Nelson . . . continued from page 3 . . .

How they spent the rest of the day he doesn't know but it wasn't long before he was put to bed in the nursery at the back of the park. He stayed around that building for a long time but was able to run around the park but not to go out of it. In his wanderings he discovered that a very nice lady ran a Fish, Frog Legs and Chicken dinner place to serve the people who came to the park on the Tashmoo.

There were many times that his dad would take him to the dock where the steamers came. He couldn't pronounce the names of the boats but could tell them apart by the number of smoke stacks. As he learned later the Steamer Tashmoo was a one stacker and the Waketa had two stacks. So, when he saw either one coming, he would yell to his father that a one stacker or a two stacker was coming. He was fascinated by the steamboats, as he called them, that went up and down the river and he wondered why those going up the river disappeared very shortly after passing. So, he asked his father where they went. His dad never answered him. He never found out until after he went sailing on one of those steamboats in 1941.

In one of his wanderings one day he discovered that there was a hole under the fence behind the house that served the fried chicken. He also learned that the lady who ran the place was Mrs. Woods and that her husband was Tom Woods. She knew of course that he wasn't supposed to be outside of the park, so she had one of the local girls find his dad. In the meantime, she would give him a piece of pie to keep him there until his dad came. By this time his dad was getting pretty tired of his running where he wasn't supposed to go so the dad brought him back to the nursery, got a short piece of rope and tied him to a tree in the front yard. There his mother could watch him. Of course, all the ladies who came for their children saw him and made comments. Mrs. Woods hired the local girls to wait tables for they were busy just after the Tashmoo came in. Again, it wasn't long before the Park Superintendent fixed the hole. So, no more pies.

This only lasted for the summer for in the meantime his folks had been hired to teach at the Island school. They had to rent a place to live. As he remembers it was the Patton place across the road from the little white house on the McMillian farm. The Patton house was a two-story building and, in the bedroom, upstairs his mother had placed a table with geraniums to keep over the winter. This table was placed in a back corner so the plants would not freeze. He used this bedroom to play in with his toys and the corner was just the place to put his garage. So, the table was moved in front of the window. Naturally the plants froze that night for what kid would remember to move it back to where it belonged. He only stayed at the Patton place for a year.

They moved to a cement block house on the south channel of the river. At about this time he was old to enough notice the freighters going by, also about this time the folks got a collie dog (Shep) for them. This was the house that he remembered having a bath. His dad brought in a washtub and sat it on the floor. His mother poured water from the tea kettle and then enough cold water to cool it down. Then into the tub he went. It was also about this time that his dad bought a Model A Ford car. When dad brought the car home from the dealership, he was playing at the home of the Park Superintendent. He thought it was so new that he could see his face reflected in the shiny black paint. With the folks teaching again for the second year Shep would run after the car all the way to school and back home again after school was out.

The school house sat all by itself quite a way from any house and was a two-room building. The land it sat on was part of the Little farm. Being a two-room building it was painted white and had a solid cement porch across the front by the front door. The bell was in a cupola at the top of the building that had the porch. There was no running water, toilets or play rooms.

Tall narrow windows were on both sides of the front room with desks facing away from the front door. The teacher's desk was facing the students. On her right as she faced the students was a long low table where she held class. At noon the table was cleared, and the family lunch was spread out. The other students either ate at their desks or outside if the

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A Letter to Jean Nelson . . . continued from page 5 . . .

weather was nice. After that the games would start. Fox and Geese in the winter snow or Hide and Seek in the fall and spring. His mother taught the first four grades plus kindergarten and his father taught the fifth through the eighth grade. The windows in the other room were of the regular type and were only on the left side of the children as they faced the front of the room. The two toilets were outside, one for the girls and one for the boys. Each child brought their own drinking glass. His dad tried for years to get the school board to standardize the building, but the board could not see covering the windows on one side, so it was never done.

One day one of the boys who lived on what is now the state highway had been trapping and, on this day, came to school stinking from trapping a skunk. He smelled to high heaven. So, the teacher talked to him and sent him home to change clothes. He came back to school and was not marked late nor absent. He never did come back to school like that again. Even Shep got up and walked out. Shep slept in the back of the room while school was in session.

The following summer the family moved back across the road from the Patton house to the white house on the McMillan farm where that summer this little boy came down with Scarlet Fever. He and his mother were quarantined for a month while his dad stayed at the McLane home bringing food and other necessities to him and his mother. At the end of month, the house had to be vacated while the County sealed it up and fumigated it. By this time, he had a Fordson

tractor to play with. He was growing in height some and could do more things, so he made a scraper to move dirt while playing in the driveway. While on a trip to Niagara Falls his dad bought him a set of plows to have the tractor pull it. He still had the tractor and a few years ago sent it to nephews in South Carolina for safekeeping.

