

The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Upcoming Events

**Members & Public
Welcome!**

Sept. 22

Square Dance & Fried Chicken Dinner

Browne's Field
Dinner at 5pm
Dancing at 6pm
\$15 per person
RSVP 810-748-1825

October 13

2012 Lecture Series

presents

Joel Stone

curator at the Detroit
Historical Society

Committed To

The Deep

Exploring

Underwater

Traesures of the

Great Lakes

3-5pm

Lion's Club

\$10 per person

From the President

If you missed First Nations Festival on August 11, you lost an opportunity for a really educational and fun day. As you know our **First Nations** neighbors visited from **Walpole Island**. They brought with them **Dr. Evelyn White Eye** who did an excellent presentation explaining the spirit of the drum, the purpose of the songs and the meaning of the dancing. She also described the regalia worn by the dancers. In addition great food and craft vendors were here to share their talents. (The Fry Bread and Indian Tacos were just great... I ate too much!)

We were all treated to a wealth of information from **Susan and Richard Carr** who are experts on the care and feeding of our Purple Martin friends who visit us here in the Delta each summer. We also had the Native Territories Avian Research Project President **Rachel Powless** and **Carl Pascoe**, to describe their hummingbird banding research project. We have discussed bringing these people and their topics to the Island for a Lecture early next year so that we can all learn more about Purple Martins and Hummingbirds.

Our visitors from Walpole enjoyed their visit and expressed an interest in returning in 2013 for another event. On a personal note, I was curious to know if anyone or group here on Harsens Island had ever invited our 'neighbors from Walpole' to an organized event like this before... so I asked some of the people who have lived here most of their lives... some in their 80's and 90's. They remembered vendors who worked Tashmoo Park and sold crafts to park visitors in the 1940's, but this was their first organized event (a mini-powwow) with Drummers, Singers and Dancers; and the first time there was an educational perspective. Every person I spoke to expressed their appreciation for the experience and the educational aspects of the day. For these reasons your Historical Society Board will work hard to repeat and improve the program for next year.

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The Society Pages

Volume 3 / Number 9 / September 2012

a publication of the Harsens Island/
St. Clair Flats Historical Society

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Join us on Facebook!

From the President continued

In other news...

SUMMER is leaving us... it's nearly over and it seems like we just got here... and here it is Labor Day AGAIN! The Society has had a great line-up of events this year and we hope to have another fun filled, summer next year with more educational and cultural events.

DO NOT FORGET... we still have a few activities scheduled for the fall:

- **September 22** is the **Square Dance and Fried Chicken Dinner** at Browne's Field Pavilion. This event sold-out early last year so make your RESERVATIONS with Nancy, so we have enough Fried Chicken on hand for all you dancers...phone her at: 810-748-1825.
- Saturday, **October 13**, we are all looking forward to the Lecture by **Joel Stone** of the Detroit Historical Society, who will be here to present: **Committed to the Deep - Exploring Underwater Treasures of the Great Lakes**. This is one you will not want to miss, again, make reservations.

The **2012 Lecture Series** is being made into DVD's that will be available soon at the Museum Gift Shoppe and may be ordered via the website. We will announce their completion hopefully by next printing of *The Society Pages*.

Thanks to those who attended the **Annual Meeting on August 18** followed by a great **Spaghetti Dinner** catered for us by the Lions. We all had a chance to socialize and meet some new faces as well as greet visitors from Walpole Island who attended the dinner.

We are sending a Thank-you letter to **Manny Maroun** of the **Detroit International Bridge Company** for their donation of \$500.00 to The Society. We appreciate their support to achieve our goal of purchasing the historic Fire Hall to become our permanent Museum.

For a quick update on our progress, we have a current bank balance and pledges whose total is fast approaching \$90K; which means we still need an additional \$50-60K to execute the purchase of the building. We are confident, based on our past two year experience, that we can sustain operations once the building is in our ownership. If you have any ideas as to where we might procure additional funds, please contact me directly and promptly.

