



volume 13 / number 8

October 2022

Message from the President . . .

Happy Fall!

The summers seem to go by faster and faster each year. As the weather begins to change and the temperatures drop, the Island activities change to reflect the fall season. The summer wildflowers are well past their peak and trees begin to takeover to show their colors. Summer cottages are closing and of course, the dreaded winterizing of the boats is well underway.

Similarly, the museum is closing for the season, our last regular week-end hours were in September. We had a great season with lots of visitors, many complimenting the new museum displays. The younger visitors continued to enjoy the Kids Korner. We had a number of new museum hosts this year. The last newsletter introduced our adults hosts and this issue pays tribute to our younger hosts. I also want to add a special thank you for their donation of time, and hope that they will return next year! Without our volunteer hosts, both returning and new, we wouldn't be able to keep the doors open every weekend.

The annual pie sale was October 1st and was a great success. Thank you to everyone who donated and purchased pies. They all looked delicious, but the one my 3-year-old grandson picked out was spectacular... what a treat.

To close out the 2022 season, we have 2 more upcoming events, the Edmund Fitzgerald Remembrance on November 6th, and the annual Cookie Walk on December 3rd. Please join us.

I wish all of those traveling to warmer climates for the fall and winter safe and healthy travels.

As always, thank you for your continued support!

Joyce

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President



Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Museum Hosts

By Corinne Trexler

This past summer, we had four young people who volunteered a total of 36 hours of their time to the Historical Museum. Hayden O. and Lily T. enjoyed working in the Kid's Korner, helping with crafts and activities for our young visitors. Jacob and Noah P. helped with checking in and organizing artifacts and publications for our library. All of them are obtaining volunteer hours for the Junior National Honor Society. We are happy to have them on board and hope they will continue volunteering with us next summer!



Lily and Hayden



Noah and Jacob

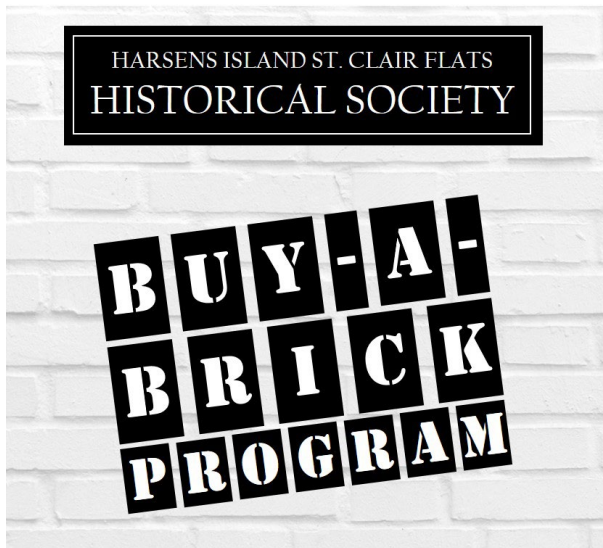
I would like to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU again to everyone who volunteered as a Museum Host this summer season. I'm grateful for the time you gave us!



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.

Flats School

In the museum's Delta News archives, I found a publication printed on brown newsprint without a cover title page, date, or volume number. Based on the obituaries in the document, it looks like it was published around 1959-1960. The article names "Flats School – Galley 1" was transcribed from this publication.

"Flats School – Galley 1 – by Max J. Morash

On the day before Labor Day 1908, I journeyed from Port Huron on the White Star Steam "Tashmoo" and landed at Riverside Hotel which later was renamed "Idle Hour Club".

I had been selected by the district school board to teach the Flats School. It was my first venture away from home and I was, indeed, fortunate in being able to board and room with Mr. Albert Stokey, his wife and his wife's mother, Mrs. Brewster. Their home was on a canal perhaps 1,000 feet east of Riverside Hotel and the only means of transportation upstream to Tashmoo Park and downstream to the Old Club was by boat. Your present highway had not been even dreamed of at that time.



Moored in front of the school is one of Albert Stokey's launches, the "Eileen".