After the white house he moved to the Osgood home, again along the river but no boats. He loved to go to the



Source: Example of Fordson tractor toy - <https://345auction.hibid.com/lot/48897322/antique-arcade-toy-cast-iron-fordson-tractor/?q=&ref=catalog>

McMillan home nearby and see all the birds mounted under glass on a small table in the living room. Each winter the ice would flow down the St. Clair river from Lake Huron and would reach the Island between Christmas and New Year. Further down the river from where he lived the ice would jam and stop flowing. A few days after it stopped the men of the island would mark a path on the solid ice with old Christmas trees. Then the residents could drive their cars across. It was during this time that his parents were able to go to a show at the theatre in Algonac. Every Wednesday the theatre would have a thriller along with the regular movie. Sometimes it was Tom Mix or Hoot Gibson but always the girl was left in a perilous spot until the next week. This lasted until the ice was no longer safe to drive on.

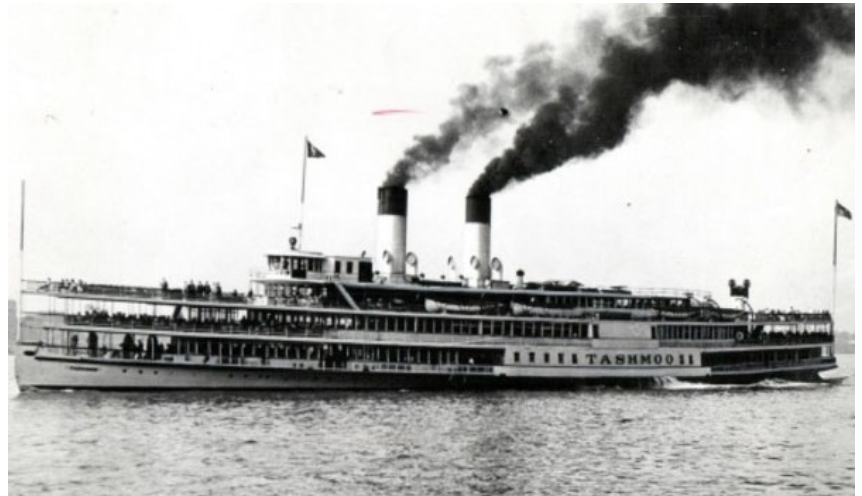
During this time the folks had purchased about 18 acres from Mr. Little and started construction on their house. He remembered staying with Aunt Belle Little whose house was at the head of the Little road and the one that came from the ferry. This little boy was in the fourth grade by then and was a little behind in his multiplication tables, so he sat behind the big parlor stove and tried to study. It didn't last long for there was a chore to be done. He always had a chore to do, if nothing else than bringing in the coal for the stoves.

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A Letter to Jean Nelson . . . continued from page 6 . . .

Source: <https://www.farmcollector.com/farm-life/the-outhouse-zmrz14mayzbea>

Just a few weeks later he learned that the older boys had talked young Bill Harms into getting a pass from his father, the Park Superintendent, for a trip to Port Huron on the Tashmoo. He was supposed to stay with Mrs. MacDonald that day. Could he go along with the older boys? Oh no, he was just too young and little. He didn't think so. So, on the morning that he was to stay with Mrs. MacDonald he went there but it irked him to stay. With nothing to do, with no toys and nobody to play with so about nine that morning he started to walk to the boat. He arrived there just



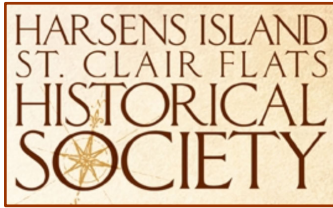
Source: <https://historicedetroit.org/buildings/tashmoo>

before the boat came but in time for the pass to include him. He did love the trip.

Of course, Mrs. MacDonald missed him and becoming frantic went to his mother. They looked everywhere but never thought to ask if he was on the boat with the older boys. When he returned, he was talked to very strongly and had to apologize to Mrs. MacDonald, which he had to do.

In the late summer his parents moved from his home on the island to Detroit so he could have better schooling. He started that fall in the fifth grade at the Fairbanks school which was just across the alley from the apartment where they lived. The following year they moved to Highland Park which had even better schools. Here they lived until he graduated from high school.

So ended his association with the Island."



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>

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The historical society is still collecting photos and stories about the high water of 2019 and 2020. Or if you would like to add your family history to the museum archives, I can help you capture your memories for future generations.

Please contact our interim curator, Chris Knight
(chris.knight@comcast.net).

Mark Your Calendars
New Year's Eve Treat Sale at
the Harsens Island Museum
December 31 10:00 to 1:00 PM



COVID-19 safety measures will be
instituted for the Treat Sale

Museum Hours

Winter Schedule

Winter Schedule (September through May)

Closed but Open by appointment