



Message from the President . . .

Happy Labor Day!

We recently hosted the Annual Membership Meeting at the museum. At that meeting, I presented a Year in Review, highlighting what we have done and accomplished since the last meeting. Thought I would take the opportunity present the highlights again. The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society has accomplished much since our last annual meeting (August 2021):

- Participated in the Labor Day Parade and hosted numerous visitors at the museum that day!
- Closed the museum in the fall and moved everything from the original building. Spent the winter replacing and fixing the floor, painting walls, re-designing displays, re-assembling displays, getting new displays, and re-stocking the store and Kids Korner. So much work and donation of time was made over the winter to make the space new again.
- Hosted the annual Pie Sale.
- Hosted the Cookie Walk.
- In April, welcomed 15 University of Michigan, Flint students and their professor to the Island. They started their day at the Schoolhouse Grille for breakfast, then headed to the museum for a presentation from Sue Wrobel on Walpole Island. They explored the museum (which was still a work in process) and businesses in Sans Souci. They then drove to the turn-around and I went with them, narrating some stories and highlights of the Flats.
- Re-opened the museum on Memorial Day weekend with a ribbon cutting ceremony.
- Started the speaker series again with a great turn-out to hear Brenda Williams discuss her research on Frances Harsen, wife of Jacob Harsen II.

During the meeting we also presented the election results. Nancy Bonacquisti was re-elected, and a new board member was elected; Tom Pendolino. After the Annual Meeting was adjourned, the Monthly Board meeting was called to order. Officers were elected and results were as follows:

2022 Historical Society Officers

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

continued on page 2 . . .

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

Thank you so very much to our Board and the volunteers that make all this possible. We have set a high bar the last couple seasons with the addition and remodel of the museum. The coming year into 2023, we need to focus on the museum's infra-structure such as a new roof, utility / furnace room improvements and possibly a technology solution. We are committed to continue supporting the community. We still have a lot to do this season – participating in the Labor Day 2022 parade, hosting the Pie Sale and the Cookie Walk, and the Edmund Fitzgerald Remembrance planned for November.

As always, thank you for your continued support!

Joyce

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

Museum Visitors

Mid-August we had a group of seniors from the Village of East Harbor (New Baltimore) stop in for a visit. Ellen Probst and Chris Knight welcomed the seniors who came in to see all the displays and learn about the Harsens Island history. The group also did some shopping at the Waterfront Shoppe.



continued on page 7 ...

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Museum Hosts

By Corinne Trexler

As summer winds down, I would like to take this opportunity to say **THANK YOU** to everyone who has volunteered as a Museum Host this summer season. As a part of the team who worked through the past 3 winters to reimagine and redesign our museum displays, I'm proud of what we've accomplished. But without volunteers to host on the weekend, our doors cannot be open to visitors to share our history. I'm grateful for the time you gave us! This summer we've had many returning hosts, and several new ones. I'd like to share some of their comments in hopes that more of our members will consider hosting with us next summer.

Returning host, **Linda Schoonover**, is passionate about our Historical Society, and grateful for all of our visitors. She has spent many Sundays all summer long greeting visitors and sharing her knowledge and passion.

David Elle, another returning host, has been spending his summers on the Island since 1955 where his parents owned a cottage on the Middle Channel. He is a Past Commodore of the Clinton River Boat Club at the end of the Middle Channel. He currently has a home on the South Channel where his family and friends spend their summers. He especially enjoys meeting and chatting with people about the history of Harsens Island.

Dan Orlando is a new host this summer. He is a Lego Master and shared his Lego scale model creations of Sans Souci and the Edmund Fitzgerald with us in July. He says he enjoys volunteering because he learns new things every time he goes in the museum. He enjoys meeting the Islanders and sharing the knowledge he has with them.

Jim Wysocki is also a new host this year. He loves to see the variety of people who come to visit the museum from both on and off the Island. Their excitement and interest are contagious. Jim has been a part-time resident of Harsens Island for over 30 years and is still learning new things and meeting new people.

Steve Nicol has had a home on South Channel Drive since 1998. He enjoyed hosting this summer because of all the new people he met. He enjoyed talking with many of the visitors at the museum who have interesting stories about their families and the Island. He also found that when things were slow or quiet, he could pull a binder from our museum library and learn more about the Island homes, hotels, and Tashmoo Park, etc., which made his time there pass quickly.

The other adult volunteers were Ted Malys, Donna Krispin, Janice Reha and Christopher Cahill.

This summer we also had several young volunteers who helped greet and guide visitors and entertain kids in our Kids Korner. We will include a feature article on their contributions in the October newsletter.