Your board and executive team cannot function without your input. Any questions or comments should be sent directly to me at: president@hiscfhs.org.

bernard



2012 – 2013 Board of Directors

Back row: John Chamberlain, Bob Williams, Bernard Licata

Front row: Nancy Boulton, Nancy Licata, Joyce Hassen,
Gary Grout

Not Present: Lucy Burby-Mastro, Kathy O'Connor

Images from the First Nations Festival August 11, 2012



Thanks to **Judi Stewart** at the **Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau**. They posted our August First Nations Festival on their electronic billboard in Port Huron (see below). **Chi Miigwetch** to our **Bkejwanong First Nation** friends for their participation in this event.



Pictures From The Attic

Venice Memories

By Bob Carroll

"Yippee...we are GOING to the Flats!"

My mother, Virginia Carroll, had just set down the phone after talking with my father, "Bill" (John William) while he was at work. They had decided we would go TONIGHT... a Friday in July...just as soon as Dad arrived home from work by bus.

As a seven year old boy – one of four at the time – growing up in Northeast Detroit was BORING. Concrete sidewalks, single car garages set on concrete driveways, asphalt or concrete alleys, and concrete streets with CARS zooming everywhere meant not much freedom for little boys ages 8, 6, 5, and 4, in 1954.

"Play in the yard...play in the sandbox," Mom seemed to always say. "Keep that gate closed...the dogs will stay OUT of the yard." (Lots of neighbors had dogs that liked to run around, dropping their "gifts" on someone else's yard. And little boys would inevitably track those gifts into their homes, much to the horror of their mothers.) But, playing OUTSIDE the yard might have meant getting blasted by some driver zooming to work, or the store...too dangerous.

Sandbox play meant fighting with older brother, John, who would hog most of the box so I couldn't build MY tower with ramps; or with little brothers Mike and Jim, who were too small to really be of any help constructing MY designs.

Now, with the GRAND ANNOUNCEMENT of a trip to the Flats, everything changed. There would be the "white bag" to pack with linens and towels; water jugs and grocery bags to fill. Then, all this stuff had to be carefully packed in the car; leaving room for fresh fruits and vegetables to be purchased at roadside farms on 23 Mile Road west of New Baltimore; plus worms from the "worm lady" on M-29 around the bend from County Line road heading east out of New Baltimore toward the Ferry.

As soon as Dad arrived, he would change clothes, toss his stuff into the car, and off we would go to the magical island where there was

NO concrete, NO fences, NO restrictions on where and what little boys could explore, just as long as they wore their life preservers as they chased frogs and crayfish; red winged blackbirds and ducks, or stalked the wily "Shipo"--Great Blue Heron. These, and many other delights, inhabited all the area around the family cottage on the Venice Highway.

At that time, NO ONE had steel seawalls. Many cottages had incomplete or decaying wood seawalls. This meant there were beach areas right on the canal, cattails growing next to boathouses...sometimes inside the boathouses! Walk right out the door of the cottage, and a little boy had something like Disneyland right at his feet.

"Oh Bobbie, take extra pillows for you and Johnnie...Gramps will be there too." Mom's words electrified me. Gramps was my Dad's father...the only Grandfather I had ever known.

Gramps was John Francis Carroll, born in Detroit in May of 1892 of Irish immigrant parents. Gramps' mother, Katherine McIntyre, had purchased the Cottage on the Venice on July 3, 1911 for \$300. She had done that to try and save her daughter, Theresa, from tuberculosis (TB). TB was the scourge of city dwellers; spreading rapidly between victims living in the closely cramped conditions of Detroit in the late 1880s and early 1900s. Theresa's doctor had recommended she leave the city and get to fresh air as her only hope of surviving TB. Sadly, the fresh air and clean living of Harsens Island in the summer of 1911 did not work for her. She died, I believe, in October 1911.

