



*Message from the President . . .*

Happy May!

Although the calendar keeps quickly marching on and now shows May, the weather seems to be dragging on with winter and the real start of spring, at least for me. I'm behind with everything Harsens Island and cottage, and I blaming the weather!

I attended a Michigan Historical Society conference earlier this spring and one of the presentations I attended was on the history of the Detroit River, told through artist's rendering of ships on the Detroit River and surrounding channels. Before photographic technology (especially the use of color) was easily or readily available, artists were often commissioned for their paintings depicting the river fronts and ships. One of the featured artists of this presentation was Seth Whipple (1855-1901). Seth was a prominent maritime artist and several of his works are at the DIA and Dossin Museum. I was quickly reminded that the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society Museum has several beautiful paintings, prints, and photos on display from various artists . . . including a print of Seth's painting 'Tug Champion Towing Schooners', originally painted in 1878. Another reason to visit us this summer . . . our normal hours begin on Memorial Day weekend.

We are once again looking for volunteers to be at the museum on Saturdays and Sundays during the summer, please consider spending a couple of hours on a weekend this summer as a host.

As always, thank you for your support!

*Joyce*

*Joyce Hassen, President*

**Stop by Memorial Weekend to see the  
new Lego replica of the Historical Museum!**

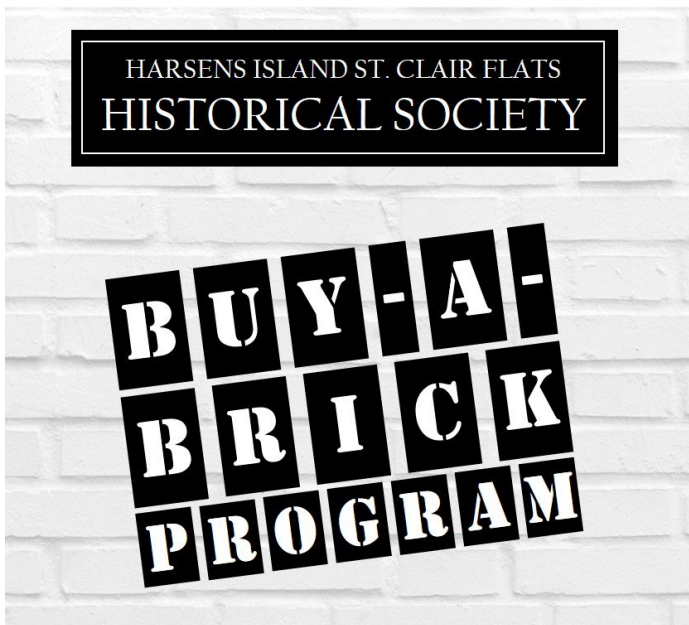
The replica creator and Lego Master, Dan Orlando, will be at the museum on  
Saturday May 27 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm to help kids build with Legos.

The museum will have some Lego kits for purchase.