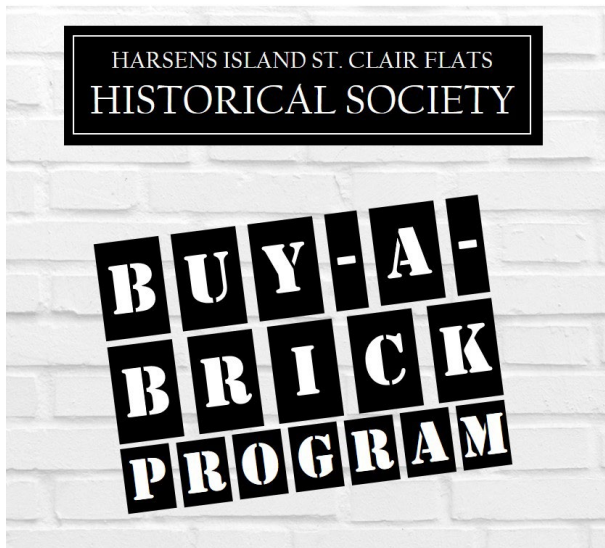


**Our young volunteers
will be featured in the
October Newsletter.**

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 xharpsph@aol.com.

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

A History and Folklore of Harsen's Island & The St. Clair Flats

By Nancy Harrison, Published in 1987

There are many documents and publications describing how Harsens Island was settled and named. A portion of Nancy Harrison's publication is transcribed here for your reading pleasure.

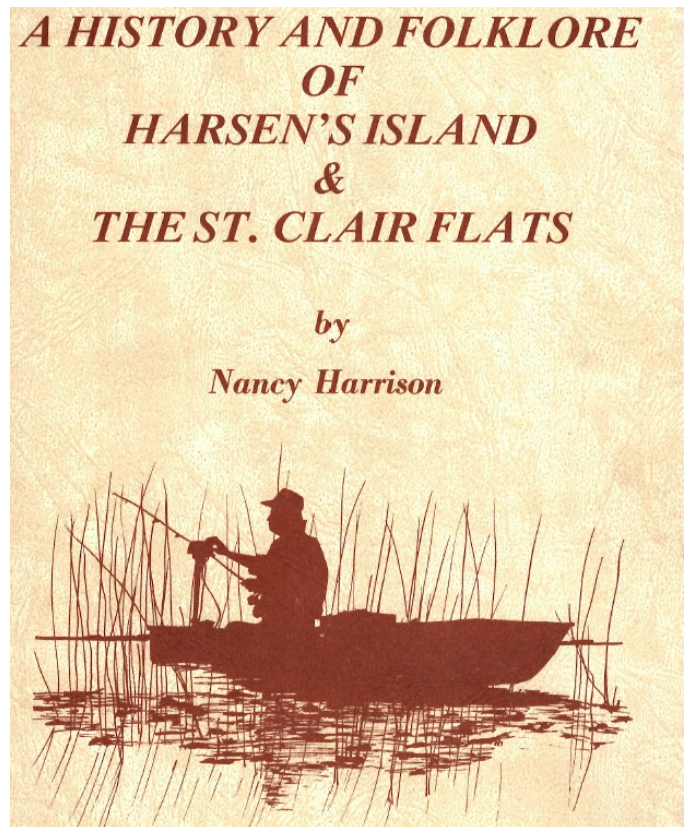
"How Harsen's Island was Named – Early History

The Indians gave the Island the name SOY-GE-WONG but when the first white men came there, they named it Harsen's after the man who came there sometime before 1779 to engage in trade with the Indians. James (Jacobus) Harsen, a gunsmith by trade and his son-in-law, Isaac Graveret, a silverworker, were the first to find their way here. James Harsen bartered with the Indians for the right to trade in furs. This was in 1783. However, he had no sooner completed the deal than he discovered that a Royal Proclamation, issued in 1763 expressly prohibited private transactions with the Red Men. He now found himself with nothing more than squatter's rights.

By 1797 two more Harsens had arrived on the scene. These were Williams and Bernardus, who so far it can be ascertained were brother of James. Whether this would be considered legal or not, they got together with the Indian Chiefs and on February 3, 1797, a deed was signed by James, Williams and Bernardus Harsen and the Indian Chiefs, Weronis and Nangue, for possession of the north end of the Island. The document bears the names of these Indian Chiefs followed by their totems, which apparently were their legal signatures.

The final and definitely legal document for possession of the Island was signed on March 17, 1797, apparently with the consent of the government. This was a 990-year lease of the Island signed on one hand by James May, Patrick McNiff and James Harsen and on the other by the Chippewa Chiefs named Nangue, Knisk, Pechekee, Wesancy, Myskeass and Chachapenepish. Here again their totems appear after their names. This practice of leasing the land continued until recent years. No resident or cottage owner owned the land he had built on but held it with a 99-year lease. It wasn't until the organization of the St. Clair Improvement Association that action on this point was taken. Now it was possible by dealing with Lansing to buy property outright.

The Indian population of Harsen's Island in October of 1797 was 31. They were a bit unaccustomed to the white man and perhaps not liking their presence there, had quietly disappeared from the area. About three hundred acres of the Island are tillable while the rest is marsh and bog.



continued on page 6 . . .

... *History and Folklore* ... continued from page 5 ...

On the north end of the Island James Harsen built a large house, barn, blacksmith shop and other necessary buildings. He was a very religious man of the Lutheran denomination and forbade the Indians permission to hunt on Sundays. However, the Indians, not understanding this, or perhaps not caring to understand too clearly, paid not the slightest attention.

