



volume 14 / number 1

January / February 2023

Message from the President . . .

Happy Winter!

I hope your winter is going well, wherever you are spending it. Because our cottage is seasonal, we must winterize it, so I don't get to be on the Island regularly like I am during the summer. Recently on a sunny Saturday we had no commitments or urgent to dos at home, so decided to take advantage of the beautiful sunny day and drive to the Island to check the house, do a couple of quick chores, and exchange some miscellaneous 'stuff' that ended up in the wrong house when we closed . . . the joys of going back and forth. Despite the sun, it was waaaaay cold and the wind was whipping off Muscamoot causing wicked wind chill . . . and then we get a text notice from St. Clair County's WINS that the ferry may close due to ice. We knew without heat or water in the cottage it would be a quick trip . . . but it was even quicker as we weren't prepared for all of that! We didn't waste much time getting back home 😞. But we did get done what we needed and being on the Island for a couple hours was certainly enough to give me spring fever.

The Board has finalized and approved the 2023 budget and decided we need to concentrate on infrastructure improvements during 2023 and beyond. These things include but are not limited to; a new furnace and remodel of the utility room, a new roof for the museum, and technology to support the museum operations. The Board realizes these things will take time and happen over the next couple years as we gather costs, prioritize, and ensure the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society remains financially strong.

We also continue to work and plan for the 2023 summer season that will include more informational speakers and events. I hope to have dates and more details soon.

As always, thank you for your support!

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

Evolution of the Pursuit of Pastime 1880 – 1910

From a Delta News in the Museum Library (Part 1)

The significant changes that occurred in the economic structure of the United States during the period between 1870 and 1910 resulted in trend toward increased leisure and a resulting quest for recreational facilities. At first, because of the nature of industrialization, only the wealthy enjoyed this happy condition; however as more and more people began to reap the rewards of industrialization, opportunities for the pursuit of pleasure and relaxation filtered down to the middle class and eventually to the working classes as well. The evolution of the pursuit of pastime can be seen in the development of various resort areas in New England, New Jersey, and the Great Lakes regions, during this period.

The first watering spot of the wealthy to develop, or in this case to redevelop, was Newport, Rhode Island. With the establishment of the Ocean House Hotel in 1840, this area became a millionaire's haven and by the 1890's boasted such late nineteenth century "palace cottages" as "The Marble House" and "The Breakers", built by the Vanderbilt family. Long Branch New Jersey followed Newport and soon gained acclaim, partly due to frequent visits there of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. This resort, too, had undergone a revival. Originally it had been a popular retreat for Philadelphia's sedate citizenry but had suffered a period of decline. However, by 1860 it had evolved into a mecca for the wealthy, acquiring further prestige when President Grant began to spend his summers there in 1869.

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What They Do at the Flats

Mary Stuart Coffin – News-Tribune, June 28, 1986

Pray what do they do at the Flats?

The question is easy to ask,
But to answer fully, my dear,
Would be a herculean task.
And yet in a bantering way,
As the magpie or parroquet chats,
I will venture briefly, in verse,
To tell what they do at the Flats.

To begin with, my darling, they dress –

In various modes they appear –
Tho' the taste is sometimes the best,
And sometimes exceedingly queer.
But the swells are more easily caught
By girls in sweet waists and cravats,
So they dress, and they dress, and they
dress,
And that's what they do at the Flats.

They look so charming and neat,

Or in dishabille, as some go,
For everyone follows their taste
When summering there, you know.
They rush at the sound of the gong, to
Dine on good things, from sturgeon to
sprats,
And they eat, and they eat, and they eat,
And that's what they do at the Flats.

Now they stroll on the sward or the dock,

To wait for the boats when they land,
Some missive or friend to receive,
Or to take papa dear by the hand.
When the night comes, mirth and revels
prolong,
Till dawn issues her caveats.
And they dance, and they dance, and they
dance,
And that's what they do at the Flats.

