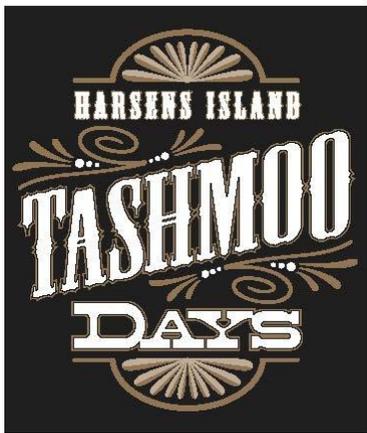


The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



see page 7

Volunteers Needed!

Our members are needed to volunteer for 2 or 3 hours on Saturday, July 20, to help make this event a success.

Please contact Nancy L at: nlicata@comcast.net or at 810-748-1825 to sign up to help.

The Story of the Unique

By James MacDonald
see page 3

WANTED

Museum Volunteers 3-hour shift

Find a friend or family member and volunteer together, you will meet new people and really have fun spending a few hours at the museum. Please call Jean Weber at 586-246-8483 or Karen Smith at 586-459-2078 to volunteer.

From the President

The Presidents Message, last month, in the May Issue of *The Society Pages*, discussed the status of the Museum / Historic Fire Hall Building. Members were invited to participate in this important decision process by phoning, writing-in and/or attending the board meeting on May 11 to offer their opinions. One member wrote and phoned to discuss this decision and one member attended the board meeting (in error) and did not stay for the meeting or offer any opinion. Based upon participation to this invitation, the only conclusion that your board of directors or I may draw from this response is that the membership is satisfied with the boards' management of the acquisition.

The building committee has met with the owners and together we have agreed on an approach to acquiring the building. The building committee is preparing the necessary purchase agreements and drafting a 'land contract' to be presented in the upcoming week.

Other Activities:

The **TASHMOO Days** event committee continues to make good progress. A number of community businesses have committed to supporting the event either in-cash or in-kind contributions. Blue Water Area Transit will provide **FREE** bus service in the AM from Downtown Port Huron, picking-up passengers South along M-29 to Sans Souci; and, remain on the Island the entire day to provide **FREE SHUTTLE SERVICE** around the Island from parking areas and other locations to Downtown Sans Souci. The buses will depart the Island at 6:30 and 7:00 PM. All Sponsors and participating Island organizations will be recognized on the website that is expected to be on-line in the upcoming week. Be sure to mark your calendars for **Saturday, July 20** and forward to a fun day in Sans Souci.

The Society Pages

Volume 4 / Number 6 / June 2013

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

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Join us on Facebook!



From the President *continued*

The Community Foundation Grants Committee meets June 5 and has requested that The Society be available to answer questions.

The May 11, lecture by Mr. Lee Chaney, *Early 20th Century Harsens Island & St. Clair Flats*, was attended by 45 guests. Denne Osgood, chairman of the Lecture Series, is working hard to secure *a famous artist / author / historian to be our fall speaker*. THIS IS ONE YOU WILL NOT WANT TO MISS. Mark your calendars for Saturday September 21...and stay tuned, we should have final confirmation prior to the next Issue of *The Society Pages*.

Please, take a moment to introduce *The Society Pages* newsletter, to a neighbor, friend or relative and invite them join The Society. A growing membership is a positive sign to Foundations and organizations that would consider donating or lending funds to your Historical Society. Thank you for your help.

Any questions or comments should be sent directly to me at: president@hiscfhs.org.

thank you,
bernard

Happenings at the Museum

We are open once again for the summer with new exhibits and artifacts. The Island has a long history and heritage of hunting and fishing. **Muskrat** was a staple of many people's diet in the late 1800's and early 1900's, in fact there are folks still on the Island, who grew up here, and remember muskrat as a staple in their diet. The Museum now has an exhibit on the history of trapping these little critters that were and are still prevalent in the marshes. At the Muskrat exhibit, you will get to see a taxidermist's rendition of a real Muskrat....and he does look real.

