



volume 16 / number 3

May 2025

Message from the President . . .

Happy May!

The excitement is beginning to build for the new season. Not only am I personally attempting to get the cottage ready for the new season, but the Board is also gearing up to open the museum for this season, too. We have confirmed a couple of new speakers for our Speaker Series, which will provide new and interesting information. We always look forward to hosting new speakers. These events are always well attended by our members and guests.

In addition, we are finalizing the plans and the 'character' scripts for the Tashmoo Mystery Event, being hosted at the museum. Tashmoo Distilling Company has developed craft cocktails, which will be available for purchase, the Schoolhouse Grille is providing appetizers, and then there is that murder to solve. This event is almost sold out and we are very excited to share and present something new!

The museum will open on Memorial Day weekend and begin normal summer hours of Saturday 10:00 – 3:00 and Sunday 12:00 Noon to 4:00, or by appointment off-hours. We are again this year looking for volunteers to be a host. It's easy and fun to be a host and only takes a couple of hours. Contact any Board member if you're interested.

As always, thank you for your support!

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

The 1920s movie "Harsens Island Revenge" opened to the public in April at the Sanctuary Cinema in Alpena. The movie features several local actors and was filmed primarily in Alpena, with some scenes filmed on Harsens Island itself, about 50 miles northeast of Detroit.

"Harsens Island Revenge," is an adaptation of a book of the same title by Karl Manke. It takes viewers back to the 1920s, centering on World War I veterans who had their own Canadian whiskey smuggling operation on Harsens Island near Detroit.

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=harsens%20island%20revenge>



Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society *presents*

Interactive Murder Mystery

MURDER ON THE TASHMOO



The tranquil waters of the St. Clair River were shattered when a passenger on the Tashmo Steamer was murdered.

Help solve the murder!

JUNE 21, 2025

Doors Open at **4:30 PM**

Event Starts at **5:00 PM**

At 3058 South Channel Drive

1920s period costumes encouraged



Only 50 tickets are available for this exclusive event.

Tashmo Steamer inspired drinks and food

Cash Bar by the Tashmo Distilling Company



Appetizers by Schoolhouse Grille
(Included in Ticket Price)



For Tickets Contact

Corinne Trexler - ctrexler5@gmail.com or Call 313-530-9173

Ellen Probst - elpro8@bellsouth.net or Call 772-766-2912

Where the Wild Goose Flies
Storied Past of Harsens – October 21, 1961
By Dorothy Mitts

The signatures on the Declaration of Independence were hardly dry and General George Washington's Army was still at Valley Forge when the first move of a permanent settlement by white men was made on the small piece of land at the mouth of the St. Clair River we now know as Harsens Island.

The original settler, the man who gave the island its name, was Jacob Harsen, a gunsmith by trade, who came on horseback to Michigan Territory from New York state where he was associated for awhile with John Jacob Astor in the fur trade. Harsen continued in the fur trade, buying skins from the Indians and shipping them east on the backs of Indian ponies, and later, when he was joined by Isaac Gravereat, a Silversmith, they combined their skills in producing guns and other items to be traded to the Indians.

JACOB HARSEN who had five sons and two daughters is believed to have settled on the island some time prior to 1778, and for more than 170 years – or until Benjamin Harsen died in 1949 – a progeny of his, bearing the name Harsen, had resided on the island.

Many dramatic incidents took place on the island in the early days of its settlement, and tragedy more than once struck at the Harsen family. One such incident, probably considered by Jacob Harsen a retribution to his eldest son, happened on a Sunday, a day on which the father forbade the use of firearms.

On that particular Sunday a large and inviting flock of duck alighted on the water near the house and the son forgetting the admonitions of his father, grabbed his gun and left the house to go for them. He attempted to fire but the priming flashed in the pan of the old flintlock, and he rushed back into the house to reprime it. As he entered, the butt of the gun struck the door and the gun was discharged, the charge entering the arm of his seven-year-old niece, badly mangling it. The little girl had to be taken to Detroit to have it amputated.



Example of Flintlock

ANOTHER BROTHER, James, was shot in the eye by the half breed John Riley, and died some months later, and still another brother, Bernard, and his sister, Mrs. Gravereat, were killed instantly by the explosion of a 20-pound keg of powder which also destroyed the house.

But probably one of the most dramatic, and less tragic, incidents to occur on the island in connection with the Harsen family, was an altercation of skirmish proportions between the fourth son, Francis, and a tenant, Robert Little. It seems that the following the War of 1812 Francis Harsen went to Detroit to serve as interpreter with the Indian Department there and leased his farm during his absence to Robert Little, a Canadian and a loyal British subject. Rent for the farm was at first but later the tenant refused to pay, claiming he was on "His Majesty's" domain and that under existing laws no American might hold lands under British government. He further maintained that he had rendered important service to

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his government and was entitled to the land and told Harsen that he was in possession and intended to claim that possession under British law.

