



### *Message from the President . . .*

Happy Spring!

It officially looks like spring with the leaves budding, flowers beginning to bloom, birds chirping, small goslings following closely behind protective parents, and boaters braving the first 'warm' days on the water.

I spent part of a Sunday afternoon in April with the students from U of M Flint as they visited the Island. None of them had been on the Island before, and it was a pleasure accompanying them as their bus drove to the turnaround. I believe the unique landscape of the Flats surprised them, and the gorgeous sunny day provided beautiful distant views of the lake, lighthouses, and downtown Detroit. Seeing that perspective provided them a better understanding of how and why the steamships could get here in those early days of resorts and hotels that populated Harsens Island. Their professor was very grateful for the time that the Historical Society spent with them, especially the Walpole Island presentation by Sue Wrobel, and their time in the museum (albeit still under a bit of renovation during their visit). Thank you to all who participated and made it a rewarding day for the students.

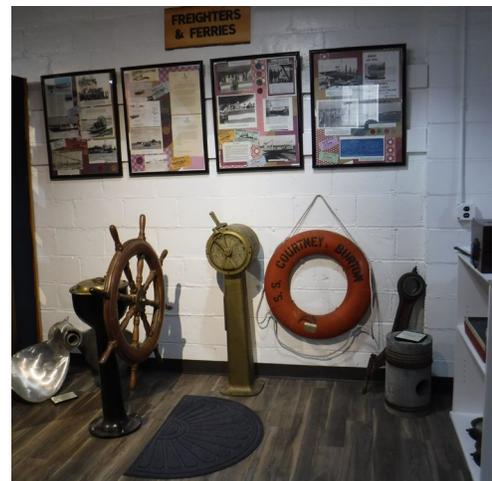
The museum is entering the final phases of the renovation, with the displays being finalized and put into place. It looks fabulous and we can't wait to share it with you on Memorial Weekend!!

The Board is completely dedicated to the Historical Society and maintaining the museum, but each of us are volunteers and much of our time is spent running the

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### *Renovation Project*

The museum opens for the season in a few weeks, Saturday of Memorial Weekend. The exhibits for the Old Club, the hotels from the Golden Era, and the Freighters and Ferries are ready. The rest of the new exhibits are in progress.



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

business of the Historical Society and Museum, and it takes more than just the Board to keep the museum open during the summer. As such, we are still 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. Contact any Board member for more information.

As always, thank you for your continued support!

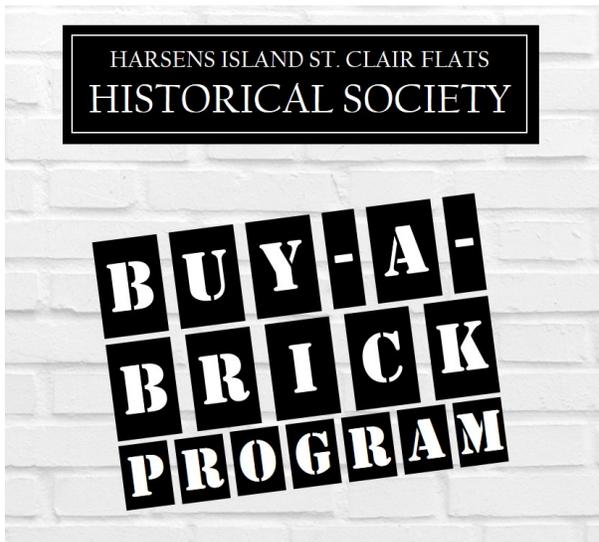
*Joyce*

*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](mailto:xharpspah@aol.com).

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



## University of Michigan Students Visit Harsens Island and the Historical Museum

### Contribution by Sue Wrobel

On Sunday, April 10, our museum hosted a visit by the University of Michigan students and their instructors. Their visit was part of a four-day journey, that started in Port Huron, to research the history of the St. Clair River and its people. To prepare for the final stop on Harsens Island, the students read, "Spirit Stories Told by the Sears Family of the St. Clair Flats." This book was written by Stephen Hadden and can be found at our museum.

Once on the Island, the students got to enjoy brunch at the Schoolhouse Grille. They seemed surprised and delighted by the old school. After enjoying a wide variety of delicious foods prepared by Kristin, they relished a stroll by the canal behind the school. They were not disappointed by a show of muskrats, birds, and turtles.