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

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

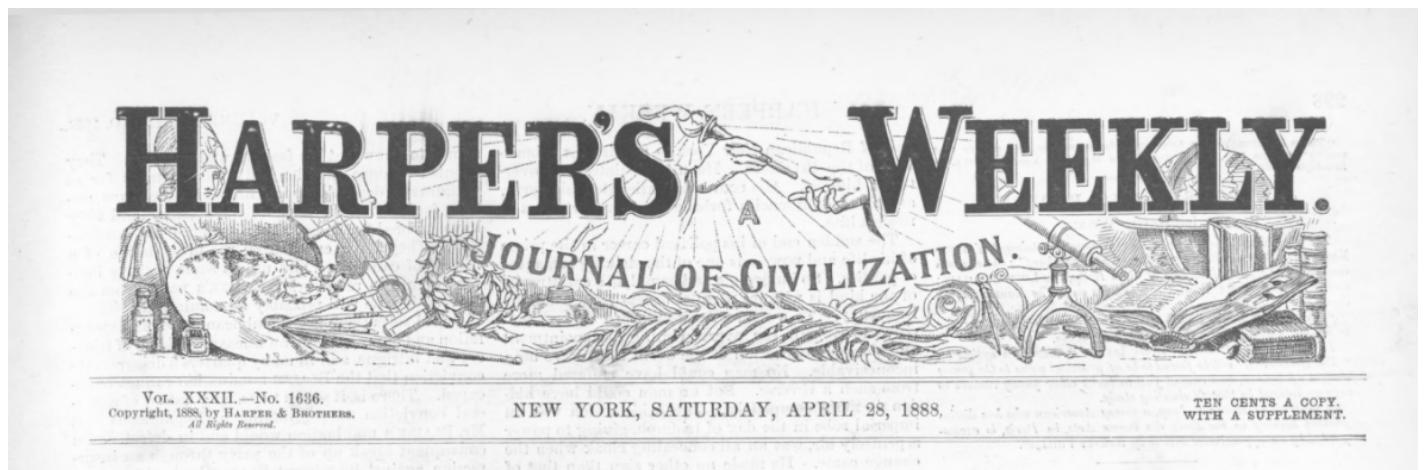
## *On and Around the St. Clair River*

*Harper's Weekly April 28, 1888*

Smallest link in the great chain of unsalted seas of North America, Lake St. Clair is important to the world chiefly because it forms a part of the wonderful waterway from the Atlantic to the great sources of supply of the country. If it were not necessary to pass through it to reach Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, or the rich wilderness of the Lake Superior region, few persons beyond its immediate neighborhood would know anything of Lake St. Clair. But as a part of nature's highway, it has great importance, and this has been recognized perforce by the nation.

Only some sixty miles in length and about the same in width, it is fed by the St. Clair River, a tortuous, shallow stream that flows through a bed of alluvial deposit, which it has washed down in the unnumbered ages since the shores were twenty miles back from where they are now. This river has formed a delta, or rather a cluster of deltas, where it empties into the lake, and these are so obstructive to the channel that it was necessary more than twenty years ago to build a ship-canal from the river to the lake. This was built by the United States government, though it lies in Canadian territory, and is maintained as a free channel. The original work made a channel thirteen feet deep and 800 feet wide, but in 1878 the middle of the canal to a width of 100 feet was deepened by three feet more, so that now, as in the Sault Ste. Marie Canal, there was free passage for vessels drawing sixteen feet of water.

The dikes of the canal, which is rather more than a mile in length were formed by dumping the sand and loam which was excavated into crib pockets of timber, resting on the original bottom of the shoals. These were protected by sheet piling. The soil was so soft and wet that in 1874 and 1875 willow trees were planted on both dikes, in order that their roots should form a network to hold the work in place. They answered the purpose admirably, and while thus proving useful, they also added greatly to the beauty of a wild scene, as may be seen in our illustrations. The entire coast construction and maintenance has been not far from three-quarters of a million dollars, and the work is justly entitled by the Engineer-in-Chief of the United States one of the utmost importance to the nation.



Source : <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020220474&view=1up&seq=255>

*continued on page 4 . . .*

*continued from page 3 . . . On and Around the St. Clair River*

To sportsmen the region has long been known as a paradise, Wide-stretching flats, shallow waters, and wilderness of reeds make a region of delight to him whose sole yearneth for ducks and devious channels of joy to the wielder of rod and reel. The most enthusiastic anglers are apt to go farther and fare better, for beyond the St. Clair, up through the great ship-canal of the Sault St. Marie, lies Whitefish Bay, which is the lower end of Lake Superior, and there some of the best fishing in the world may be had.

But to the angler who is also is also a gunner the St. Clair region is most tempting, and numerous sporting clubs in Detroit have their clubhouses there. They do not differ from houses of the kind elsewhere, but they are easily accessible by the main channel of travel, though they are lonely enough in location. Numerous islands, like Star Island, have been bought and improved by these clubs, and serve as delightful summer houses for the members and their families.

