

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

From the President

My wish is that the New Year will bring you Health, Warmth, Food, and a few Good Friends...and also that all people of the world learn to live in peace.

The New Year Holiday is a time to reflect on 'his story' (also: 'her story')...**history!** Take an hour to be alone in a quiet place and ruminate on your life 'story', your most recent 'story' and what 'story' you will create in the year ahead. Think also on what **history/herstory** you will bring to those who find your *Pictures from the Attic* and what memories you will create for them.

Now that we've kicked-off the New Year with a well executed personal reality check, let me fill you in on a couple items of interest to the Historical Society.

First, we are having some success with: *The Night the Fitz Went Down* DVD. We've shipped nearly 100 of them to all points, East, West, North and South, Boston, Seattle, Alaska and Florida. Our

plan is to expand marketing of the DVD to YouTube and Facebook. Monies from this project are being directed to the building fund...which brings me to our next topic.

Bob Williams and I visited with The Community Foundation of St. Clair County at the very end of November and they will be visiting the museum the afternoon of January 5. A grant application to the Community Foundation is in the process of being completed and should be submitted by the time you read this message. The Society has also submitted a grant application to DTE Energy Foundation for possible funding; and, we recently received word from another private foundation that our grant request is under consideration.

Reflect on where you've been and set some goals for where you're going this New Year. Our hope in all of that is that you will make some space for your Historical Society and Museum.

Have a Great Year....

bernard

Pictures From The Attic

The Story of Lot #112 - 8146 and 8153 South Channel

by Gary R. Grout

My first visit to Lot #112 was shortly after my marriage to my wife, Arline Ann Blount, in 1952. Her great uncle, Newell Collins and his wife, Edith, had purchased the property in 1910. There was only one structure on the property. It was a boathouse and was on piers at the edge of the South Channel. They moved part of the boathouse to the back of the property and built what was known as the Green Cottage. Later, around 1921, they built the Brown Cottage.

It was their second property purchase on Harsens Island. Their first was up river, at what is known as the S curve. They sold that

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The boathouse

The Society Pages

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Museum Happenings

by **Nancy Boulton and Chris Wludyka**

Since the Museum opened, we have had over a 1,000 visitors. It all started Memorial Weekend just seven months ago and didn't wind down until the weekend of December 3 - 4 with the Antique Sale.

All the visitors to the Museum told us how happy they were to see the Old Fire Hall back in use, and they could not think of a better place for the Museum.

Two weeks before the Museum opened, **Nancy, Marie (Eidt) and Chris** were cataloging the donations. At that point, we had a few copies of island photos and some maps. We were worried. What were we going to display Memorial Weekend for the Grand Opening? It was unbelievable how many donations arrived in those couple of weeks. When we opened, everyone was amazed at all we had to display. The response has been overwhelming and we cannot begin to tell you how grateful we are for all the contributions.

In addition to general displays of historical interest, we have sectioned off areas in the museum for **ships, Tashmoo Park, fire-house equipment, island schools, the post office, the Old Club**. It includes one that displays **Recent Acquisitions**.

Our **Antique Sale** in December was a huge success. Many thanks to all who donated their time and antique items for our sale. The Museum looked beautiful. With all the help and donations from all of you, we had Christmas lights, a tree, antique Christmas ornaments for the tree and much more. We are planning another antique sale sometime in the summer.

This couldn't have happened without all the help we received from Marie and John Eidt. Marie has spent many, many hours creating and setting up our wonderful displays. John has totally taken over the maintenance of the museum and is available anytime we need his help. **Thank you, John and Marie!**

If you have any items that pertain to the island, please think of donating them to the Museum. We found **Charlie**, a mannequin that Nancy and Chris discovered in a store that was going out of business, so now we can display historical clothing items.

Call **Nancy at 810-748-3802**, or **Chris at 810-748-9231** if you have anything to donate. The Museum will be closed for the winter. However, the Museum can be open by special request by contacting Nancy Boulton at 810-748-3802.



Christmas lights at the Museum

We wish you all a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

Pictures From The Attic

continued

property as they could only view the freighters for a short time at that location. The cottage was dubbed "The Swastika". Back then, a swastika was a good luck sign for the Native Americans.



The first cottage known as The Swastika

Mr. Collins wrote many articles for *The Delta News* and he was an island historian. One of his books is in our museum and titled *Harsens Island and the Old Johnson House*. He was such an interesting person and was in the process of printing the Bible into the language of the First Nation people on Walpole Island. Mr. Collins was not able to finish the printing before his death in 1957.