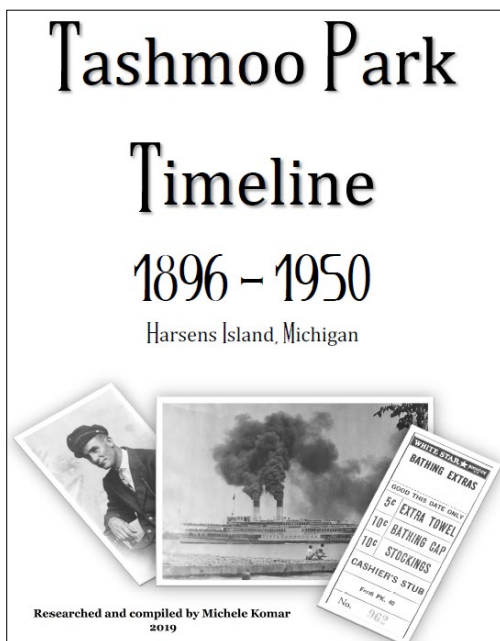
Harsen after much delay finally secured a writ of ejection, but when Sheriff Fulton called on Little with the writ demanding surrender of the premises Little “forcibly put Fulton out of doors,” whereupon Fulton is supposed to have vowed that he would execute the writ “if he had to call upon the militia in the territory.” He secured the assistance of William Brown who selected six men – some of them recently discharged soldiers of the War of 1812 – with Harsen accompanying them, the men crossed over to the island. In the meantime, Little, getting word of the posse’s coming, had prepared himself with loaded guns and a cauldron of boiling water.

Reaching the farm the men took shelter in one of the outlying sheds and there planned their strategy of attack, fortified by a small jug of whiskey which they had procured on the way, from the distillery of Harvey Stewart. Finally, the sheriff, followed by Harsen, went to the door and demanded, “In the name of the commonwealth,” the surrender of the premises.

Little answered by firing from the window, the shot striking Harsen in the leg. (It was reported later that Little had not intended to shoot Harsen, that the shot glanced off the frozen ground and struck him accidentally). Brown then ordered the men to surround the house and return the fire. The first volley splintered the door behind which Little was standing, one bullet narrowly missing him and entering a bed on which his wife and daughter were sitting. Little promptly surrendered.

There is a version of the incident more favorable to Little who contended he had “never refused to the rent,” and that there never would have been any shooting had not the men been intoxicated. And perhaps Little did have some grounds for his claim of possession inasmuch as the islands in the St. Clair River were understood to be part of Canada even until 1821.

In any event, the dispute was eventually settled amicably, and according to a son of Little, Francis Harsen and Robert Little lived out the rest of their lives on friendship.



Tashmoo Park Timeline

The Tashmoo Park Timeline by Michele Komar is a chronological compilation of articles, booklets and photos that are mainly about Tashmoo Park, the White Star Line and its properties, people, and boats. Originally estimated to be 500 pages, it turned into 1,916 pages comprised of 4 volumes with thousands of articles and would take 2 ½ years from start to finish.

Here are some additional facts about Tashmoo Park, continued from the last newsletter.

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Preserving Your History

We encourage, and would like to assist, islanders in getting their old photos, slides, negatives, and historical documents into digital format to preserve and/or display them. In addition, the Harsens Island Historical Society would like to collect digital copies of historical photos and documents of the island for the museum's collection.

You can bring photos, slides, negatives, or historical documents to the Museum to have them scanned and the digital copy put on a USB flash drive to take home along with the documents you brought for scanning. Some photos or documents may be of historic interest, and with the owner's permission, a digital copy would be retained by the Harsens Island Historical Society for the museum's collection.

The Harsens Island History Society is also looking for 8 mm or super 8 mm home movies taken on the island prior to 1960 for segments to be digitized and place in the archives. There would be **no fee for members**, but non-members would be asked to make a small donation.

You can make an appointment for scanning with Bob Williams at 248-388-0465 or email him at xharpspah@aol.com.



Harsens Island Fire Hall Dedication in 1938

Tashmoo Park - Souvenirs

Like many popular summer destinations, souvenirs were readily had. "Tashmoo Park" and images of the steamer Tashmoo graced glass objects like vases, cups and figurines, spoons, metal trays, and wooden boxes.

Postcard featured White Star Line ships and Tashmoo Park scenery along with novelty shots.

In later years during the late 1920s and 1930s, Elmer Cote who had the ride concessions also ran the souvenir stand for Tashmoo Park.



Courtesy of Gray Groul

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Continued from page 5 . . .Tashmoo Park Timeline

Tashmoo Park - Souvenirs



Courtesy of Detroit Publishing Company

Indian area at Tashmoo Park.

Walpole Island has long been associated with Harsens Island and Tashmoo Park. Walpole Island is a First Nation reserve across the St. Clair River from Harsens Island. It was a popular tourist destination in the late 1800s and early 1900s offering picnic grounds, a baseball field and the Walpole Indian Band that greeted excursionists getting off the boats that serviced the island. In later years the steamer Tashmoo made Walpole Island a regular stop especially during the time of the Indian Fair in late summer.



