



Message from the President . . .

Happy April!

As I write this today, there are still large snowflakes in the air . . . not a welcome sight in April, but since it *is* April, I know that winter is on borrowed time and spring with warmer weather and sunshine will be here soon. Freighters beginning their first voyages, birds migrating back, and ice-free waters are also sure signs that summer cottages and homes will be open, boats will be back on the water, gardens will be in bloom, and spring / summer will be in full swing soon!!

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, University of Michigan Flint students will be on the Island as part of their “Walking on Water: History, Enterprise, and Community on Lower Michigan Rivers” class. They have set the date for Sunday, April 10th and will be around Sans Souci, the Flats, and possibly the DNR site. Although their experience is walking the areas they visit, the distance they want to cover will require them to take their bus around parts on the Island, especially between Sans Souci and the turnaround. We look forward to their visit.

The Board continues to work hard getting ready for the upcoming museum season, with finalizing the museum remodel and display refresh, with a new addition or two! I can’t thank Chris Knight, Corinne Trexler, Ellen Probst and the Eidts enough for their hard work on the museum over the winter!! Plan on joining us Saturday, May 28th of Memorial Day weekend to see all that has been done to the space.

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Renovation Project

The renovation team is very excited about showcasing some new exhibits this spring when we reopen on Memorial Weekend. Two of the new exhibits are about the Island’s early history and the Harsen family.



The museum’s store is ready for visitors and new items have been ordered.



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

Also - The Henry Ford has extended their loan of the *Tashmoo* Bell, so it will remain on display in the museum.

We will also soon be looking for volunteers to host the museum on Saturdays and Sundays this summer, please consider spending a couple of hours on a weekend (or two) this summer as a host . . . it's great fun and we really need the assistance.

Thank you to those who have renewed your membership, we truly appreciate your support!

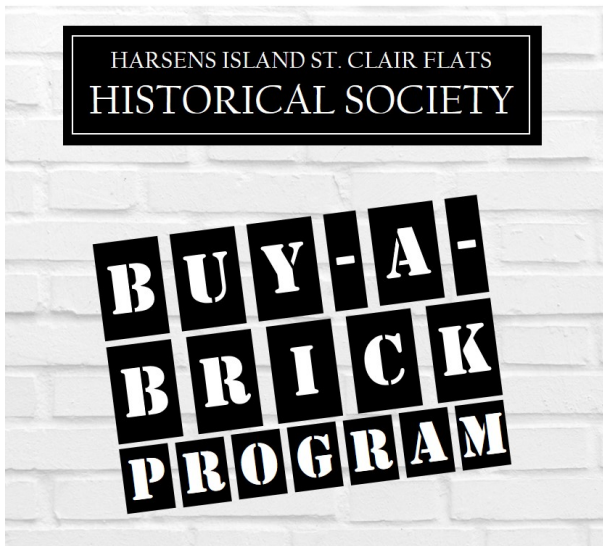
Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society Building Renovation BUY-A-BRICK Program

In 2020 we celebrated the completion of the Clayton Evans Room Addition and in 2021 the completion of the renovation of the Karen and Drew Peslar Library. We have now begun work on the final phase of our construction, the renovation of the large exhibit space at the entrance to the museum.

To help maintain a healthy financial position for our Historical Society, we are reactivating our BUY-A-BRICK Program.



Members and friends can support the Historical Society and assure the continuance of the museum by donating \$350 to our BUY-A-BRICK program. Donors will be recognized or may designate a memorial on one of the bricks inside the museum. Of course, they may remain anonymous if they wish. Donations of any amount to support the renovation efforts are welcome and appreciated. To sign up, or if you have questions, contact Bob Williams at 248-388-0465 or xharpspah@aol.com.

BUY-A-BRICK Order Form is included at the end of this newsletter.