Gramps married Florence Faull in October, 1912 at Holy Rosary Church in Detroit when he was 20 years old. Three years later, in October, 1915, his only child, my dad, John William was born. Sadly, my grandmother, Florence, died shortly after giving birth to my Dad.

Widowed at age 23, Gramps worked as an Irish plasterer. He worked on grand theaters throughout America; including the Michigan and Fox in Detroit, and theaters in New York City, Miami, and Chicago. He also did mundane work such as plastering blocks and blocks of new homes in the booming City of Royal Oak during the 1920s.

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Venice Memories *continued*

At 6' 4" tall and weighing perhaps 200 pounds, he was imposing in size; quiet in voice, but full of the "Irish gift of gab" (something many of his descendants, including myself, suffer from). And every summer, they all took the *Tashmoo* from Woodward Avenue to Forester's on the Venice; tossed all their belongings into the rowboat stored there, and rowed to the Cottage.

By 1954, the *Tashmoo* was gone; the roads had arrived on the Island, and cars were the way we all travelled to the Venice. Gramps had improved the Cottage much: indoor plumbing; a kitchen with electric stove and fridge; and an enclosed wraparound front porch that had double hung windows. Gramps was waiting when we arrived. The old 1942 Frigidaire refrigerator already had bacon, eggs, butter, milk and cream inside (no cholesterol worries back then)...not much room for the things we had brought. Somehow, using an old "icebox" or other mysterious item hauled down from upstairs in the boathouse, Mother and Gramps got everything that needed to stay cold into the refrigerator or some sort of cooler.

After a supper of hamburgers, fresh corn, fried potatoes seasoned with onions ("cottage fries" made by Gramps and Dad), and sliced tomatoes and radishes (none of us boys ate radishes but the adults did); we all sat down in the living room and listened to Gramps' stories of the Flats.

The cottage had NO television back then.

Entertainment was provided by family members actually talking face to face to one another. My Dad would have his Stroh's beer, and Gramps would have his Jameson Irish Whiskey in a glass of ice. At age 62, Gramps was retired or close to it. He probably had arrived on the Venice on Thursday, and thus had two full days to "see the neighbors." This usually meant Bill Gagnier, and Oscar Decker (Oscar built and operated Decker's Landing on the North Channel and lived year round right next door to us.) These gentlemen would have filled Gramps with all kinds of fish, boating, and drinking stories from the past week. And Harsens Island in 1954 was FULL of fishing, boating, and drinking.

Being only 6 years old, I couldn't quite comprehend exactly who all the individuals described in the stories were...let it rest that

quite a few stories featured relatives of one Alex McMinn, who had died in 1950 in his Cottage, directly across from ours, right on the Venice. "Boys, off to bed," Mom would announce around 8:30 after dinner. Johnnie and I had to sleep on a double cot on the enclosed porch on the south side of the Cottage. Gramps had the south bedroom to himself, and in there he had his cans of Half & Half pipe tobacco, lined up on the plastered alcove shelves he had built right into the walls of the bedrooms, and his pipes. He would smoke a pipe just before bed...I still remember the tobacco smell coming out of his room.

Saturday morning: "Rats," I thought, "it's RAINING!" One quick glance out the porch windows showed nothing but overcast battleship gray clouds dripping rain nonstop, and no chance of a break in the soggy sky for hours. It was if the St Clair River had been elevated UP in the sky; then turned upside down to drizzle on our heads...miserable. Nothing worse than rain at the Flats...couldn't run around outside without becoming a soggy drowned rat of a kid, with Mother beside herself wondering how she would ever dry our clothes...no electric clothes dryer at the Cottage (no washing machine either). That meant staying INSIDE...better than being in the City, but not much.

After sulking about the rain, I dragged myself to the kitchen; where Johnnie, Mom, Dad, and Gramps were all eating bacon and eggs, toast, coffee and orange juice. I settled for a bowl of Cherries with sliced strawberries, and some juice and bacon. Didn't like "over easy" eggs; whatever that meant to a kid.