After Mr. Collins' death, his wife Edith sold the property to her nephew, William A. Blount and his wife, Fern (Ann's father and mother). Pop and Mom, as I called them, stayed in the Brown Cottage. Ann and our family along with her brother Bill and his family used the Green Cottage. Both of our families came up most every weekend during the summer and off and on during the winter. It seemed like Pop was always working on the sea wall which took a beating from the freighter traffic on the South Channel. It got to a point that major work needed to be done and Pop felt he could not afford the necessary repairs.

One evening in 1971 Ann and I got a call from Pop who asked if we could come over to his home in Detroit. Pop knew of our interest in the cottages and asked if we wanted to purchase them. Of course we said yes and an agreement was made



Edith and Newell Collins

to buy out their land contract. We gave them a life time right to the Brown Cottage at the 8146 address. They came up to the cottage during the summer and wintered in Florida. Pop passed in 1979 on my birthday in November. Mom came to the cottage when possible during the summer and as her health failed she came less often and stopped coming in 1989. Upon Mom's death in 2002 the life time right ended and Ann and I had complete ownership of the property.

In 1989, we began a project to make the Brown Cottage into a year round home. We hired island contractors to complete the process. Dan Persyn did the foundation and septic field. Norm Olsen and John Sampier did the remodel and added additional rooms to the old structure. The project was completed in 1993 and Ann and I moved into our new home and became year round residents.

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The Brown and Green Cottages

Pictures From The Attic

continued

The Green Cottage (8153) was remodeled in 1999 and again Dan did the foundation but this time our grandson, Jason Grout, remodeled the outside of the cottage. The Green Cottage now has white siding but the inside is still the same as it was when my family used it.

My dear wife of fifty three years passed in April of 2005 and I retired from employment. The cottages are no longer green and brown and the names have faded with time. Things are ever changing here on Lot #112 and plans are being made to turn ownership over to my son Guy and his wife Gail. Their plans are to have their son, Jason, take ownership from them. This will mean that Lot #112 will have remained in the Collins, Blount, and Grout ownership for over one hundred years.

This ends my story of Lot #112 for now, but it is an ongoing story, and will be continued by other generations of the Grout line. Jason is not married as of this writing, but if and when he does, there may be other descendants who will continue this story and their name may not be Grout! ■

Walpole Island Heritage Centre

by Nancy Licata

December 15, 2011, turned out to be a day that was interesting, educational and most of all a great deal of fun. Our Historical Society was invited to sponsor and participate in the **Walpole Island Heritage Centre - 22nd Anniversary Open House**. The purpose was to celebrate local history. Gary Grout, Bob Williams, Denne Osgood, Bernard and I attended.

We set up a display board using past issues of our *Society Pages* newsletter to illustrate our short history, events and progress of the Society and Museum. We also had two lap tops streaming videos: ***The Night the Fitz Went Down*** and ***Steamer Tashmoo***. The attendees were interested and asked a lot of questions about our Historical Society. We were intrigued with information we learned about our neighbors from several speakers on the event agenda. →



Dr. Dean Jacobs, event organizer with Elder, Eric Issac

Dr. Neal Ferris spoke on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal archaeology of Northeastern North America, particularly about the Aboriginal communities and recent findings at two archaeology sites.

Dr. Victor Lytwyn was fascinating; he is an independent consultant in the field of Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada. He spoke briefly about the border that separates us from our Canadian neighbors, how it has changed and promises made but not kept in the 1800's. It raised the old question of the international border and whether Harsens Island should still be a part of Canada and the First Nation territory.

Eric Issac, an elder of Walpole Island, told stories about growing up on the Walpole and the many changes he has witnessed over the years. Did you know that wild ponies inhabited these islands? We also learned that the First Nation is keeping their native language alive by teaching and using it with their children. Sue Carr and her mother, both Native Americans, brought hundreds of old photos that brought their personal history and the history of the islands in the delta vividly to life.

It was a wonderful day and we all learned a lot. It is our hope that we will continue our good relations with our neighbors and that more of us take the opportunity to visit the Walpole Island Heritage Centre to learn more and experience the warm hospitality extended to us. We also look forward to organizing a Historical Society educational event here on Harsens Island that will bring some of the history of the Ojibwa First Nation here to share. ■

The Clubs of the St. Clair Flats

by E. Hough

Editor's Note: This is Part 1 of a multi-part series published in Field and Forest in August and September, 1890.