At the museum, the students were given a tour and lecture on the history of the islands and the indigenous people. After their visit to the museum, they boarded their bus and headed to the turnaround with Joyce Hassen as their guide and instructor. Many students remarked that Harsens Island was the highlight of their studies and their instructors overheard many say, "who knew this entire world was here?"

# 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**

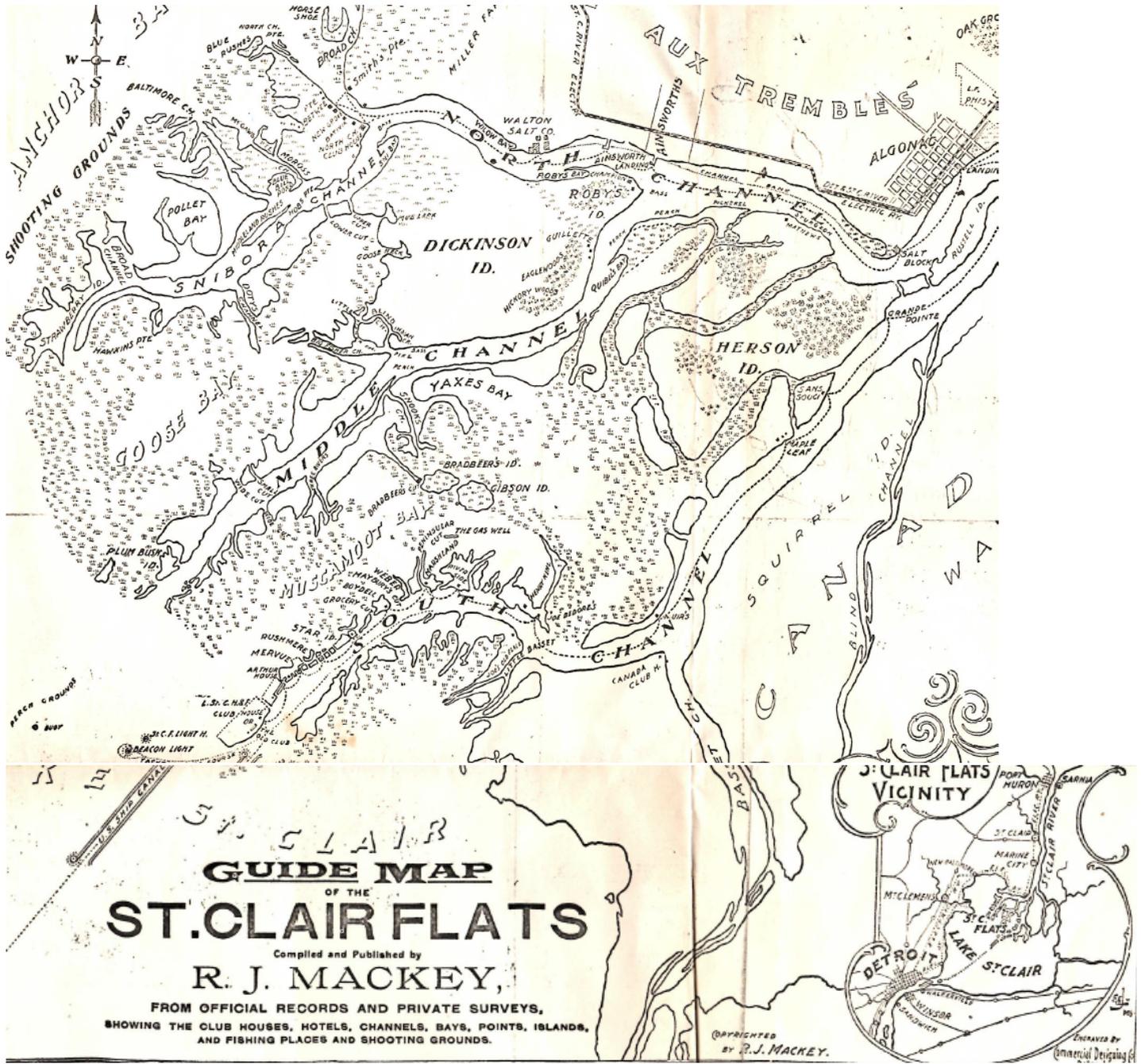
**Event Starts at 10:30 AM**

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

### Guide Map of the St. Clair Flats from 1895

If you are interested in history and cartography, stop in to visit the museum. There are several maps of Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats from different periods in history. Take a close look this gem. Notice Harsens Island is named Herson Island. Look at the area by Muscamoot Bay, all the clubs and hotels from 'The Golden Era' are identified. This map was created 65 years before the Channel Cut-Off was developed for the freighters.