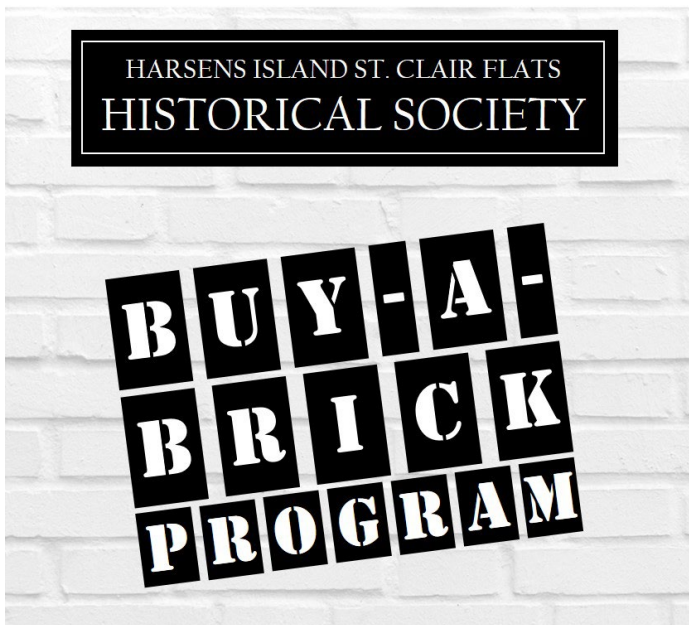
The water's alive with all craft –

The season was never so gay –
From the steamer belching smoke
To the snowy sails far away.
Now the rowboats glide o'er the
bright tide –
Somehow hats seem mingled with
hats –
And they row, and they row, and
they row,
And that's what they do at the Flats.

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

The past three years we celebrated the completion of several renovation projects; in 2020 the Clayton Evans Room Addition, in 2021 the Karen and Drew Peslar Library and in 2022 the large exhibit space at the entrance to the museum named the Nancy Boulton / Gary Grout Room.

To help maintain the museum's infrastructure and 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.

continued from page 2 . . . Evolution of the Pursuit of Pastime

With the passing of time these areas once more began to lose their exclusive air and by 1900 the “other” elements of society had begun to frequent them.

Michigan also had its resort areas and one in particular, Harsens Island, “America’s Venice”, closely parallels the eastern resorts in its evolution. Hence an examination of Harsens Island and the surrounding St. Flats can provide an illustration of leisure life in the years between 1870 and 1910.

The original white settler of the “flats” area, Jacob Harsen, had by 1797 built three permanent dwellings on the island for himself and his neighbors. According to Newell Collins, author of *The Story of Harsens’ Island and the Old Johnson House*, the location of the Harsens’ homestead was on the north channel, which at the time was the only shipping channel. This evidently was a convenient location for the marketing of his farm produce. Until 1872 the island remained agrarian due to its nature as a river delta.

Also, because of its delta origin, the flats provided fishes and fowl. To exploit this resource, a group prominent Detroiters organized “The Lakes St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club of Detroit”, building a “small clubhouse” on the flats in 1872, and thus marking the beginning of Harsens Island as a recreational retreat. The fact that this club developed as an elite affair, and one which excluded women, seems to have been characteristic of the era. This club’s unique existence was short lived, however, for by 1875 the Star Island Hotel had been completed, provided access to the island for the upper middle class.

During the late 1890’s, the middle classes had become more affluent and began to emulate their wealthier peers. Resorts throughout the nation began to cater to these people and the resort hotel concept evolved. Harsens’ Island was no exception: between the years 1880 and 1910 many of these structures emerged. Among the more popular were the Star Island Hotel; Joe Bedore’s (ca. 1881), noted its shady trees, intriguing tales, and busy bar; Muir’s (ca. 1890), a temperance-oriented affair renowned for its propriety, and finally, the elegant though reasonable Grand Pointe Summer Resort (1892).

The life which surrounded these hotels was typical of Americans leisurely pursuits during that period and, like the poets who sang praises of the Rhine and the Hudson, Mary Stuart Coffin did her part for Harsens’ Island. Her poem, “What They Do at the Flats” (See Page 2), was printed in the *Sunday News Tribune* in 1896, and is most expressive of the gay atmosphere found at the island. It seems the question of “what they do” was easy to ask but an enormous one to answer; nevertheless, she did it charmingly in verse, enumerating the delights of dressing up to “catch” a “swell”, dining on the best of fare, strolling down to see the boats land and meet their passengers, dancing ‘til dawn and gliding around in rowboats. Another article in the Sunday



Star Island Hotel



Joe Bedore's Hotel

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continued from page 5 . . . Evolution of the Pursuit of Pastime