THERE is no sporting locality in the Western country which has a wider reputation than the St. Clair Flats, and the sporting clubs of that locality have long been the name of everything denoting thoroughness, wealth and luxury in sportsmen's organizations. It is not every one, however, who has had the privilege of visiting this land of ducks and small-mouthed bass, and not everyone knows definitely much about the forms of the sport there or of the great clubs which have made that their abiding place. The story of the St. Clair Flats may therefore be of interest. It is believed that the effort of *Forest and Stream* to secure complete information for such a story is the first noticeable attempt of the kind made by any sportsmen's paper.

Preparations were made to go up among the club houses of the St. Clair Flats. At the time it was announced that Mr. John Parker, game warden for Wayne county, with Mr. Frank Wherry, acting as assistant State game warden, were going up to look after some violations of the fish laws, complained of by some of the larger clubs. The writer, being invited to join them in this trip, did so with pleasure, since it afforded the best possible method of learning thoroughly the peculiarities of the country.

We set sail of a Wednesday morning in the cabin boat owned by Mr. Gilman, which is much used by the Detroit boys on their shooting trips. This boat is called "No. 11," and she is a study in naval architecture. She is a flat-bottomed centerboard craft, with two masts, about twice as broad as she is long. The cabin, however, is very large and roomy and provided with every convenience for cooking, eating and sleeping. There is a good cook stove, a handy folding table along the centerboard well, plenty of lockers under deck, and a place where a false bottom is laid for the beds at night. Under the deck forward is a vast cavity, where are stowed the bedding, guns, valises, etc. The boat bore evidences of having been occupied by shooters who knew how to live and yet kept things neat and shipshape. A better abode for three men bound on such errands as ours could not be devised.

The Detroit River is a very swift stream, and as we met a hard head wind the first day, we were able to get up only as far as Belle Isle Park by evening of the first day. Numbers of the craft out on the river were tacking up stream, but No. 11 wasn't built that way, and we couldn't get up the hill, no matter which end of the boat we sailed first. A steamer just pulling out for Walkerville offered us a tow up, and we cast them a line, and went flying. In this way we came upon the point of sustaining what would have been at best a very serious accident, and learned that the simple operation of being towed, even in so large and steady a craft as ours, may in reality be a very dangerous one.

Our boat when under tow ran very high forward, and we shipped a great amount of water astern through the rudder hole. Wherry and myself, acting under the orders of Parker, who was in command of the vessel, went forward by the foremast to try to keep her nose down all we could. We were going a good gait, when Parker also came forward. His weight was enough to overcome the balance of the loose water ballast we were carrying. This rushed forward under decks, and the No. 11 began to go down by the head about as fast as any vessel ever did. The water surged up over the bows, wet us to the knees as we stood on deck, and even swashed across the top of the cabin. Parker called out for us to jump astern, and at the same instant the engineer of the steamer saw our plight and at once reversed his engines. Otherwise we should certainly have gone to the bottom; as it was, the tons of water that went over us were mostly turned from the cockpit by the build of the deck, and we slowly came up again, not much the worse for it except in the wetting of our cargo, and for a scare which never reached its height till two or three days later, when we got to figuring about it.

The morning of the second day's journey toward the Flats broke clear and with a change of wind. No. 11 began to plow her way heavily but steadily up the river. By afternoon we left the land far away to our left and stood out into the open lake, heading for a long point which stretches out from the head of the bay. There was quite a sea on, and the wind was not especially favorable, but the skillful work of

Captain John Parker got us well along before evening. Before the dusk set down, we could see from our decks the long line of buildings far out in the lake, which constitute the group of the St. Clair clubs proper. We ate a hearty supper and passed a jovial evening aboard that night, flattering ourselves that we would soon be at anchor at the end of our journey.

As we tacked in for our last reach, we passed a boat containing four damsels from the Rushmere Club House. These we hailed after the manner of the country, and catching up the line they tossed us, we gave them a tow of a quarter of a mile or so.

It was 4 o'clock that evening before we ran in under the lee of the "made ground" at the long line of club houses and cottages. We came to anchor just back of the Rushmere Clubhouse, and from our position had a very good view of what is really a unique scene. The "flats" of Lake St. Clair are miles and miles in extent, but throughout their extent there is not any land at all, unless an approach thereto may be found in the marshy banks of some channel. Even the deep channel of what is called the St. Clair River has no banks, properly speaking, in that section where we now were. On every hand "the shallows spread away for miles and miles, covered in many portions with a regular wild-rice marsh, but showing little or nothing of terra firma, except a low island or so like the one called Strawberry Island, which we passed in coming up. Beyond the two old lighthouses is the "ship canal" which is simply a channel dredged through the shallow lake, the banks, which are built of the dredged dirt, being protected by willows thickly planted along them.