*continued on page 5 . . .**The S.S. Keewatin Travels Down the St. Clair River on April 26, 2023*

The S.S. *Keewatin* is one of the largest of the remaining Edwardian (Titanic-era) passenger steamers left in the world. The *Keewatin* was built in 1907 by Fairfield Ship building and Engineering Company in Govan, Glasgow, Scotland. The vessel sailed on her maiden voyage docking at Quebec to be halved because the canals below Lake Erie, specifically the Welland Canal, could not handle ships as long as *Keewatin*. The ship was reassembled at Buffalo, New York, where she resumed her voyage under her own power to begin service at Owen Sound, Ontario.



Photo Credit Paul Wargo



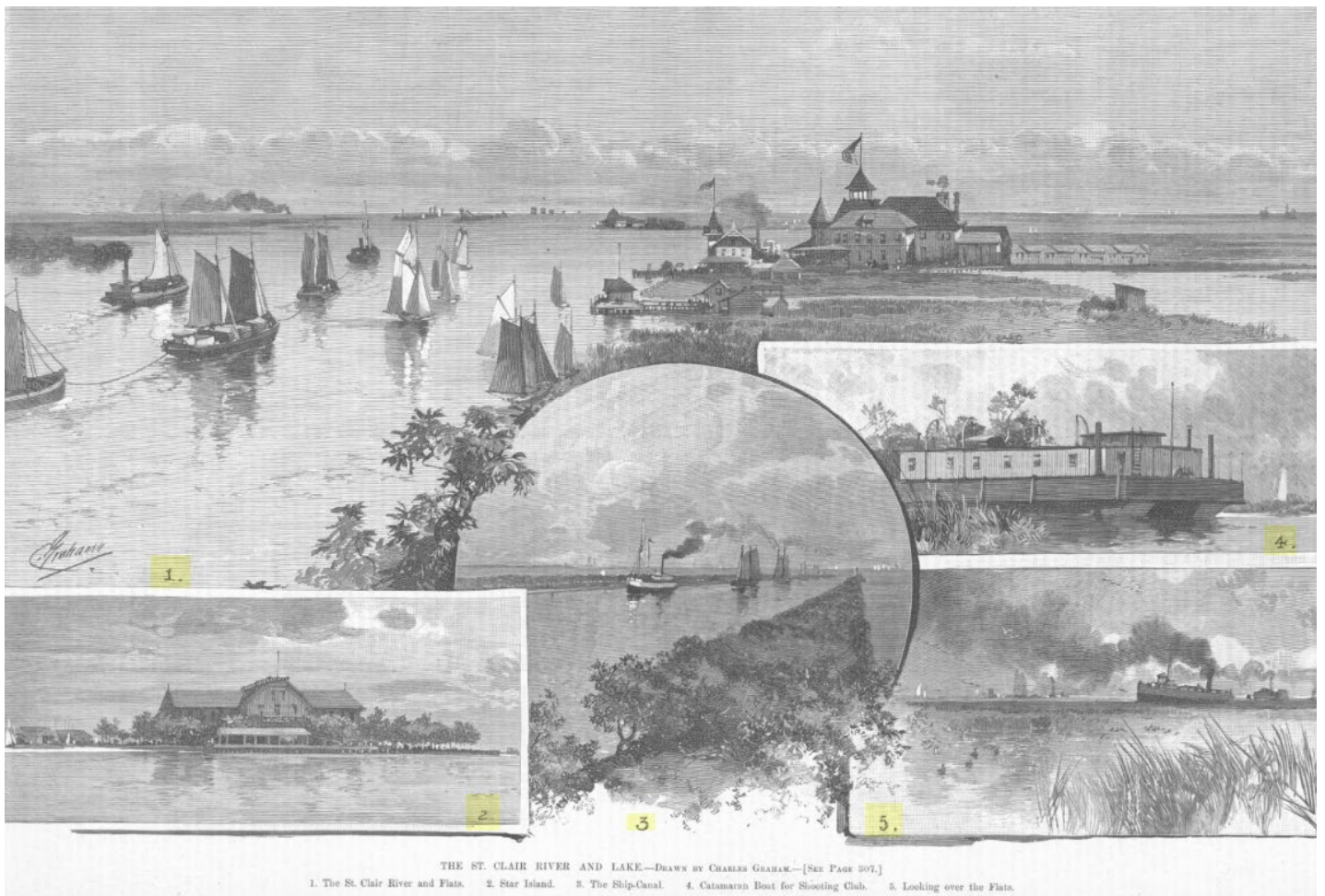
Photo Credit: Joe Lenz

On April 26, 2023, she was towed from her home in Saugatuck, MI where she was a maritime museum for 45 years. She was repatriated to Port McNicoll in 2012 so she could be restored to her former glory. Her new home will be at the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston, Ontario. The S.S. *Keewatin* will be open for visitors in 2024.

The S.S. *Keewatin* is a passenger liner that once sailed between Port Arthur/Fort William (now Thunder Bay) on Lake Superior and Port McNicoll on Georgian Bay (Lake Huron) in Ontario, Canada. She carried passengers between these ports for the Canadian Pacific Railway's Great Lakes steamship service. *Keewatin* also carried packaged freight goods for the railway at these ports.

*continued from page 4 . . . On and Around the St. Clair River*

The huge catamarans that are used by the sportsman in exploring the small streams and the lonely lagoons and morasses hereabout are constructed on the plan of the famous old-time Mississippi steamer in one important particular, for they will travel "wherever a light dew has fallen." They are roomy and comfortable and serve as floating homes sometimes for an entire season. The sport, however, is mostly found in punting, and during the season hundreds of these little boats go poking about in the watery ground on either side of the river, and the Crack! Crack! of the shotgun is the crack of doom to many a duck and goose.



## THE ST. CLAIR RIVER AND LAKE

1. The St. Clair River and Flats - 2. Star Island - 3. The Ship-Canal  
