

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Biography Series presents:

Charles F. Bielman

This ongoing series will highlight prominent people that have impacted the history of Harsens Island.

Charles Frederick Bielman was born in Detroit on



April 20, 1859 to Frederick and Ellen C. (Daley) Bielman, who established their home in Detroit in the early 1800's. His parents moved to Casco in St. Clair County when he was four years old and he attended the public school there.

When he was 14 he went to Marine City and found employment in the post office under Postmaster John J. Spinks. Mr. Spinks was also a merchant and local agent for the Star Line steamers. Bielman was employed for a period of six years, where he gained a thorough knowledge of the details of lake-marine traffic.

In 1881 he became clerk of the steamer *Evening Star*, owned and operated by the Detroit & Cleveland Steam Navigation Company, and in the following year he was transferred to the *City of Mackinac*, of the same line.

1886 effected a merge of the operating interests of the Star and the Cole lines of steamers, which had previously been in competition in the passenger and freight traffic. The interested principals in the new combination requested David Carter,

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Membership Numbers Up

Our secretary, Nancy Licata, reports that our membership is up to 194 members.

From the President

She: "Will you come down to the Library tomorrow at 2:00?"

He: "Why?"

She: "There is a meeting of the new historical society."

He: "You can get involved, but I really do not want to."

She: "Just come to the meeting...you don't have to get involved...just come and hear what they are doing."

He: "OK, I'll go with you, but I'm not getting involved because I have a lot of other things I'm doing like finally getting to restore my 1968 Lyman....I'm retired you know? I just want to play at being the 'retired guy'."

That was a conversation between my dear wife Nancy and me one afternoon in early 2010. Frankly I knew quite well that I should not go to that meeting because I also know, with certainty based on historical data, that when I allow myself to get involved in something ... anything ... the DNA that constitutes my being starts driving toward a positive outcome no matter the cause.

Well...you also need to know that I have a hard time saying no, so I went to the meeting. I came away **INVOLVED** and here we are about eighteen months later spending my Sunday morning writing a message: 'From the President' for *The Society Pages* instead of being out in the Lyman, catching those wily walleye or those big bass.

As with going to the first meeting....you also need to know that now that I'm **INVOLVED**....you can expect my DNA to 'kick-in' and start driving....so here we go. You've heard from Gary Grout that we have a dedicated board of directors and he is absolutely right...we do. Nancy Boulton has the vision and enthusiasm for organizing and managing the Museum and along with her team, Marie Eidt and Chris Wludyka, have done an incredible job at organizing, cataloging and displaying artifacts in the museum.

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the Society Pages

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Charles F. Bielman Home

THE HOUSE was erected for Charles F. Bielman, at No. 285 Hancock avenue, West, Detroit, Mich., from designs prepared by A. C. Varney & Co., architects. The house is constructed of stone, while the roof is covered with slate. The material employed up to the window sills is limestone, while above that point is red sandstone. The steps of the house are of bluestone. The dwelling is conveniently arranged, the floor plans showing five rooms and a hall on the first floor, while on the floor above are a bathroom and five sleeping rooms, out of one of the latter of which opens a large alcove. Entering the hall from a wide veranda, the parlor is found at the right hand communicating with the sitting room in the rear and separated from it by *portieres*. In the rear of the hall is the library, while beyond it and the sitting room is the dining room. The kitchen is in the rear, dining room and bathroom are finished with paneled wainscoting.
—as featured in *Carpentry and Building, Vol. XIII, 1891*



Fall Harvest Campout at Algonac State Park



On Oct 1st (9AM to 5 PM) and 2nd (9 AM to 3 PM), the Algonac State park will be hosting the **Algonac Historical Encampment**. The Algonac State Park is located on M-29 about 2 miles north of Algonac. Living history interpreters & re-enactors will demonstrate the daily life activities of the various people (both Native Americans and Europeans) that inhabited the Great Lakes region during the early to mid 1700's. Over the course of the weekend, re-enactors will be engaged in the following activities; tanning hides, spinning wool, working on moccasins, snow shoes, and toboggans, finger weaving sashes, twinning bags, cooking meals over fires, making rope, shooting flintlock firearms, carving bowls and more.