Through this narrow channel of deep blue water, all the traffic of the whole Great Lakes system passes, going and coming, up and down. Among these vessels are the fastest inland steamers of the world, whose time card equals that of any freight train. Besides these are countless sailing craft, odd and picturesque many of them, and the whole scene is a stirring marine panorama whose like is not elsewhere to be found.

The process of "making ground" is here not a very difficult or expensive one. The great dredging machines simply tear the bottom out of the lake, which may be only 8 or 10ft. deep, and pile up the results in a heap. Where the bottom is thus robbed, the water is of course very deep, and in this way have been made the short channels or "cut-offs" which separate some of the buildings from their neighbors. The price for such "made land" is about \$50 per front foot, I was told. Of course the original appearance of this artificial ground is very rough, the dirt having a bluish clayey look as it lies in the huge piles fresh from the dredge; but the hand of man knows how to smooth all this down.

On the following morning, the boys having very kindly loaned me the little duck boat—which was the best all-around boat I ever was in, for pushing, paddling or sailing, it being double-end, beamy, well decked, light of draft and provided with the nicest little centerboard on earth—I set out for a systematic trip among the club houses, beginning at the first one on our right, the great St. Clair Club, whose magnificent building is just above the mouth of the ship canal.

Thence, on up the river, each club was visited in order, and in the writing will be taken up in the same order; so that our little story will touch, first, the St. Clair Club; second, the Mervue Club; third, the Rushmere Club; fourth, the Peninsula Club; fifth, the Delta Club; sixth, the Canada Club; seventh, the North Channel Club. The latter club is across the bay and some miles distant from the main body of the clubs; but it is a strong and worthy organization, and properly to be included in any account of the clubs of the Flats. Now, each of these clubs is different from the others, so that the story of each is interesting. ■

Look for Part 2 in the next issue!

2012 Activities & Events Calendar

Dates and locations subject to change

Museum Hours

Open by appointment in January, February and March 2012

May: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM

June, July, Aug, Sept: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM and Sunday Noon – 4 PM

Oct & Nov: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM

Dec: closed – open by appointment and for Christmas Sale

For museum information, contact Nancy Boulton at 810-748-3802

Contact us at email@hiscfhs.org

All events and meetings held at the Old Fire Hall Museum unless noted
3058 S. Channel in downtown Sans Souci.

Members are welcome to attend any Board meetings on the calendar to keep apprised of Society activities and to bring issues before the Board.

January	14	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
March	31	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
May	12	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	12	General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM
	26 – 28	Memorial Day Open House & First Year Anniversary Saturday, Sunday & Monday
June	9	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	13	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	16 or 23	Rum Runners event date to be determined – Saturday
	27	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
July	4	Museum open special for the holiday – Wednesday
	11	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	14	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	14	General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM
	25	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
August	4	Society booth at HISCFA Field Day – Saturday
	8	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	11	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	18	Annual Meeting followed by spaghetti dinner Saturday – 5 PM
	22	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
September		Square dance proposed in September. Date to be determined
	1, 2, 3	Museum open Saturday, Sunday & Monday – Labor Day Weekend
	8	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	8	General Membership Meeting and Lecture Series Saturday – 3 to 5 PM
	12	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	26	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
November	10	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
December	1 & 2	Christmas Sale at the museum Saturday and Sunday – 10 AM to 4 PM

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 44
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DVD running time: 1 hour 40 minutes

The story of the Great Lakes freighter S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald is well known, but few have heard it from someone who was there that fateful night.

Captain Donald Erickson and his crew aboard the lake freighter S.S. William Clay Ford - upon receiving word that the Fitzgerald had disappeared from radar - left the safe anchorage of Whitefish Bay during the ferocious November 1975 storm to search for the Mighty Fitz and her crew.

As part of its Guest Speaker Series, The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society invited Captain Erickson to share his insights and memories of that night - fireside chat style - along with moderator Malcolm McAdam of the Great Lakes Maritime Institute, in front of a packed house at the Harsens Island Lions Hall. This DVD captures their conversation.

\$20.00 each plus \$5.00 shipping/handling if you cannot pickup. Contact any board member to pickup or send a check made payable to the HISCFS to PO Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028.