 4. Catamaran Boat for Shooting Club - 5. Looking over the Flats

Source: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020220474&view=1up&seq=255>

*continued on page 7 . . .*

### *Island Memories Written by Astrid Delitzsch (Del) Heleotis 1925 – 2021*

In 2009, Del wrote down some of her favorite island memories. These memories were short, thoughtful, and funny. I want to share some of these with you. This story is entitled **Houseboat Summers II**, written in June of 2009. The Houseboat Summer I story is in the March/April Newsletter.

We easily slid into our new life on the houseboat that summer of 1968. The living quarters seemed almost palatial compared to the tight cabin space on the Jersey skiff that was designed for day fishing, not for long cruises and rainy, windy days



Example of Jersey Skiff

<https://downeastboatforum.com/threads/1964-24-seaford-channel-raider-downeast-jersey-skiff.4955/>

being weathered in port. The new galley was very adequate for meals, especially having Esther's "Chicken Coop" a phone call away. We never needed much of an excuse to call Esther – succulent chicken, her special coleslaw, pizzas additionally flavored with her salty language. The days quickly melted together too quickly. Many of the island "kids" started coming soon after we moved into the back canal. Kenny, Donna, Bob Raynal and sometimes Wes were regulars.

After breakfast and clean up time came the trip to Sans Souci for Hasker's hot freshly baked bread and goodies, then stop at Hershelman's, enhanced by a few pithy comments from Wes always perched on one hip behind the meat counter. Following lunch, Ken would show up in his aluminum outboard and the action began. Our dinghy was launched. Donna, Bon, Wes, and assorted others appeared with regularity that almost seemed

scheduled. The "surfing" of freighter waves was begun. Kenny towed the dinghy loaded down with a hilariously laughing crew. The periodic moments of relative quiet meant snack time. The water-logged aquanauts dispersed late afternoons with hearty appetites for dinner. Our evenings with pleasant fatigue, were time for a card game and sometimes Monopoly, Password or Careers as they grew out of Chutes and Ladders. Those pre-teen years were wonderful.