Gramps broke my sullen silence: "Well boys, we are going to have fun at the Flats today, and I'll show you how. Finish your breakfast, get dressed, and come out to the boathouse." Three minutes later Johnnie and I were inside the boathouse, eagerly staring at Gramps, wondering what magic he was going to show us. Gramps had built the two story boathouse in the summer of 1942.

The first floor was home to a 24 foot Chris Craft cabin cruiser hoisted out of the water on an Algonac boat hoist, and a 16 foot Thompson

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Venice Memories *continued*

lapstrake runabout floating in a small slip beside the cruiser. (Sadly, the boats are gone...victims of dry rot or wet rot or some kind of decay back in the 1960s.)

"I'm going to show you how to catch fish". Gramps announced, and he pulled out his tackle box and carefully opened it. Inside were pencil plugs, daredevils, leaders, fish hooks, pliers, sinkers...all sorts of cool items that two little boys would be certain to turn into a tangled mess just before we stuck a fish hook into either a finger, hand, or eye. Taking two fishing poles off the hooks on the boathouse wall, he carefully set up a small perch hook and sinker jig on each line. Then, he took a worm out of the wormbox, ripped it in two, and showed each of us how to bait our hook. "Now, spit on the worm for good luck", he ordered. Then, we dropped the lines into the well under the cabin cruiser. Within two minutes, each of us had our fish...a wiggling, thrashing, tossing and turning, feisty little sunfish. Gramps had us reel them in, up and out of the water; then he deftly unhooked them and tossed them into the minnow bucket that floated, securely tied to a post; right next to the seawall inside the boathouse. "We'll keep the fish in

there", he announced, "so you can show your Mom and Dad what you've caught."

And for the next three hours or so that's what we did: caught perch, bluegill, sunfish and rock bass. When the sun finally did come out, it was lunch time. After lunch, "fun on the Flats" changed from fishing to running and jumping off the seawall into the Venice, splashing and yelling like a bunch of "wild Indians"; as Gramps called us.

Thinking back, I realize Gramps got us out of the Cottage and into the boathouse so Mom could take care of the younger kids, clean up the kitchen after breakfast, and get ready for lunch and dinner. Most likely, he had been putting stale bread; minnow "paste" (a mixture of flour and water), and other "goodies" into the boatwell all summer; attracting the fish there for just such a rainy day. He probably thought that's what had to be done to entertain young boys at the Flats...teach them to fish inside the boathouse, so that even if it did rain ALL DAY, the kids would still have "fun on the Flats."

Gramps died in October, 1964... and I still miss him today. ■



SQUARE DANCE

AND FRIED CHICKEN DINNER

S * A * T * U * R * D * A * Y

SEPTEMBER 22

Brown Field Pavillion
1674 North Channel Drive / Harsens Island MI 48028

Dinner @ 5:00 pm
Squares Form Up @ 6:00pm

For more information or to purchase tickets contact:
Nancy at [810] 748-1825

presented by the
HARSENS ISLAND
ST. CLAIR FLATS
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Grab your favorite gal or
favorite guy, and join us for
a finger lickin' - foot stompin'
good time!

We've even hired an honest
to goodness professional
'caller' to guide you
through the steps.

ONLY \$15.00
PER
PERSON
Coffee and sodas provided
-BYOB-

2012 Activities & Events Calendar

Dates and locations subject to change

Museum Hours

Sept: Saturday 10 AM – 2 PM and Sunday Noon – 4 PM

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.**

September	8	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
	12	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
	22	Square Dance & Fried Chicken Dinner - \$15 per person, Browne's Field
	26	Social Hour Wednesday – 5 to 7 PM
October	22	Lecture Series - Joel Stone - Committed to the Deep - Exploring Underwater Treasures of the Great Lakes – 3 to 5 PM, Lion's Club
November	10	Board Meeting Saturday – 11:30 AM
December	1 & 2	Christmas Sale at the museum Saturday and Sunday – 10 AM to 4 PM