The public will be transported from the state park parking lot to and from the historical encampment by hay wagons pulled by antique tractors. The cost of the hay wagon rides and admission to the historical encampment is; \$2 for children under 12 and \$5 for everyone else. Check out the following sites for more information:

<https://www.facebook.com/AlgonacHistoricalEncampment>

<https://www.facebook.com/livinghistoryhq>

<http://www.livinghistoryhq.com/>

John Chamberlain has brought us his knowledge of the insurance industry to guide us in making sure we are protected. Christine Wludyka's talent as a CPA has organized our accounting and finances. Lucy Burby-Mastro is invaluable to the board with her no-nonsense business sense and her ability to simply get stuff done. Nancy Licata, my dear wife, has done a really outstanding job of keeping all the meeting minutes and handling all mailings and communications. Bob Williams was appointed to the board last month; and with my experience working with Bob on the Clay Township Phragmites Management Advisory Board, I am confident that he will be an asset to the Historical Society. (Bob and his wife Sue were honored as **Michiganians of the Year** for their work.) Our newest elected board member is Otto Jensen. I do not know Otto very well, but do know that he has served as a Lion for many years and we look forward to the contributions that he can bring to The Society.

MEMBERS, I will need each and every one of you to help this board make your historical society a success. Please think about what your talent is, what you really like to do and take on *one small project* for the upcoming year. Please contact me by phone at: 586-530-7100 or send e-mail to me at: licata@comcast.net to discuss how you can help.

As we move into fall, please know that we have not yet achieved our goal to raise funds to acquire the old Fire Hall to be our permanent Museum. We still need a lot of money not only to acquire the building but to make necessary improvements. It is your Historical Society and your Museum.

Each of you reading this you must have thought this Historical Society was a good idea; otherwise you would not have become a member or put a few dollars toward the cause, which means you have some of the same DNA and also want a positive outcome. So...Make it Happen...Pick up the Phone...Send an E-mail...Become a Committee Chairperson...Manage an Event...Take Responsibility....Just Do It....**TOGETHER** we can have a **POSITIVE OUTCOME**.

I look forward to working with each of you.

-Bernard

CHARLES F. BIELMAN biography

continued

then general manager of the Detroit & Cleveland Steam Navigation Company, to select for them a competent manager for the business of the Star-Cole Line, representing the consolidated interests.

Mr. Carter's appreciation of the services and ability of Bielman warmly recommended the latter as a most eligible candidate for the position in question. Bielman had been in the employ of the Detroit & Cleveland Company for a period of six years, and had demonstrated his executive and technical ability. In March 1886 at the age of 27, Bielman entered upon the duties of his new office, and in the following year he returned to the employ of the Detroit & Cleveland Steam Navigation Company, in service on the steamer *City of Alpena*.

Soon afterward, however, in July, 1887, he became associated with Darius Cole in securing control of the Star Line. Cole already owned the line which bore his name, and the two gentlemen continued the operation of what was designated as the Star-Cole Line, one of the most important of those having virtual headquarters in Detroit. Bielman became secretary and treasurer of the company. In 1893 he became associated with Aaron A. Parker, Captain James W. Millen and John Pridgeon, Jr., in the purchase of the Red Star Line, of which he was made secretary and traffic manager. In 1896 the White Star Line was incorporated under the laws of Michigan and assimilated the interests of the Red



Charles F. Bielman, *far right*, poses with present and past members of the Detroit Board of Commerce in 1913.

CHARLES F. BIELMAN biography

continued

and the White Star Lines and Bielman had charge of the traffic interests of the combination. Under the administrative ability of Bielman, the White Star line would flourish and own five steel passenger steamers on the route between Toledo, Detroit, St. Clair Flats and all points on the St. Clair River to Port Huron.