Weekend activities varied, the only constant being cocktail hour on the foredeck and frequent guests from the "city". We quickly developed a heavy dependence of Esther Earl and her "Chicken Koop". Not only was her food great, but the whole experience was generously seasoned with her ribald laugh, spicy comments, and salty humor. This relationship grew and flourished as a thirty plus year friendship until her death.

Back to the cocktail hour. Bob frequently "happened by" plunking himself in a small folding chair very unobtrusively enjoying a non-boozy sip with Anne-Marie and Harry. This is always a special time when we all are together. Now my grandchildren share in the ritual too!

*continued on page 7 . . .*

*continued from page 6 . . . Memories from Del Heleotis*

(A short digression to the houseboat rambling: During Anne-Marie's labor with her first child, Tasso and I were alternating stints of guiding her into relaxation states with soothing images. I took her on an imaginary drift through the march surrounding the "Basset". Finally, she said "Mom, if you really want me to relax, take me to cocktail hour on the deck at the cottage".)

We stretched out the all-too-short summer by fall weekends at our floating hideaway. After Indian summer, the frost drove us back to reality and "city life".

June 21, 2009

## Volunteer to be a Host at the Museum this Summer

The Harsens Island Historical Museum will be open weekends starting Memorial Weekend, Saturday from 10-3, and Sundays from Noon – 4pm. Volunteers are needed to work as hosts this summer to maintain these hours. If you can volunteer for two or three hours on any Saturday or Sunday this summer, please contact us.

Hosting simply means being there to greet visitors, answer questions if you can, and record sales in our Museum Shop. Many volunteers have found that it is also an opportunity to spend a little time learning more about our interesting Island history!

If you are interested in volunteering, or would like more information,  
please contact Corinne Trexler at 313-530-9173.

*continued from page 5 . . . On and Around the St. Clair River*

The ground is overgrown with reeds, many of them eight and ten feet high, and even higher, so that it is exceedingly easy to get lost, for a man standing in a boat can by no means see where he is. Many stories are told of overconfident sportsman venturing out without guides and getting lost within a mile or less of their clubhouses. The reeds are a source of danger in another way also, the sportsman who chances to fall overboard is tolerable certain to be tangled in the roots of the reeds, and if help is not close at hand, he stands a fair chance of being drowned.

More fishing than shooting is done, however, the supply of game fish seems inexhaustible. Bass of different kinds, pickerel, pike, and sturgeon abound. A favorite sport is deep trolling for pike and pickerel. A weight sufficient to keep the line at the bottom is used, and the hook floats a couple feet above. This being dragged through the water is certain to attract the voracious fish, which is game enough and strong enough to make a hard fight for life after he has been struck.

The sporting clubs of Detroit have multiplied in late years, and every summer now sees the erection of one or more large fine clubhouses, all generally resembling the one shown in the first picture. They all rest upon made ground and are all on the Michigan side of the river. A large amount of capital has been invested in this kind of property, and many of the clubs represent in their membership a great amount of wealth.

# Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2023

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

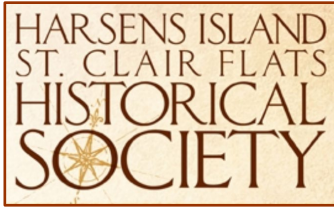
Date	Day	Time	Event
May 13	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
May 27, 28 and 29	Saturday	10:00 AM – 4:00 PM	Museum Opens for the season
	Sunday	12:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Museum Open
	Monday	11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Museum Open
June 10	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at Museum
June TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – 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 20	Sunday	2:00 PM	Author LeRoy A. Rubinas talks about J.B. Ford
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](http://www.harsensislandhistory.org)

**HISCFHS Board of Directors 2023**

Chairman of the Board

**Bob Williams**

President

**Joyce Hassen**

1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

**Chris Knight**

2<sup>nd</sup> 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](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](https://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.

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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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_