Mr. Stokey was a boat builder. They told me that he built a sailboat in Detroit large enough to carry their belongings and that they sailed to the Flats about 1895 and built themselves a cottage. He then built a boat shop and in 1908 had at least five launches, a duck boat and two rowboats. One of the rowboats was assigned to me so that I might get to and from the schoolhouse on another island some 100 yards distant.

The school building was a cottage with a sizable yard protected from erosion by a wooden sheet-piling with oak stakes about ten feet apart so that the pupils might moor their various family boats. Rarely did any parent bring his children to school and they came from distances as far as two miles, in rowboats with as many as seven in one boat. Attendance was very good, and I must say that the water became very rough in windy weather. In the two years I taught there, not one pupil was lost on his or her way to or from school.

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The school building had not been remodeled in any way so that the front room was filled with 23 very small desks. There were no blackboards, so I painted a wall in the rear to serve that purpose. Our course of study was outlined by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and 23 pupils ranged in age from five to fifteen with grades from beginners to eighth grade. I did the janitor work and taught the school for fifty dollars per month. Board and room cost me \$5.00 per week. The heat was furnished by a coal stove. The fire went out every night and that obligated the janitor (me) to be there every morning at 8:00 A.M. to kindle the fire so that the cottage was warm by 9:00 A.M. when school classes started.

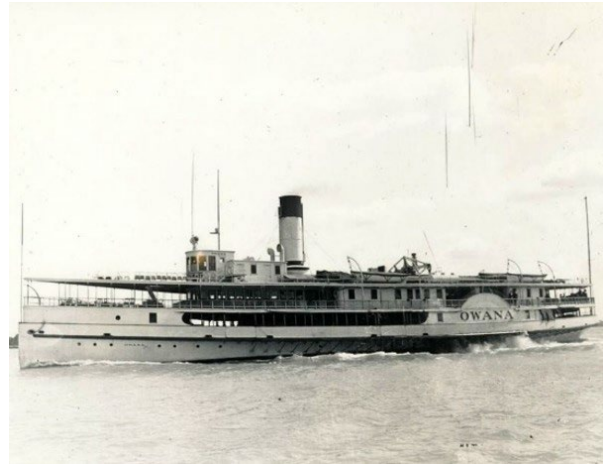
The parents of these school children were year-round residents of the district. Several of them acted as hunting and fishing guides seasonally but most of them depended on income from daily wages from work such as building cottages, erecting docks, repairing docks, and digging canals. I never heard of any dole¹ in those days. If one didn't work, the family didn't eat so well.

After Labor Day each year the *City of Toledo* and *Tashmoo* were laid up and usually a smaller boat made the round trip from Detroit to Port Huron daily until late November. The *Owana* was one such boat. She was a sidewheeler but in the spring of 1909 the White Star Line bought out the new screw propeller steamer *Wauketa*. On her first trip north, the crew got their signals confused and the *Wauketa* ploughed through thirty feet of the Algonac wooden dock. However, the dock was rather old and mellow, and ship was not much damaged, being able to continue the trip to Port Huron.

Each fall when the passenger boat was laid up, our only connection with Algonac was by launch. Even after the range lights were no longer operating, we made launch trips for supplies and mail. I shall never forget the uncanny ability of Mr. Stokey in steering the launch in pitch dark nights on that trip with not a single range light in operation.

When the ice blocked St. Clair River, our only lifeline was by horse and cutter traveling over the frozen swamp land to Sans Souci about three time a week.

Mr. Stokey's boat shop was a short distance inland from the Riverside Hotel. He was a real genius when it came to building a craft of any description. As a rule, he had verbal orders each fall for the construction of three or four launches for spring delivery. He simply asked the interested purchaser about the length, width and how much water he wanted the launch to draw and how fast he wanted it to travel. There was never a cash advance nor a contract. With only the above approximate specifications and no blueprints, he personally executed every hour of work on the boats from the keels to the finished

The *Owana*Source : <https://historicdetroit.org/buildings/owana>The *Wauketa*Source : <https://historicdetroit.org/buildings/wauketa>*continued on page 6 . . .*

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product. He installed the single cylinder engines of those days and even painted the launches before putting them in the water. Once in the water, they sat perfectly true to the water line he painted on each. Never did I hear of a dissatisfied customer in the two years that I lived there.