A new exhibit that depicts a **typical cottage** of the early-1900's is now on display. This exhibit features all the items that were needed to subsist in the Flats. See a super 1910 model kerosene oil cook-stove and oven, a pot-belly wood-burning stove and other items that made life easier on Harsens Island or the Flats.

We hope you will visit us to and we hope you will consider becoming a volunteer.

Nancy Boulton
Founder/Curator

Little Venice: Vessels and Voyages

A continuing series by James MacDonald

The Story of the *Unique*

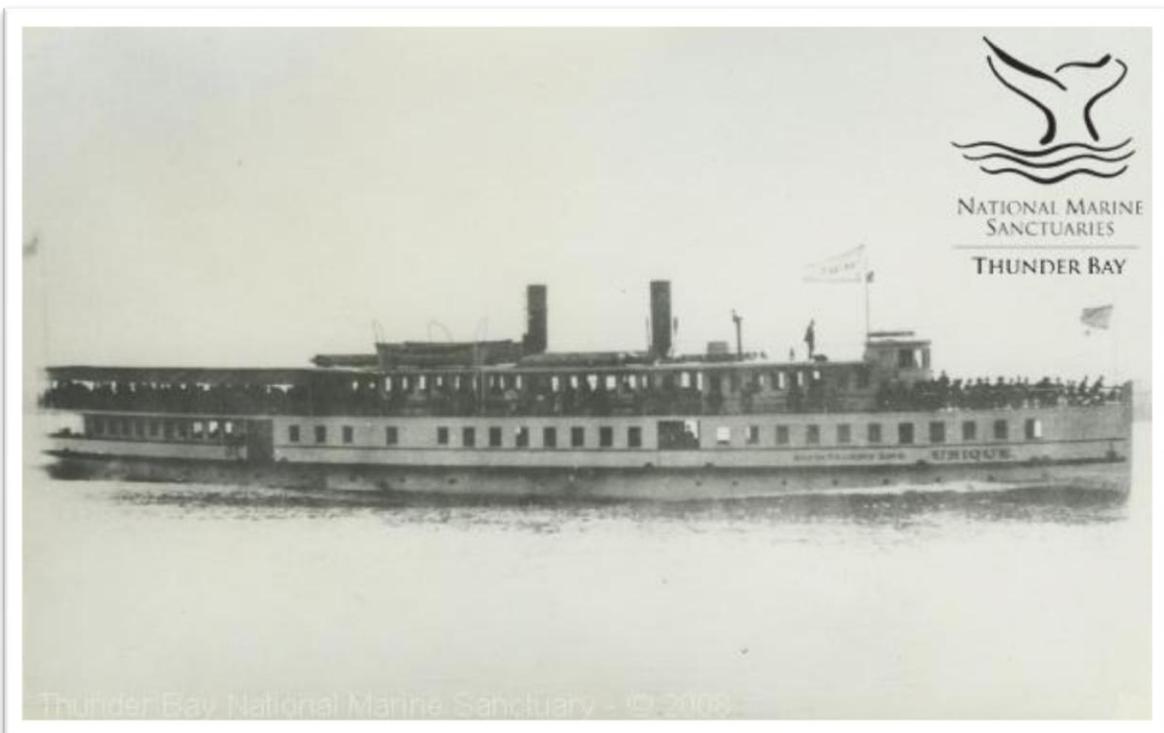
In 1894, Mr. Crochet McElroy, the owner of the popular river boat, *Mary*, planned and constructed the steamer *Unique*. She was intended to be very speedy, and it was expected she would absorb a large part of the Port Huron-Detroit traffic from the competing Star-Cole, Red and White Star Lines Steamer fleet whose boats included the *City of Toledo* and the *Greyhound*.

The Marine Review announced the news¹:

The steamer *Unique*, a wooden propeller passenger/package freight steamer of 163 feet in length and of 381 gross tons [has been] built by Alexander Anderson at Marine City, Michigan. She was launched stern first at 3:00 p.m. June 16th, 1894. There was quite a crowd assembled to watch the launch. While waiting for the launch, Engineer Merrill of the steamer *Mary* composed the following verse:

“The new steamer Unique
Made a beautiful suique
On a direction oblique
Into a big crique,
So to spique.”