In 1800 a missionary passed up the river on his way to Mackinac Island. While his schooner was becalmed on the lake, one of the Harsen family rowed out to try to persuade him to settle with them but to no avail. Then later a Moravian Missionary named Christian Denky came to the Island.

By this time the Island had practically dropped its Indian name. From 1809 it was quite generally known as Jacob's Island. Then during the War of 1812, the family moved to Detroit for safety. When Harsen died his part of the Island was divided among the family, the original farm going to his son, Francis. However, at the end of the War of 1812 not desiring to return to the Island themselves, the family rented the farm to Robert Little. Later a disagreement arose, and they wished to eject Little from the farm. They called the sheriff and when Little saw him, he fired on him. But when he, himself was fired upon he surrendered quietly.

It was at this time that the international Boundary Line was determined. Both Canada and the United States claimed the Island. The decision of the Boundary Commission made the area American.

One of the first commercial distilleries in Michigan operated from the Island in 1810. It was started by two Detroit merchants, Mack and Conant, who engaged Harvey Stewart to take charge. In 1814 he married Mary Graveret, who became a widow, and was a daughter of James Harsen. They moved to her farm which had been given to her by her father.

James Harsen had 5 sons and 2 daughters who married, and all brought up many children.

In 1818 the need for a school arose and John K. Smith from Dickenson Island, was hired for the job of teaching. The enrollment was 18 at first, many of whom were directly related to the Harsen family. The other half of the school building was used to trade with the Indians. Also, in 1818 efforts for a church were started. They secured a man named Mr. Dixon of Methodist faith for the job. The farms, when not occupied by the Harsen family, were rented. Captain Nelson was one of the people who rented a farm and every summer he would again return to being a skipper on a boat. Then the Harsen family would return from Detroit and continue where they left off in the spring.

About 1840 the Island became noted for its ship building timber, some of which was used in the building of the Newberry fleet built by Ogden Newberry, a merchant of Detroit. Then the industry moved in to use this timber on the spot and many large ships were built on the Island, although the largest of these concerns was the Ward family who located at a spot up the river known today as Marine City. In 1859 the schooner *Island City* was built on the Island."

Note: Saturday, April 7th, 1894: En route from Ludington, Michigan to Milwaukee, the schooner *Island City*, while loaded with hardwood, was caught in a storm in the afternoon. The vessel soon began to leak, and by 10 PM the pumps could not keep up with the water rising in her hold. By 11 o'clock that night the *Island City* was uncontrollable, and the three men in her crew began preparations for abandoning the schooner in the yawl boat. While cutting the yawl loose, Captain Wood and the small boat with no oars were swept into the lake. The two crew members were stranded in the sinking vessel. The captain managed to climb into the boat and was washed ashore the following afternoon on the Wisconsin side of the lake near Mequon. The schooner and the other two men were lost.

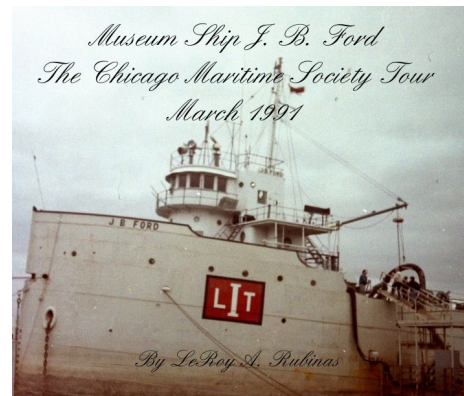
"These boats were almost entirely dependent on wood for fuel. A long wooden dock, built by William LaCroix, was used to fuel passing steamers. This dock was later taken over by the White Star Line and that dock, with some improvements is known as the Tashmoo dock today. Residents of the Island have named a street after LaCroix to preserve his memory."

... Museum Visitors ... continued from page 2 ...

During our Annual Meeting, we were visited by author, LeRoy A. Rubinas. LeRoy, a maritime enthusiast, and historian came with his family to visit the museum and to see the J.B. Ford steam whistle in action. LeRoy also brought the museum a donation of a beautiful painting of the J.B. Ford done by artist Catherine Loerch. The painting was purposely done with a reflection in the water as this 114-year-old ship is being scrapped at the Azcon Scrap dock. To learn more about the J.B. Ford visit LeRoy's website, <https://www.steamshipjbfordhistoricalsurvey.org>.



Artist Catherine Loerch



Book by LeRoy A. Rubinas

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2022

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

Date	Day	Time	Event
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

Mailing Address:

PO Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

Museum Address:

3058 S. Channel Dr.

www.harsensislandhistory.org

HISCFHS Board of Directors 2022

Chairman of the Board

Bob Williams

President

Joyce Hassen

1st Vice President

Chris Knight

2nd Vice President

Ellen Probst

Treasurer

Corinne Trexler

Secretary

Nancy Bonacquisti

Directors

Terry Wiggins

Sue Wrobel

Tom Pendolino



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

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

