

# The SOCIETY PAGES

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Drummer boys and buglers were often the target of sharpshooters as they signaled troop movements.

## The Civil War and Michigan

More than 90,000 Michigan men served in the Civil War. This was 23% of Michigan's male population. Michigan soldiers included whites, Blacks and Native Americans. They fought in almost every major battle in the war even though no battles took place in Michigan. They served in 31 regiments of infantry, 11 of cavalry, one of engineers, one of sharpshooters and in 14 batteries of artillery; 498 joined the Navy.

During the Civil War, many soldiers wrote letters and kept diaries about long marches, poor food, illness, boredom, loneliness and the fear and excitement of fighting.

## From the President

Last month, I requested that you mark your calendar and SAVE THE DATE for Tuesday, November 19. We have confirmed the availability of **Thomas Gordon** who will commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Gettysburg Address with the program: ***Songs That Tell A Story*** from the Civil War. Tom will bring his collection of Civil War 'original-music-documents', tell stories of the Civil War and play recordings of these original music scores. Tom will also present a recorded recitation of the Gettysburg Address with the Battle Hymn of the Republic being played by the Dodworth Saxhorn Band on Original Brass Instruments from the Civil War. Note that we have scheduled sessions throughout the day and have also invited all schools in St. Clair county to attend these sessions.

Please review the Poster and other information included in this issue. Tom has conducted this program on numerous occasions for the Henry Ford/Greenfield Village Museum. He is a retired schoolteacher who is passionate about the Civil War. This will be a good program, we hope you will attend.

The Society is ALSO offering an: **Dinner with our Guest Speaker/Storyteller Tom Gordon** at the Harsens Island Schoolhouse Grille at 5:00 PM, upper level. Seating is limited and will be by ADVANCE RESERVATION ONLY. Dinner and donation to the event will be: \$35.00 per person. If you are interested ***please call Nancy Licata, prior to November 12 to reserve space.***

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## The Society Pages

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## From the President *continued*

It is almost Thanksgiving and the time of year we gather with family and friends and say thanks to them for their love, kindness, support and good deeds. This tradition of 'Thanksgiving' is part of our lives and each of us has our own way of being thankful for where we are at this moment in our individual journey. I, for instance, am thankful that my grandparents chose to change their lives by migrating to America in the early 1900's. I'm also thankful that I have had the opportunity and that I am able to help our Historical Society. Each of you has your own list to reflect upon. Enjoy 'Your-Thanksgiving' this year.

It is approaching the time of year when we begin to assess and start looking for ways to **maximize our individual effectiveness** with the limited resources we have available and **minimize the taxes we pay by making charitable contributions to our favorite organizations**. We hope 2013 has been a bountiful year for you; and, while considering who should be favored with your donations before year-end, you consider **your Historical Society's Building Fund**.

Our goal is to pay-off the balance of our Land Contract as expeditiously as possible. **Please mark your donations: Building Fund and date them prior to 12/31/2013**. Anyone wishing to discuss details of our financial status, or review our financial statements is welcome to contact me at any time.

Thank you,  
*bernard*

## COOKIE WALK

Thank you so much for all the people who baked and bought pies from our Just Pies bake sale on October.

We will have our **Cookie Walk** on **December 7** from 10:00am until 3:00pm at the Historical Society Museum. If you would like to bake some cookies or if you have any empty cookie tins would you please call Nancy Boulton 748-3802.



TO COMMEMORATE THE  
*150th Anniversary*  
**of THE Gettysburg Address**

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society is pleased to sponsor...