The *Unique* was immediately put into service for the “Rapid Line” running from Detroit to Port Huron twice daily.



Steamer *Unique*

photo credit: University of Detroit Mercy, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

The *Unique* really was “unique” in several ways. First, perhaps most unique of all, the steamer was painted **entirely in yellow!** Evidently it didn't go over too well, as a year later the *Port Huron Daily Times* of Friday, April 26, 1895 reported the *Unique* “will be painted all white this year.”²

Second, she was powered with a “quadruple expansion engine” – at the time, being only the fourth boat on the lakes with this type of propulsion system – most lake boats of the era having the more ubiquitous the “triple expansion engine.”

Third, she proved to be a bit of a “cranky lady” in that she could be a rather unreliable ship at times: “In 1894-95 Crockett McElroy's sleek new steamer, *Unique*, challenged the Star Line intermittently between failures of its sophisticated boilers. People said, “It's a beautiful ship when it runs.”³

Finally, she proved to be a very ill-omened boat and was involved in several serious incidents and accidents. The most serious of these accidents happened just within the second year of her operation on May 13, 1895. She experienced a boiler explosion on Lake St. Clair, nine miles above Belle Isle. The accident killed two crewmen and seriously injured a third. Below is a newspaper extract describing the event:

THE THREE VICTIMS OF EXPLOSION

Detroit, Mich., May 14 --An accident on the new river steamer *Unique* in Lake St. Clair last evening caused the death of two men, while a third was perhaps fatally injured. The *Unique* was bound for Port Huron. When about nine miles from Belle Isle an explosion occurred in the boiler-room, one of the flues bursting. George Robinson of this city, engineer of the boat, was sitting on the port rail and thrown overboard. Life preservers were cast to him, but as the boat was going at full speed they did not come within his reach, and he was drowned.

Andrew Case, a coal passer, was killed outright in the boiler-room.

Near him was John Plant, a fireman, who was taken from the firehold frightfully burned. There were about 40 passengers on the boat and a rush was made for life preservers as soon as the accident occurred, but order was quickly restored, and this morning the *Unique* was towed to this city.⁴

Despite this accident, Mr. Crochet McElroy, seemed to cynically deny any problems related to the *Unique's* quadruple expansion engine or its sophisticated boilers. Shortly after the accident, in the periodical *The Engineer*, he is quoted in an advertisement for the ironically named “The Roberts Safety Water Tube Boiler Co.” saying this:

Office of C. McElroy, Managing Owner of Steamer *Unique*.
St. Clair, Mich., Dec. 13, 1895.
The Roberts Safety Water-Tube Boiler Co.
39 Cortland St., New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen — The steamer *Unique* is 175 ft. long by 20½ ft. beam. She has a quadruple expansion engine and two Roberts Boilers which drive the boat at a speed of about twenty-two miles-per-hour with forced draft. I have had considerable experience with water-tube boilers and feel justified in saying that I have found these easy to manage, strong and safe, and that they steam well even without forcing. I have more confidence in them than any other water-tube boiler.