News Tribune, August 18, 1895, reflects the atmosphere and popularity of a day “at the island”. Boarding the steamer Greyhound (White Star Line), the author noted “ . . . if they can’t all get on board, they will have to stay over, people are going to the flats whether they ever get back or not . . . “. The glowing promise contained in the Grand Pointe Hotel’s brochures provide further examples of the character of the leisure enjoyed by the patrons. The 1890 pamphlet informs one that “every room in the hotel commands a water view from its windows . . . “. The hotel is lighted throughout with gas . . . “and it compares “. . . favorable with the best resorts for beauty and convenience; and health and strength are the reward of those who reach its quiet and comfort.” It is also



Grand Pointe Hotel Circa 1901

Source : <https://bluewaterhealthyliving.com/the-grande-pointe-hotel/>

noted in this brochure that, unlike its southern counterparts, “. . . such a thing as malaria is unknown.” Corresponding to the development of the resort hotel concept was the creation of middle-class residential areas at Sans Souci and Maple Leaf.

By the middle of the 1890’s, steamships to the island and other ports crowded the Detroit harbor. But “. . . despite this heavy traffic out of the port of Detroit, not a single passenger was reported lost overboard a local boat and it was not necessary to even use a life preserver . . .” To encourage skeptics the steamship lines constantly commented on their safety records, “. . . travel by water is much safer than railroad.” Hotel and steamship line advertisements further reveal the attractions of the island. For example, the Star Island advertisement found in a travel brochure of 1907, suggests that one can find “. . . boats, skilled punters, rods, bait, and all necessaries for fishing. Sail boats, rowboats, steam, and gasoline launches. Beautiful walks in shady lanes. Bathing, bowling, lawn tennis, outdoor and aquatic sports.”

The Muir House offered a different approach: “Finest fishing on the St. Clair River. No bar . . . especially desirable for

ladies without escort . . .” the most important aspect of all was revealed in Joe Bedore’s promulgation (and true of most other resorts): “It is not necessary to fatten your purse with bills to enjoy the hospitality of Bedore.” The average rate was two dollars a day or eight dollars a week!

The popularity of such places is revealed in the statistics of “the season” of 1894, when 225,000 tourists and 100,000 cottagers visited Harsens Island. This at a time when Detroit’s population was only 238,264!

Part 2 of Evolution of the Pursuit of Pastime 1880 – 1910 will be in the March/April Newsletter.



Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2023

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

Date	Day	Time	Event
March 4	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom
April 1	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom
May 13	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
May 27, 28 and 29	Saturday	10:00 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 10	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
June TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
July 8	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
July TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
August 12	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
August 12	Saturday	10:00 AM	Annual Membership Meeting at the Museum
August TBD	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
September 2	Saturday	11:00 AM	Labor Day Parade
September 9	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
October 7	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Annual Pie Sale
October 14	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
November TBD	Sunday	2:00 PM	Remembrance Edmund Fitzgerald
November 11	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Planning Meeting via Zoom
December 2	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk
December 9	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:

P.O. Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

Museum Address:

3058 S. Channel Dr.

www.harsensislandhistory.org

HISCFHS Board of Directors 2023

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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)

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

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society

Building Renovation BUY-A-BRICK Order Form

I / We would like to 'BUY-A-BRICK' to support the Museum.

Indicate on the three lines below the inscription you would like on the brick using up to 25 letters, spaces, or special characters per line.

Print Your Name _____

Your Phone Number _____ - _____ - _____

Your email address _____ @ _____

_____ **Enclosed is my check for \$350 made payable to HISCFHS.**

_____ **I will not be purchasing a brick at this time but have enclosed a donation for the renovation.**

Payments should be made payable to "HISCFHS" with "BRICK" on the memo line and mailed to the HISCFHS at P.O. Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028.



PO Box 44
 Harsens Island
 MI 48028
 www.harsensislandhistory.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2023

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ Spouse: _____

Primary Mailing Address: _____ Member No. _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____ Spouse Cell: _____

E-Mail Address: _____ Spouse E-Mail: _____

Additional Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Additional Phone: _____ Membership Type: _____

Annual Renewal Dues:		Lifetime Dues:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (1 Member Only)	\$20.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Individual	\$300.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family (1-2 Adults + Children < 18)	\$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Family	\$500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Business	\$50.00		

Building Donation: \$ _____ Other Donation: \$ _____

If desired, please specify use: _____

Newsletters are emailed to members. If you require newsletters via postal mail, please write a note on your returned application.

Please complete and send with a check made payable to: **Harsens Island Historical Society.**

Mail to: Harsens Island St. Clair Historical Society, P.O. Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028

OFFICE USE ONLY:

Date received: _____

Check # _____ Amount \$ _____