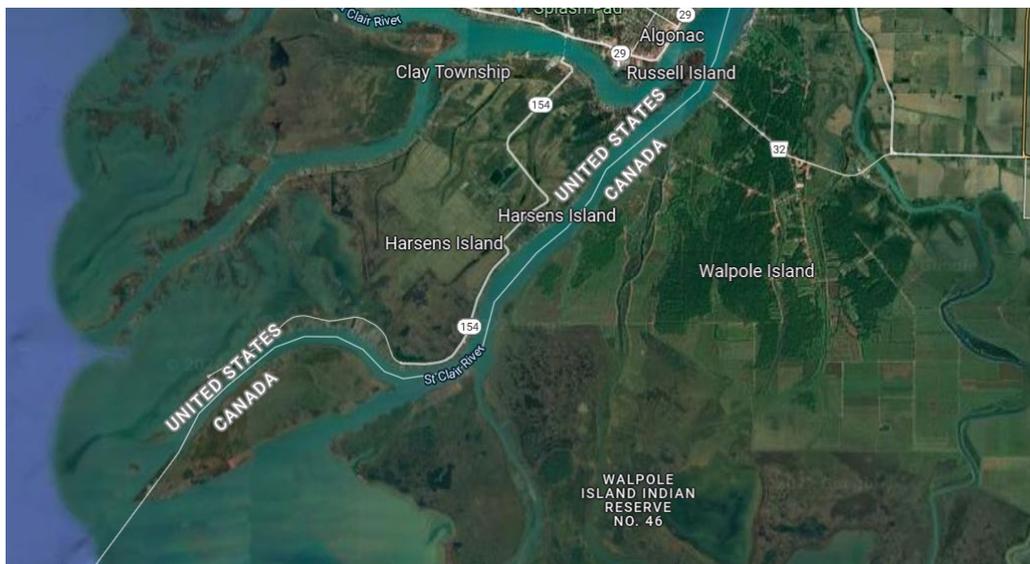


## The International Boundary between the US and Canada

I found a single photocopied page, from what appears to be from a larger document. Title, date, and source is unknown. Here is an excerpt from the page which I found interesting.

“By the end of the War of 1812, the International boundary was set, further clouding the issue of who rightfully owns the Harsen’s Island area, virtually ignoring any claims the natives may have had for the land. Eventually a boundary committee decided the issue by awarding the Harsen’s Island area to the United States.

To further exemplify the somewhat loose awarding of the area in question, arose in 1870 involving Hiram Little of Wallaceburg a Captain who was given a contract to provide cord wood and supplies to a work crew. At the time, a ship canal was being dredged through the marshy areas near Lake St. Clair. By this time shipping was increasing and the need for a deep, free flowing canal was required. During one trip to the work area, Captain Little’s ship was seized by U.S. officials who claimed he was operating illegally since he was in U.S. waters. Little protested claiming he was in Canadian water, challenging U.S. officials to prove their contention. After searching of documents, including contact with the Crown in England who supplied early charts. Captain Little was ultimately proven correct. To avoid further embarrassment, the U.S. officials simply moved the international boundary east further infringing on Canadian (and native) land. The present St. Clair River from Russel Island to Lake St. Clair has been the International boundary line between Canada and the United States ever since, although who legally should own Harsen’s Island and the St. Clair Delta area remains speculative in some eyes.”



### 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

Contact Corinne Trexler for additional information 313-530-9173

## St. Clair Flats Range Lights

After having been appointed by the Board of Navy Commissioners to examine and select lighthouse sites in the Great Lakes, Lieutenant G.J. Pendergrast embarked on a lengthy voyage during the summer of 1837 and included the following on Lake St. Clair in his report:

At its head, [Lake St. Clair] becomes very shoal, particularly at the mouth of St. Clair river, where extensive flats make out, on which there is but ten feet water. The channel is exceedingly crooked for three or four miles, and in some places very narrow. These flats are dreaded by all persons and are regarded as the most vexatious impediments they have to encounter. Vessels have been known to be two, and even three weeks in getting over them. I was unable to make any examinations at this place, and therefore do not feel qualified to propose any plan for its improvement. I may be permitted to remark, however, that I think the subject deserves the immediate attention of Government, and that no expense should be spared in removing the obstruction.