Harsens Once Summer Home for Aristocrats

By Bill Bunn – Times Herald – May 08, 1983

The museum library is a treasure trove of interesting stories about the island and its residents. I found this article which talks about a European banking family, Rothschild, who had a summer home on the island. William E. Harm and Stephen E. Clemens also recount some of their memories. Here is the article.

Harsens once summer home for aristocrats

By **BILL BUNN**
Times Herald Reporter

CLAY TOWNSHIP — European aristocracy once dwelt along a Harsens Island shoreline section known in French as *without care*.

But much knowledge about their residency has disappeared, as have all but one of their stately homes.

Residences that temporarily were among the world's marvels stood at Sans Souci, now a cluster of houses and businesses on the east side of the island about a third of the way down the St. Clair River's south channel.

Just before the turn of the century, the houses were considered to be models of futuristic design. But changing times consigned three of them to physical decay and dead memories.

One or two of the homes may have been exhibited in 1893 during the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, disassembled, and re-erected at Sans Souci.

Longtime residents agree that the homes then were used by members of the Rothschild family, famous European bankers and government financiers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

But more specific information has eluded some of the people who are most interested in Harsens Island history.

"I came to a dead end" in trying to uncover the origins of the houses, Fred A. Flowerday said. He is chairman of The Delta News, an annual publication of reminiscences for the island's 2,500 homeowners.

George Helm, well-known as a champion of islanders' heritage, has been equally baffled.

Much of the island's history has been preserved orally rather than written, Helm said. He hopes to organize a group of islanders to collect this oral history while there's still time.

The effort may be too late to save some of the information.

William E. Harm remembers the houses from his boyhood. But "The older ones who probably know more about them than I do are dead," he said.

Harm lives near where the homes used to stand on South Channel Drive. Now 68, he came here in his sixth year.

Two of the dwellings were built here, he believes. "They were quite ornate houses. They had a lot of gingerbread on them."

A home was on each corner of a section of William LaCroix's Subdivision that was surrounded by the river and narrow channels and connected to the island by two bridges, Harm said.

The most unusual was a bamboo dwelling called the Java house. The Rothschilds used it as a dining hall, he said.

It was torn down before 1930. "Nobody took care of it, and it just got to be falling apart," he said.

One house burned in the 1920s, he said. Another was demolished in the 1950s, except for its large boathouse, which has been converted to a home. "It was a beautiful old house in its day," he said of the original structure, which had been covered with cedar shingles.

See House, Page 6D

Did You Know?

In June of 1822, (almost 200 years ago!) the United States and Great Britain agreed to the South Channel border between Canada and the United States, making Harsens Island part of the United States.



Clay Days in Algonac, May 5 – 8 will celebrate this huge milestone!

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Summer Home of Aristocrats . . . continued from page 3 . . .



Stephen E. Clemens Sr., formerly of Melvindale, fell in love with this house on Harsens Island and bought it in the mid-1960s. Not until after that did he and his wife, Martha, learn that the home is the only remaining one of four at Sans Souci that were

Times Herald

used about the turn of the century by the Rothschilds, a European banking family. Specific information about the origin of the houses may have vanished along with much of the island's oral history.

House

Continued from Page 1D

Harm wishes he'd bought that property, once offered for \$5,000. The cost of maintaining many island properties during the Depression caused people to virtually abandon them, he said.

Harm is closely connected with the area's history.

His father and grandfather, both also named William, managed Tashmoo Park, one of the docks used by the excursion steamer to and from Detroit. He helped operate the park during summers in his teens.

When the Tashmoo sank in the mid-1930s after hitting a rock in the Detroit River, "That sunk us, too," Harm said.

The occupants of the surviving house weren't familiar with Sans Souci history when they bought the large gray dwelling in the mid-1960s as a summer residence.

Stephen E. Clemens Jr. said, "I just fell in love with this house," the rooms of which are large and bright and decorated with rich brown woodwork against white walls.

Clemens, who had two motels and a grocery store in Melvindale before retiring here three years ago, and his wife,

Martha, began learning about the home's origin during their first year of ownership.

