

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## From the President

When I sat at my computer to write the Society Pages article for March, I kept thinking **we now have the key to the Fire Hall** and it's time to begin cleaning up the old building. The Fire Hall has quite a history on the Island and has had many Fire Chiefs. One that comes to mind is Frank Cummings. When I first started coming to Harsens Island my first stop after leaving the ferry was Cummings Bait Shop. Today I went out to my pole barn and went through my collection of old copies of the *Delta News*. The *Delta News* I was looking for was the 1955 issue and an article written by Joan Burczyk. See the article below for the content.

I knew exactly what I was looking for as Ann, my dear wife and three of her Island friends, Donna Krispin, Jean Nelson and Jane Wright had compiled an index of all the historical articles that were contained in the *Delta News* from 1928 through 2003. There are a few years that were not available back in 2000 when they began their project but not many. As soon as the Fire Hall is cleaned up and ready for the Society to move in, this collection as well as the filing cabinet they're in, will be donated to our museum. Visitors to our museum will be able to search the index year by year. All will be amazed at the information about our Island contained in these magazines.

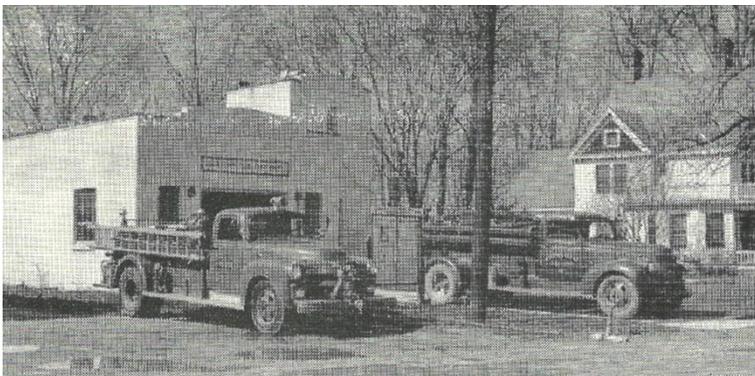
After reading this story of how it was back in 1925 and the advances made up to when this article was written in 1955. I know that we will have a long line of volunteers who can't wait to turn the Old Fire Hall into a showplace to house the historical artifacts that will be donated.

First Vice President Nancy Boulton is accepting donated items; please contact her at 810-748-3802. Most of all we need volunteers to help with the clean up. Walls need to be scraped and painted and the carpet needs a good cleaning. We will begin our fix up, clean up, paint up project in March when we take possession of the Fire Hall. Give me a call or any member of the board to become a worker-bee, **we need you!**

- Gary Grout

## "From Lower to Higher" a Brief History of our Fire Department

from the *Delta News*, 1955 by Joan Burczyk



There may be "water, water every-where" on Harsens's Island, but back in 1925 when the houses on the North Channel caught on fire, they almost burned to the ground because of lack of firefighting equipment. Putting out a fire was a long hard struggle in those days; carrying buckets of water from the river, trying to assemble enough people to carry the buckets, and it was almost impossible to save anything once the fire got going.

continued on page 2

## the Society Pages

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### HISCFHS Board of Directors

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**John Eidt** - 810-748-3181

**Lucy Burby-Mastro** - 810-748-8977

## Upcoming Events

**Clean Up Workdays**

**10am weekends**

call Gary first to confirm

810-748-3320

**HISCFHS General  
Membership Meeting**

**March 26, 2011**

**2:00pm at the Lion's Hall**

## Speedy Recovery

To member, Nancy Eldridge and her husband, Buel, They were in a severe traffic accident on the way to Florida in early February. We send them our best wishes for a speedy recovery and hope to see both of them back on the island this spring.

## THANK YOU!

To the Board of Directors, for all you do to move us forward.

## "From Lower to Higher"

### a Brief History of our Fire Department

from the *Delta News*, 1955 by Joan Burczyk

continued

Things are different today. We have a very efficient volunteer fire squad, plus the latest and finest firefighting equipment and even a pullmoter (i.e. resuscitator) which has been put to good use in the last few years and is credited with saving quite a few lives. After that devastating fire in 1925, Ralph Witmiller, who is now a resident of Florida, decided to prevent future heavy losses by fire. Canvassing the Island, house by house, for donations, he finally collected enough to buy a building. Window decals were given to those who donated, and according to the best authority, there was hardly a house on the whole Island without one. The building they bought was on the property now owned by the Telephone Company, across from Mrs. German's house. The original building is now owned by Tom Ishmal.



Firefighter Dick Earl and Fire Chief Frank Cummings

Even this didn't solve all their problems, a winter fire was a real disaster, the old Model T froze up. New and old fire trucks and it was back to the improvised equipment they went. Progress is wonderful, and with the birth of Ford's Model A, Harsen's Island too, progressed to this equipment. Many a fire chaser saw Mrs. Bob Hill whizz by in the old Model A, collecting all the kids in the neighborhood on the way to a fire, when the men were unavailable. This Model A, symbol of area long past, now is in retirement on Tommy Pouttu's property. The first fire engine was a Model T. After they had the fire engine and the fire hall, the troubles really began. There were very few in those days who knew how to run a "tin lizzy". Mechanical failures were were many. It was finally discovered that Bob Hill had the magic touch with the temperamental "T". He was elected Fireman No. 1 without delay.