Not daring to enter St. Clair River from Lake St. Clair at night, mariners were forced to anchor and wait for daylight in what is still known today as Anchor Bay. On March 3, 1853, Congress appropriated \$10,000 “for making the foundation of two light-houses, one to be a beacon light, on the Saint Clair Flats; the places to be selected and the work executed under the direction of the Topographical Bureau.” John James Abert, head of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, informed the Lighthouse Board that the foundations for the proposed structures would cost much more than \$10,000 and recommended an additional \$20,000 be obtained. Congress provided \$20,000 for completing the lighthouse foundations on August 3, 1854, but the structures were not placed in operation until November 1, 1859.



[St. Clair Flats Rear Lighthouse in 1904](#)  
Photograph courtesy U.S. Coast Guard

At the time the range lights were built, St. Clair River emptied into Lake St. Clair through seven principal mouths, and the range was built to mark the South Channel, which was the most used. The rear range light consisted of a cylindrical tower connected to a two-story dwelling by a covered passageway. Built with yellow brick, this lighthouse stood on a pier foundation, and its fourth-order fixed white light shone from a height of thirty-seven feet above the pier and forty-four feet above the lake. The front tower, also known as the beacon light, was constructed of yellow brick on a pier located 1,000 feet south west of the rear light. A sixth-order Fresnel lens installed in the lantern room of the front tower produced a fixed white light at a height of twenty-three feet above the pier and twenty-eight feet above the lake.

After completing the lights, the engineer in charge of their construction noted: “It is to be regretted that there is not a sufficient balance on hand to construct

*continued on page 8 . . .*

*St. Clair Flats Range Lights . . . continued from page 7 . . .*

a suspension footbridge between the two lights. It would enable the keeper to perform his duties more regularly in stormy weather.”

In 1867, the Lighthouse Board noted that the timber crib for the beacon light had settled some, but that “no damage of any importance” was expected as a result. Two years later, the Board reported that the settling cribs had indeed led to some damage as both towers were “slightly cracked” and the plastering of the dwelling was off in several places. Making repairs, however, was not deemed important as a cut across the flats was being dredged nearby and \$60,000 had been appropriated for range lights to mark the new improved channel.



The new St. Clair Flats Canal Range Lights were put in operation in 1871, but the old range lights, known officially as the St. Clair Flats Range Lights, remained in operation. A survey made on May 18, 1873, found that the north corner of the crib for the front light of the old range was 1.51 feet lower than the south corner and that, at its focal plane, the front tower was five-and-a-half inches out of plumb.

Two-and-a-half months later, another survey found that the north corner was now 1.665 feet lower than the south corner, and the tower was 5.95 inches out of plumb. To correct this growing problem, Congress allocated \$10,000 on June 23, 1874, for “rebuilding the crib and tower at the Saint Clair Flats light station.” The crib and front tower were rebuilt in 1874, and the following year, it was found that the heavy masses of ice of the past winter had not disturbed the new crib in the least. The rear crib received some attention in 1889, when it and its deck were repaired.

In 1899, the lighthouse tender *Amaranth* delivered materials for rebuilding the boathouse on each pier and for repointing and cement-washing the exterior of both towers and the dwelling. The entire superstructure of the rear foundation crib was rebuilt and its deck planking renewed. Ten iron plates that protected the crib were taken off, straightened, and then put back in place. A fence was built around the top of the rear crib, and the boat crane was moved from the front crib to the rear crib.

St. Clair Flats Range was discontinued at the close of navigation in 1907, but on August 27, 1915, the range was re-established with the front light showing a white flash every second, and the rear light displaying a white light that was alternately on for one second and off for one second. By 1921, only small craft and tugs towing rafts were using the old channel as it had a depth of just twelve feet. The range lights were discontinued in 1934, and the dwelling at the rear light was torn down around this time.

Information sourced from <https://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=706>

# Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2022

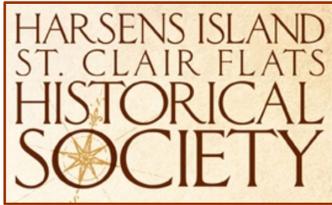
PLEASE NOTE: All events and locations in the following schedule are **tentative**

| Date         | Day      | Time               | Event                                    |
|--------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 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

|   |
|---|
| <b>Summer Schedule</b><br>(June, July, August, September) |
| Saturdays 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM                              |
| Sundays 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM                                |
| <b>Winter Schedule (October through April)</b>            |
| Closed but Open by appointment                            |



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

**Mailing Address:**

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[www.harsensislandhistory.org](http://www.harsensislandhistory.org)

**HISCFHS Board of Directors 2022**

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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](mailto: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](http://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home)

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