They also have a print of a painting of the four structures, standing alone on their South Channel Drive lots, identified as "Sans Souci Villas."

But the couple hasn't been able to obtain a clear understanding from reports of faded memories.

Mrs. Clemens said, "There are so many conflicting stories that it's hard to get down to the truth of the whole thing."

The house is outliving its history.

The couple had to make repairs, such as installing a new foundation to support sagging walls of cracked plaster. Renovations have included enclosing the porch with glass to form an extra room.

"We've changed a lot of things in it. The authenticity is gone," Mrs. Clemens said.

This and the chronicle of the homes may remain that way. As Harm said when first asked for an account of their origin, "I think you may be on a wild goose chase."

HARSENS ISLAND HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



The museum renovation project started in 2019 with the ground breaking for the museum expansion. Three year later the painting, new flooring, and exhibit upgrade is complete. **Join us for the room dedication and to see the new exhibits.**

SATURDAY, MAY 28TH

Event Starts at 10:30 AM

Blowing of the J.B. Ford Steam Whistle
Ribbon Cutting for Museum Main Room Renovation
Nancy Boulton / Gary Grout Room Dedication
Refreshments after the ceremony

Downtown Sans Souci / Historical Museum
3058 South Channel Harsens Island

Harsens Island Churches

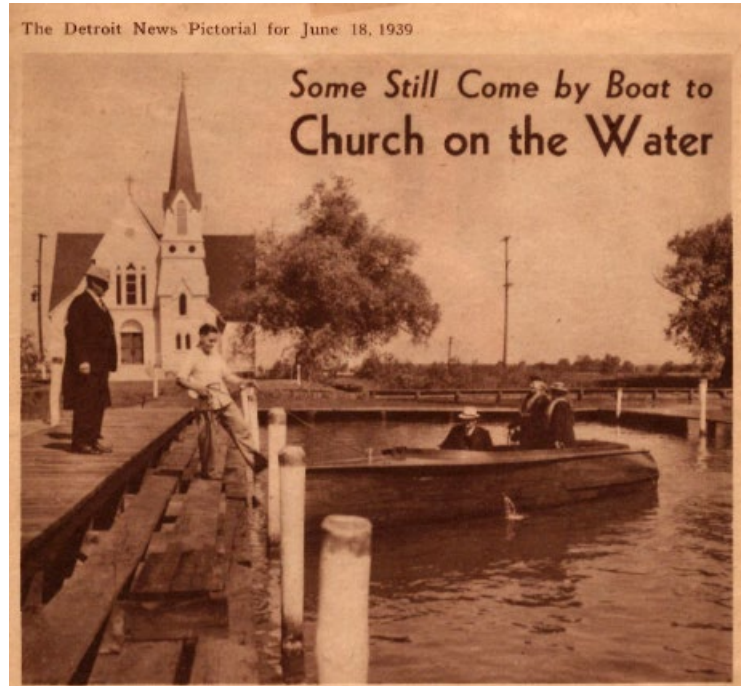
St. Mark's Church

From 1929 St. Clair Flats Association Bulletin

"A building was begun at once to seat 110 people, and the first services were held July 25, 1897. The building was designed by Peter Dederich, who designed many of the now older churches in Detroit. Dedication ceremonies took place August 17, 1897. The Very Rev. P.J. Baumgartner, Chancellor of the Diocese, representing the Bishop. Very Rev. Dean Wermers was also present. These two clergymen were well known to the past generation of Detroiters. This building took care of the needs of the Summer Colony until 1923."

"On October 3, 1923, an addition was started which would accommodate about 100 more people and at the time was thought would be ample for the future. This new part was added by cutting the building just forward of the Sanctuary and moving the Sanctuary back twenty feet, and then the new part built in connecting the two old parts."