## Fire Hall Inspection

Board member Lucy Burby-Mastro arranged for a free inspection of the fire hall by Steven Norkus from Housecalls, L.L.C. out of Marine City. John Eidt met with him on January 29, 2011 to determine the state of the building and what the most immediate needs would be before we could move in.

### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FIREHOUSE INSPECTION 1-29-11

AREA	CONCERNS
Grounds	Rain slope of front and rear entrance.
Exterior	Cracks, damaged mortar, moisture stains. Trim has stains, caulking needed, water penetration to blocks. Chimney needs sealing, loose bricks need securing. Gutters loose, damaged, and disconnected causing block damage.
Foundation	Concrete appears serviceable, cracks on lower interior walls.
Roof	Snow covered-yearly maintenance needed. Lifespan 15-20 yrs. Flashing loose in need of repair. Check in spring.
Plumbing	River water, septic needs scoping to see adequacy of field. Water heater, unsafe relief valve-end of lifespan. No test of pump. Bathroom needs vent.
Heating system	Needs servicing, debris in burner, distribution system not fully visible. Not tested.
Air conditioning	1993-near end of lifespan. Insulation damaged, could not test.
Interior	Doors need attention-some rot. Windows serviceable. Walls need repair from moisture, peeling paint, cracks. Recommend review by engineer. Ceilings of unknown product, stains and damage visible. Floors are carpeted. Loose in spots, some damage. Drains underneath? Tower (attic) no ventilation, ladder loose, framing covered by ceiling tiles which are stained.
Garage	Appears serviceable. Door needs adjustment. Floor settled-poor drainage. Floor carpeted, walls paneled.

His evaluation of many items was that they were close to the end of their lifespan and immediate maintenance on the building was needed to remain serviceable.

**If anyone can help with these issues, please contact any of the board members listed on page 2. We appreciate any help you can provide!**

## Tashmoo Book Update

Harsens Island resident, Art Woodford, has chosen to make his next book project about Tashmoo Park and the steamer, Tashmoo. He has asked our help to locate old photos of people, events at and of Tashmoo Park. Part of the proceeds from this venture will be donated to the Society.

2011 celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the sinking of the Tashmoo in 1936 and Art is looking to have the book published by the fall of this year. If you can help with this project, please contact Art directly at 810-748-3571.

## “From Lower to Higher” a Brief History of our Fire Department

from the *Delta News*, 1955

by Joan Burczyk

continued

There were many others on that old team; Ottis McLane, Steve Meal, George Yax, Charles Dean, and George Beauregard. Sundays and Wednesdays found these loyal fire-fighters on Pouttu's property. It is now a relic of the past, but to many of the Islanders, it can many a story tell.

The next fire truck was a Chevrolet, which was purchased after the war, and which is now on the Flats, at the sub-station. In February of this year, 1955, a new Chevrolet fire truck was added. This is the very latest in firefighting equipment available.

Many men were responsible for the progress made in the interest of our safety. To name a few, Sam Gore, Ralph Witmiller, Bill Windisch, Tommy Gibson, Bill Krueger, William J. Gray, Jr., William H. Thomson, Oscar E. Rasch, and Rex Baker. Our present Fire Chief, Frank Cummings, also deserves a word of praise for his untiring work and able leadership. Now there is not only "water, water everywhere", but enough equipment to utilize it and enough efficient man-power to put out a fire quickly and, with a minimum of loss. ■

## 2011 Activities & Events Calendar

<b>March</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Reminder - 2011 Membership Dues are due.</b>
	<b>5</b>	Start Clean-up / Fix-up 10 am at the old Fire Hall
	<b>26</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>April</b>	<b>15</b>	Complete Clean-up / Fix-up - Ready for MOVE-IN
	<b>23</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
	<b>30</b>	Complete MOVE-IN process
<b>May</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>OPEN DOORS</b> to Public
	<b>28</b>	<i>9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
	<b>28</b>	<b>GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION</b> -- 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM
<b>June</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>BUY THE FIRE HALL</b> -- EVENT -- Fund Raiser @ OLD CLUB --- Details TBD
	<b>25</b>	<i>9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>July</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>HOT DOG &amp; ICE CREAM SOCIAL:</b> 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM -- Fundraiser
	<b>23</b>	<i>9:30 AM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>August</b>	<b>6</b>	Society Booth at <b>FIELD DAY</b> -- Invite folks to stop in for Free Peanuts & Popcorn Day @ Fire Hall
	<b>13</b>	Society Booth at <b>BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL</b> -- Invite folks to stop in for Free Peanuts & Popcorn Day @ Fire Hall
	<b>21</b>	<b>ANNUAL MEETING &amp; GALA EVENT:</b> Dinner Dance & Entertainment -- Fundraiser @ Old Club -- Details TBD
	<b>21</b>	<i>4:00 PM General Membership ANNUAL Meeting @ OLD CLUB</i>
<b>Sept</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>PARADE DAY</b> -- Hot Dogs & Potato Chips - Peanuts & Popcorn Day
	<b>24</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Oct</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>HOT SOUP &amp; MUSIC</b> -- Details TBD
	<b>22</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Nov</b>	<b>6</b>	<i>2:00 PM General Membership Meeting</i>
<b>Dec</b>		No General Membership Meeting