Mr. Stokey's favorite launch was the "*Eileen*" which will be pictured with this story. One windy day in early spring we had an unusually strong southwest wind for many hours. This backed up the water from Lake St. Clair so that it was more than two feet higher than usual in the canals, and actually reversed the current in all of the canals. All water travels that day was disrupted and no children were able to get to school. About noon Mr. Stokey called by telephone from his shop and asked me to come after him and bring him home for lunch. I started out with the *Eileen* but one of those reversed currents carried the launch across a partially submerged island near the Stokey home a government survey punched a two by six-inch hole in the hull just aft of the motor. At a glance I could see that the launch would sink within a short time, so I paddled frantically to a nearby dock and ran up to huge willow tree with a line from the bow and a line from the stern. These lines I tied as taut as possible high in the trees and by the time the *Eileen* was just within eight inches of being submerged. Needless to say, Mr. Stokey got home by other means. We ate our lunch leisurely and then without a word of censure, we took two large pails and dipped water as rapidly as possible from the hull. When Mr. Stokey could see the surging water coming through the hole, he reached into the water at that spot and stuffed a handful of waste cotton into the hole. Once that was done, we finished the dipping out the water and towed the launch to his boat shop and hauled it up into the shop. We repaired it with a new piece of planking. When I asked him how much I owed him, the answer was "Nothing." He was that kind of man . . . always doing something nice for somebody.

The *Eileen* had another close brush with tragedy. One night in early spring before the range lights were operating, she was carrying a group of about 25 men to a caucus at Algonac. Frank Herbert was steering her that night and when rounding the point at the north end of Russel Island, he swung toward Algonac and struck a submerged wreck. All the men jerked off their overcoats thinking that in a moment they would have to swim. Fortunately, the launch had only scrapped the oak keel against some wooden portion of the wreck and no damage was incurred. However, it was mighty exciting for a moment.

If any of you 1908-1909 pupils are still living and should happen to read this story, perhaps you will wonder what became of some of your teachers. My predecessor, Leo Glassford became a successful businessman in Capac. My successor, Lawrence Parker, entered civil service and for many years served as a railway mail clerk between Port Huron and Chicago. I think he is now retired. The writer taught school and attended business college for several years after leaving the Flats and then worked for Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) subsidiaries in Canada, Peru, and Michigan, for 38 years, the last 10 years being vice president of a pipeline company until 1954 when I was retired. I now live happily with my wife in the farm and lake district near Howell, Michigan."

Stokey's and Upmals

The previous article mentions Stokey's so I thought it would be interesting to include some history about Stokey Grocery/Upmal's Grocery. Information and photos in this article were sourced from "Life at the Flats – The Golden Era of the St. Clair Flats" written by Michael M. Dixon.

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Stokey's Grocery, low water 1925



James B. Clay's original grocery



James B. Clay and Emilie Trautz Clay circa 1920

Stokey's Grocery as set up by Jennie Stokey and her mother, with the help of John Upmal. The store set up in the front of their home while John Upmal leased the land behind the house for a marina business. After the Stokey's passed Stokey Grocery became Upmal's Grocery.

Stokey's/Upmal was not the only grocery store on the Flats . . .

Clay's Landing was built in 1894 by James Burton Clay Sr. He offered a butcher's counter, groceries, counter drugs, dry goods, tobacco, gasoline, and kerosene. At one time there were three or four cows to provide fresh milk and a hen house for eggs and poultry. James and Emilie Clay worked tirelessly to keep the business going until James passed away in 1925. After Emilie married Peter Thibert, arrangements were made for James B. Clay Jr. and Lilie Bedore Clay to take over the store.

Clay's Landing had a long tradition as the meeting place and lifeline for many at the Flats. Lilie Bedore Clay dies in 1940 and James Barton Clay Jr. passed away in 1945. By that time vacationers were bringing their supplies in their own cars and Clay's Landing eventually passed from the scene.

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2022

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

Date	Day	Time	Event
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](http://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home)

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