By the late 1890's visitors to the Flats became too numerous for the hotels and restaurants and the White Star Line turned its eye to developing a picnic ground. In 1897, Bielman and his backers bought land just below Sans Souci for a permanent picnic ground called Tashmoo Park. Around June 27, 1897, the steamer Greyhound brought the first excursionists up. The park was a strategic move for the White Star Line. Hotels, as a destination, were losing their popularity and picnic grounds with a dance hall and all the amenities of the time were the rage. They could accommodate huge crowds and the financial gains were enormous.

On September of 1898, Bielman returned from a trip to New York to study Hudson River steamers. The Detroit *Free Press* reported, "Mr. Bielman has about decided to have the new steamer built after the model of the passenger steamer *New York*..." On January 13, 1899, the paper reported the letting of a \$275,000 contract to the Detroit Shipbuilding Company to build the new steamer, *Tashmoo*. She made her maiden voyage on June 9, 1900.

In January 1890, Bielman was united in marriage to Miss Catherine Barlum. They had two children, Florence and Charles, Jr. Bielman's connections with the water transportation business gave him a great



deal of opportunity to act for the public benefit and increase the prestige of Detroit. He was a staunch supporter of the Republican party but never sought public office, though his name had several times been suggested in connection with nomination for mayor of Detroit. He was the third to be elected president of the Detroit Board of Commerce in 1906. He held memberships in the Detroit Club, the Detroit Athletic Club, the Harmonie Society, and the Michigan Whist Association. He was also a member of the American Association of General Passenger & Ticket Agents, the International Water Lines Association, the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence River Association, and the Central Passenger Association.

Bielman also had his hand in another company. Since 1892 he had been secretary and treasurer of the Stewart Transportation Company, engaged in the freight-traffic business. Bielman was awarded the first contract from the Post Office to operate the Detroit Marine Post Office on June 17, 1895. His first steam vessel, named the Florence B., towed the rowboat containing the mail to the shipping channel in the Detroit River. In 1907 he built the steel steamer, *C. F. Bielman, Jr.*, at a cost of \$15,000, to haul the mail.

Charles F. Bielman passed away April 16, 1920. His son, Charles, would succeed him as the general manager of the White Star Line. Bielman, Jr. was the youngest manager of a line of steamers in the United States. In 1916, he had enlisted in World War I as a marine and was among the first American troops in actual fighting and saw some hard fighting. Bielman, Jr. was both gassed and shot. When he was back from the war, he had a rough time. While a brilliant manager like his father, Bielman, Jr. was unable to hold off the inevitable. The White Star Line was unfortunately well suited to be a victim of the automobile. During the winter of 1924, the White Star Line, bankrupt, was liquidated.

It was during this time that the rides at Sugar Island were moved to Tashmoo Park. The *Tashmoo* was bought by the newly formed White Star Navigation Company owned by Bielman, Jr. and financier, John J. Barlum, a relative on his mother's side. Bielman, Jr. would be at the helm through two more companies, the Tashmoo Transit Company and then in 1934, the White Star Steamship Company. By 1938, Bielman, Jr. had moved to Florida to get a start in the hotel business. He passed away in Miami in 1959. ■

2011 Activities & Events Calendar

Dates and locations subject to change

Museum Open

Saturday's 10am – 3pm

Sunday's 12noon – 4pm

Volunteers are needed to staff the museum and should contact Nancy Boulton at 810-748-3802 for orientation and assignments. Visit our gift shop!

General Membership Meetings held at the Old Fire Hall 3058 S Channel in downtown Sans Souci

Sept	7	Social Hour 5-7pm at the Museum*
	21	Social Hour 5-7pm at the Museum*
	24	2:00 PM General Membership Meeting
Oct	22	2:00 PM General Membership Meeting
Nov	12	Square Dance – Save the Date! <i>details to follow</i>
	26	2:00 PM General Membership Meeting
Dec		No General Membership Meeting

*Bring a lawn chair, appetizer and your beverage.