Yours truly,
C. McElroy.⁵

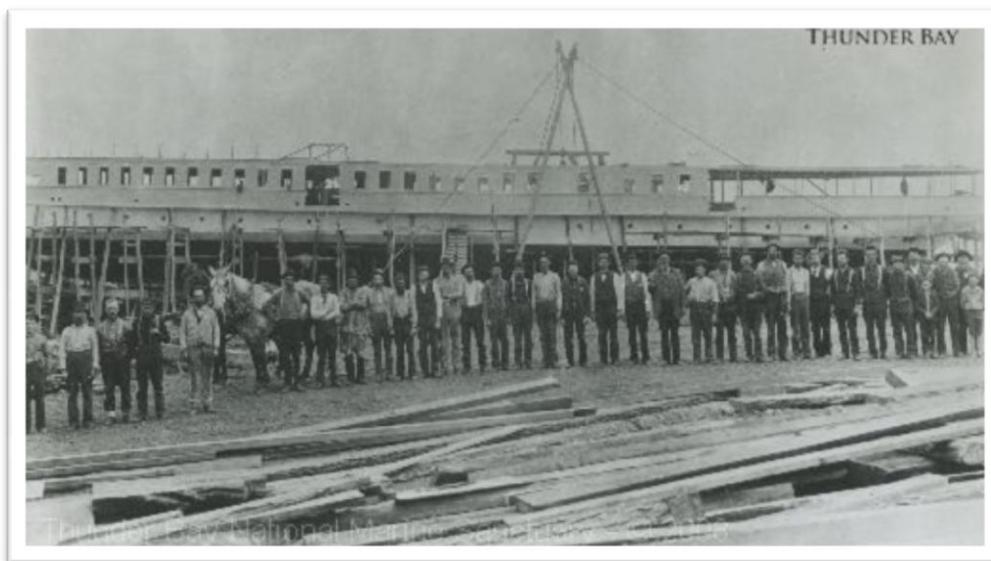
After the accident she was laid up Sarnia, repaired and eventually returned to service.

Here are some fascinating and RARE pictures of her building from 1894:



Steamer *Unique*

photo credit: University of Detroit Mercy, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.



***Unique* Shipwrights, Anderson Yard, Marine City**

photo credit: John F. Miller, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Unfortunately, the *Unique* continued the pattern of being an especially luckless ship, suffering one incident after another. An example of local interest as regards her hard luck was reported by a Milwaukee, Wisconsin newspaper on July 23, 1896:

The passenger steamer *Unique* ran aground on Herson's [sic] Island, St. Clair River, and was released by the steamer *Mary*. The *Unique's* shoe was bent and rudder carried away.⁶

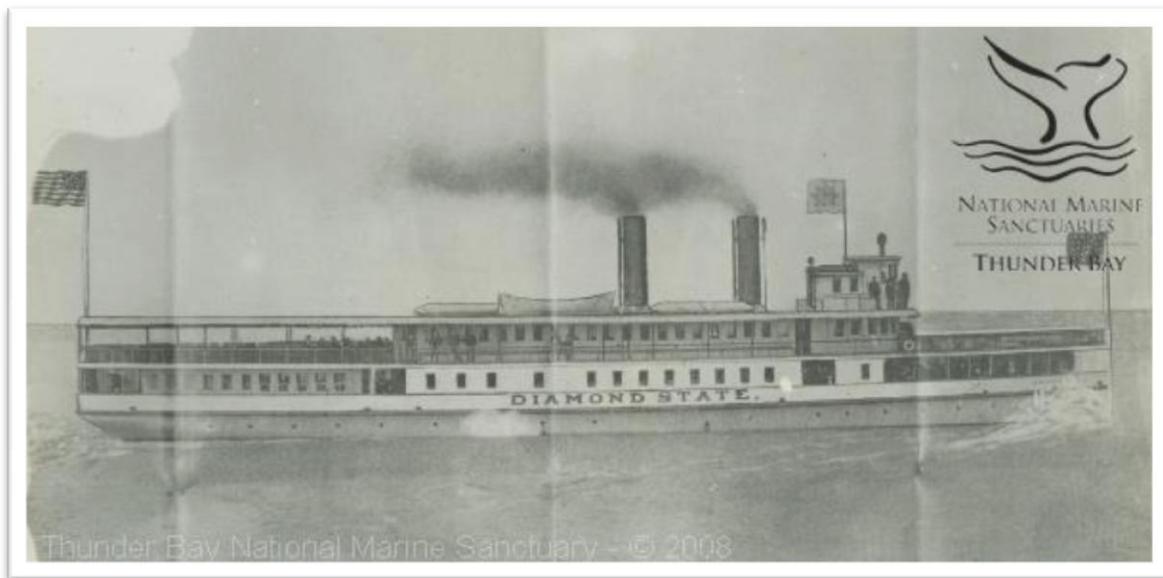
Things didn't get any better. On July 3rd, 1900, the *Unique* collided with the steamer *New York* as reported in a Milwaukee newspaper:

The ill luck of the unfortunate steamer *Unique* still clings to the boat. The *Unique* is aground in the middle of the river near Ogdensburg, N. Y. Tugs are making great efforts to secure her release. A few days ago the *Unique* collided with the passenger steamer *New York*, breaking the latter's paddle box.⁷

The year 1900 proved to be the last year Harsens Island and Algonac residents would see of the steamer *Unique*. Her new owner became W. J. Laidlaw of Ogdensburg, New York. His plan was to use the *Unique* on the St. Lawrence River. As reported by a Saginaw newspaper:

Port Huron, Mich., June 12. -- The steamer UNIQUE, was towed from Port Huron to St. Clair this morning, and at auction sale was bought by W. J. Laidlaw, of Ogdensburg, N. Y., for \$20,000. The *Unique* has had an eventful career. She was built by Crockett McElroy, Frank McElroy, David McElroy, Judge Moore and Captain John Robertson, at a cost of \$45,000. Their purpose was to run the boat in opposition to the Star Line, but from the day of her first trip she has been unlucky, and a number of fatalities have resulted. Repairs of her machinery alone have cost \$10,000. The boat will be taken to the St. Lawrence River to run between Ogdensburg, New York and Kingston, Ontario.⁸

The following year – 1901 – she had been purchased by the Delaware Navigation Co., Beverly, New York and ran on a route between Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Wilmington, Delaware and was renamed *Diamond State*.⁹



Steamer *Diamond State*

photo credit: Steamship Historical Society of America, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

By 1903 she was owned by August Belmont, New York, New York and made into a yacht.

Try as she might, but misfortune continued to plague the *Unique* with a determined tenacity. On Nov 20, 1915, she burned while at harbor in New York City and was subsequently rebuilt as freighter. She was rebuilt one last time in 1923 at Albany, New York into a Hudson River freighter, but could not escape her propensity for accidents as she finally foundered in 1924 on Hudson River near Catskill, New York.

So ends the “unique” story of a unique ship. ■

Sources: Great Lakes Maritime Database – Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

¹ Maritime History of the Great Lakes. Local identifier: McN.E.10188. Donor: William R. McNeil

² Maritime History of the Great Lakes. Local identifier: McN.E.10469. Donor: William R. McNeil

³ Jack E. Schramm, William H. Henning. *When Eastern Michigan Rode the Rails – Book Two*. Interurban Press; First Printing (Summer 1986) p. 146.

⁴ *The Herald and Torch Light*, Hagerstown, MD 10 May 1895 (Transcribed by Connie Anderson)

⁵ *The Engineer*, Vol. XXXIII. No. II., May 22, 1897. p. 119.

⁶ Maritime History of the Great Lakes. Local identifier: McN.W.23213. Donor: William R. McNeil

⁷ Maritime History of the Great Lakes. Local identifier: McN.W.20937. Donor: William R. McNeil

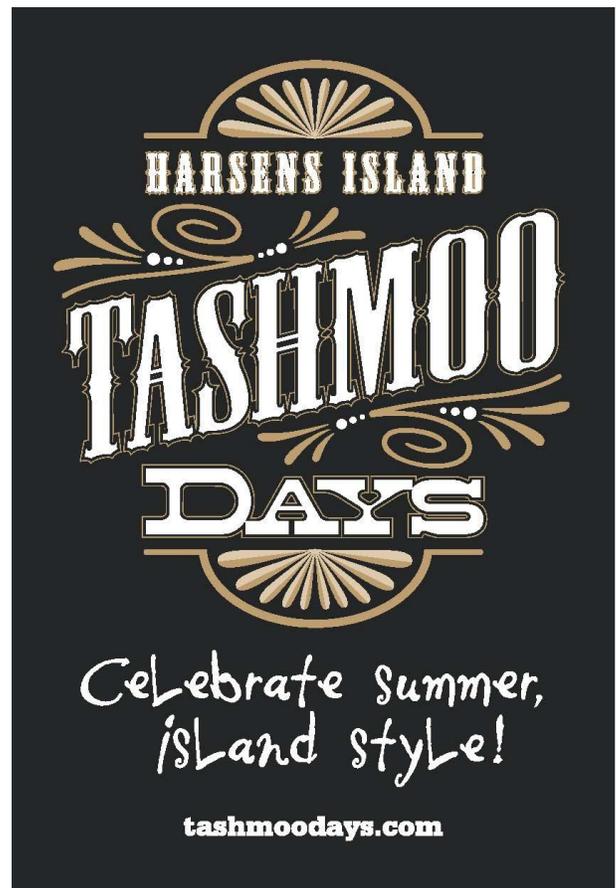
⁸ Maritime History of the Great Lakes. Local identifier: McN.E.9522. Donor: William R. McNeil