Courtesy of Michele Komar



Photo from eBay

An ash basket.

The people of Walpole Island were known for their beautiful ash baskets and offered them for sale at Tashmoo Park along with handcrafted items made of wood and other materials like sweetgrass and were often decorated by woodburning "Tashmoo Park" on the object.

According to a *Detroit Free Press* article from July 7, 1935, there were 12 booths at Tashmoo Park run continuously by Charles Knaggs and his five daughters, two sons and twenty grandchildren for the past 40 years.

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2025

Date	Day	Time	Event
May 17	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
May 24	Saturday Sunday Monday	10:00 AM – 3:00 PM 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Museum Opens (Memorial Weekend)
June 21	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
June 21	Saturday	5:00 PM	“Murder on the <i>Tashmoo</i> ” Interactive Mystery Event (Doors open at 4:30 PM – Tickets sold in advance)
July 19	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
July TBD	TBD	TBD	Special Event – Speaker TBD
August 9	Saturday	TBD	Special Event – Speaker Sue Wrobel
August 16	Saturday	10:00 AM	Annual Membership Meeting at the Museum
August 16	Saturday	10:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
August 30	Saturday	11:00 AM	Labor Day Parade
September 20	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
October 4	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Annual Pie Sale
October 18	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
November 9	Sunday	3:00 PM	Remembrance Edmund Fitzgerald
November 15	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Planning Meeting via Zoom
December 6	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk
December 20	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 2025

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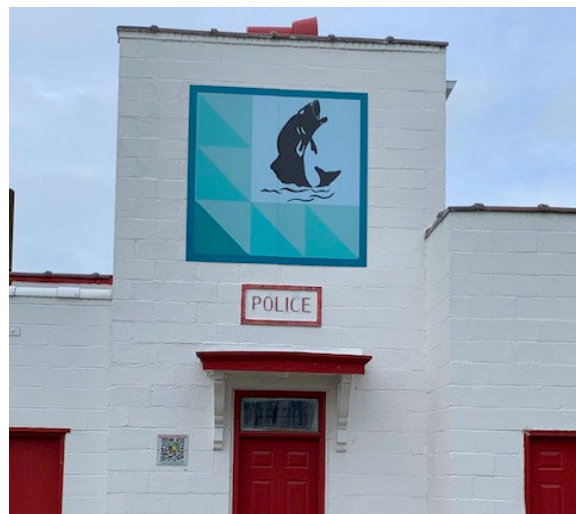
The historical society is looking to add to its collection. We accept donations of artifacts, photos, documents, and stories related to the Island and surrounding area. If you would like to add your family history to the museum archives, we can help you capture your memories for future generations.

Please contact our curator; Chris Knight at chris.knight@comcast.net

Harsens Island Historical Society

The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats History Society has a quilt block on the building and a QR code is mounted next to the side door. Using the camera app on your phone, scan the code and it will show the link to the Historical Museum page in the [Quilt Trail](#) site.

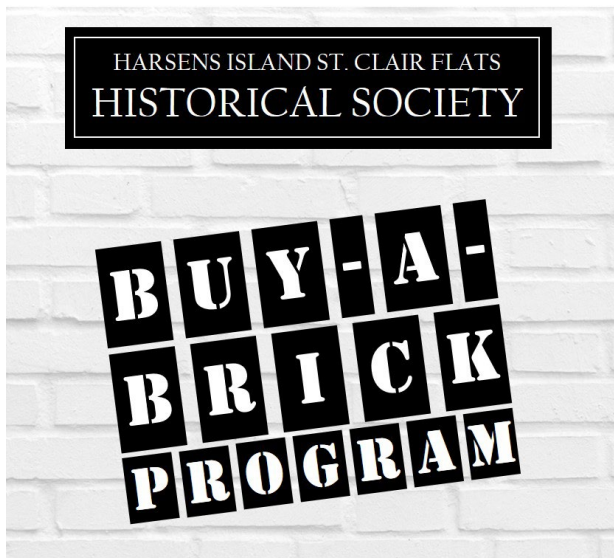
The [Historical Society of Michigan](#) published their 2024 Winter Issue of the Chronicle. The new Harsens Island Historical Society Quilt Block was mentioned in the magazine.



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 below.



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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2025

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:

- Individual (1 Member Only) \$20.00
- Family (1-2 Adults + Children < 18) \$30.00
- Business \$50.00

Lifetime Dues:

- Lifetime Individual \$300.00
- Lifetime Family \$500.00

Building Donation / Roof: \$ _____ Other Donation: \$ _____

(* The necessary roof replacement in 2024 has left reserve funds low)

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 \$ _____

I would be interested in volunteering as a museum host this summer (greeting visitors, answer questions, if possible, & record museum shop sales).