"In the beginning it was necessary for the people who lived below the church to come to church in boats. Very few owning boats they chartered a tug which was to call at all points from the Old Club to the church. The names of these places, some of them since burned or under different managements, are surely familiar to all "Old Time Flatters"; Old Club, Doemers, Mervue, Rushmere, Star Island, Marshland, Riverside, Kraut's, Joe Bedore's, and Muir's Landing. The tug would bring the people to a point in front of the church, where a scow was anchored, this being pushed ashore by hand. Some of the skeleton of the scow can still be seen in front of the church, and it kind of reminds one what difficulty the old folks overcame to attend Mass on Sunday."



Transportation to St. Mary's Church 1897

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*Harsens Island Churches . . . continued from page 6 . . .***St. Paul's Church**

"In March 1924, the Rev. E. L. C. English, who was engaged at that time as a missionary in the dioceses of Duluth, was called to become rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Algonac. In this pastoral visitation he found that the people of Harsens's Island were without the ministrations of a Protestant church or minister. He offered his services, which were accepted, and began his work there as missionary June 15, 1924. Prior to that time, the community had been privileged to have services through a Methodist minister and a Baptist minister. These services were held in the school house or private homes and later a community hall was built to house the social activities of the Community Club and in the summer a church school."

"On July 1925, the building committee made up of Mr. J.T. Gibson, chairman, Mr. Edward Neumann, secretary, Mrs. Frances G. Evans and Rev. E.L.C. English, met at the home of the chairman and made plans for the present St. Paul's Protestant Church."

"Four sites were offered for the church building, one by Miss Belle Little, One by Mr. Sam Gore, one by Mr. Peter LaCroix and a fourth by Mrs. Neil McMillan. The site offered by Mrs. McMillan on Orchard Road; Grande Pointe was accepted."

"On September 18, 1925, work on the foundation was completed and a ceremony was held for the laying of the cornerstone. The St. Andrew's Society Bagpipe Kiltie Band and many notable people were present. After the building was framed, the bricks had to be hauled from Detroit to Grande Point via the steamer *Wauketa* and deliveries had to be halted when the river froze over, consequently work ceased the Wednesday before Christmas and was not resumed until May."

"With the help of the D.J. Osgood Construction Company, the interior of the building was finished and decorated, and the dedication date was set for July 11, 1926. Bishop Page, with fitting ceremonies, dedicated the church and confirmed a class of eighteen."



Scottish Highlander Band July 11, 1926



Dedication gathering July 11, 1926

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2022

PLEASE NOTE: All events and locations in the following schedule are tentative

Date	Day	Time	Event
April 9	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum or Zoom
May 14	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum or Zoom
May 28	Saturday	10:30 AM – 4:00 PM	Museum Opens and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
	Sunday	12:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Museum Open
	Monday	11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Museum Open
June 11	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
June TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
July 9	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
July TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
August 13	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
August 13	Saturday	TBD	Annual Membership Meeting at the Museum
August TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
September 3	Saturday	11:00 AM	Labor Day Parade
September 10	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
October 1	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Annual Pie Sale
October 8	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
November 6	Sunday	2:00 PM	Remembrance Edmund Fitzgerald
November 12	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Planning Meeting via Zoom
December 3	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk
December 10	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom



Museum Hours

Summer Schedule (June, July, August, September)
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

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The historical society is looking to add to its collection. We accept donations of artifacts, photos, documents, and stories related to the island and surrounding area. If you would like to add your family history to the museum archives, we can help you capture your memories for future generations.

Please contact our curator; Chris Knight at chris.knight@comcast.net

Is your house more than 100 years old?

The Michigan Heritage Home™ program recognizes houses that were constructed at least 100 years ago and are in substantially original condition. That designation comes with a handsome cast-aluminum plaque that lets everyone know that your home has its own rich heritage and historical significance. This distinguished plaque, authorized by the Historical Society of Michigan, will remind both new and longtime community members of your home's contribution to your shared heritage.



For more information [click here to go to the](#)

[Michigan Heritage Program](#)

<https://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home>