⁹ *Unique – History and Notes*. Great Lakes Maritime Database – Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

During the dog days of summer in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Detroiters seeking to escape the heat, noise and crowds of the city, could make their way to the foot of Woodward Avenue at the Detroit River and board the (300-foot) steamship Tashmoo, bound for Harsens Island in Lake St. Clair.

Whether a day trip to Tashmoo Park - with its dance hall, beaches, and amusements - or for an extended stay at one of the island's many luxury resort hotels or clubs - the relaxation, cool breezes and wide open spaces of Harsens Island was but a leisurely boat ride away.

Well, times have changed ... the resort hotels, clubs and park are gone and the Tashmoo no longer makes her daily trips to the island, but you can still enjoy the relaxation and wide open spaces of Harsens Island...at **Tashmoo Days**.



Please Join Us
 for **TASHMOO DAYS** as we celebrate summer on the streets of historic Sans Souci, Harsens Island

SATURDAY JULY 20th 11A-6P

- Live Music & Dancing ■ Food & Beer Tent ■
- Wine Tasting ■ Arts & Crafts ■ Games for the Kids ■
- Historical Society Exhibits & Presentations ■
- First Nations Tribes Performances & Culture ■
- Trap Shooting (bring your own equipment) ■
- Vegas Room and MUCH more.

Admission is FREE.

A Ten Dollar (per person) gate donation to the Historical Society provides access to VIP seating areas, special presentations AND a chance to win valuable door prizes.

SPONSORED BY:

Tashmoo Days, a celebration of the senses and the spirit, where you can enjoy live music and dancing on the streets of historic downtown Sans Souci, sample local cuisine and craft brews, and revel in performances by our Ojibwa, Pottawatomie and Odawa tribe neighbors from Walpole Island as they share their culture through song, drum and dance.

Perhaps a leisurely walking tour of the beautiful Victorian homes along the riverfront is more to your liking. Local and First Nations arts and crafts, historic presentations, trapshooting, even a little Vegas-style gaming. And with the best view anywhere of lake freighters heading up or down river, there's something for every member of the family to enjoy.

For the outdoor enthusiast, why not make a day of it? Arrive early and bike around the Island, hike into the DNR Wildlife Area, or take in a wildflower walk and bird-watching at the Stewart Farm Ecology Center then, join the festivities at Tashmoo Days throughout the afternoon.



PO Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society 2013 Calendar of Events

subject to change

Members are welcome to attend any Board / Membership Meeting to keep apprised of Society activities and to bring issues before the Board.

Museum Hours

June, July, Aug, Sept - Saturday 10 AM - 3 PM and Sunday Noon - 4 PM
Oct, Nov, Dec - closed - open by appointment and for Christmas Sale (Dec)

June

8th - Saturday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)
12th - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)

July

4th - Thursday - Museum open for the holiday
10th - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)
13th - Saturday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)
20th - Saturday - Tashmoo Days

**For more information and complete list of Tashmoo Days activities & events,
visit: tashmoodays.com or contact: Bernardo Licata (586) 530-7100**

August

3rd - Saturday - Society Booth at HISCFA Field Day
14th - Wednesday - Social Hour - 5 to 7 PM (Museum)
11th - Sunday - 10:00 AM - Board / Membership Meeting (Museum)
17th - Saturday - 5:00 PM Annual Meeting followed by Spaghetti Dinner