# Songs That Tell A Story

*as presented by*

TEACHER, CIVIL WAR HISTORIAN, COLLECTOR & STORYTELLER

**Thomas Gordon**

*Tuesday*

*November* **19** 2013 ★ ★ ★

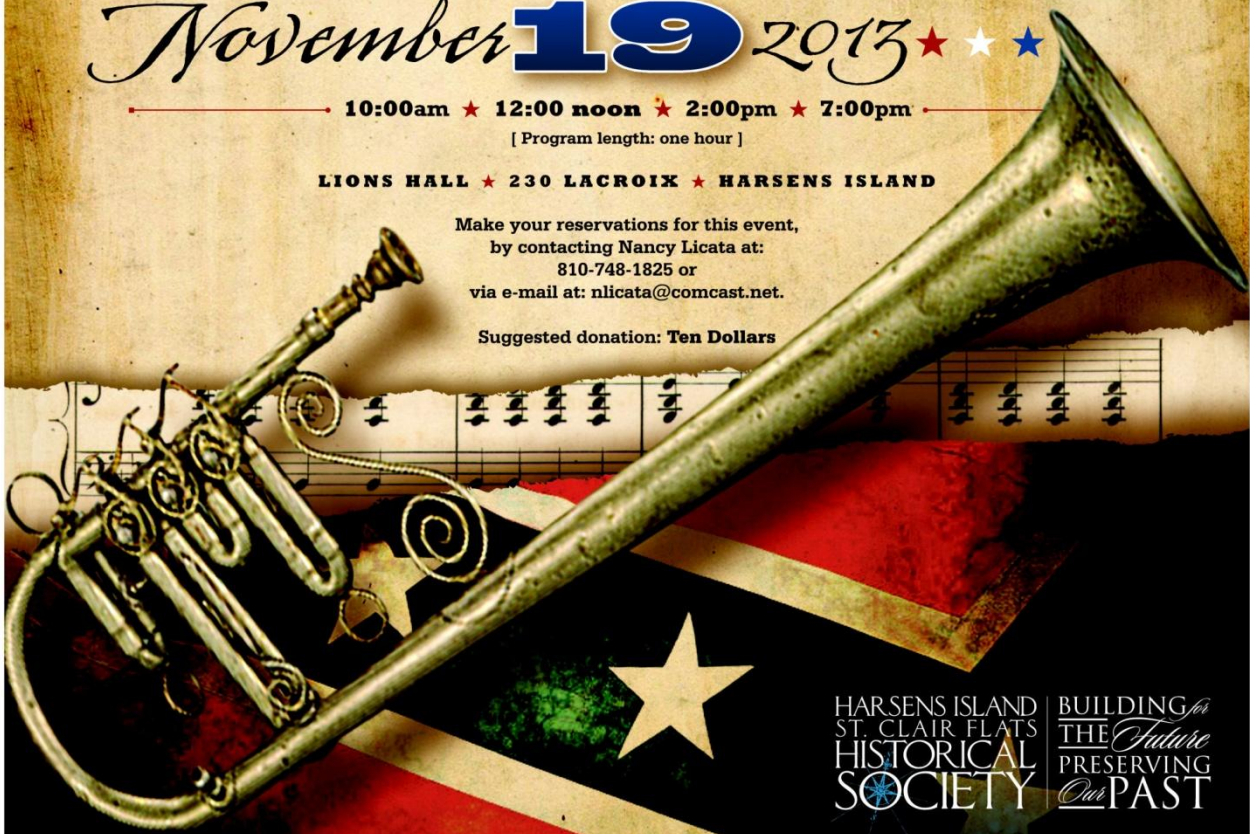
10:00am ★ 12:00 noon ★ 2:00pm ★ 7:00pm

[ Program length: one hour ]

LIONS HALL ★ 230 LACROIX ★ HARSENS ISLAND

Make your reservations for this event,  
by contacting Nancy Licata at:  
810-748-1825 or  
via e-mail at: [nlicata@comcast.net](mailto:nlicata@comcast.net).

Suggested donation: Ten Dollars



HARSENS ISLAND  
ST. CLAIR FLATS  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

BUILDING  
THE  
Future  
PRESERVING  
Our PAST

## Harsens Island and the Civil War

submitted by Gary Grout

**How is Harsens Island connected to the Civil War?** Many families who had ancestors that fought in that war still live here on Harsens Island. But the most famous family was Graveraet, which can be traced back to our Island founder Jacob Harsen. Jacob married Alida Groesbeck, their marriage produced seven children, one was Sarah Harsen. Sarah married Isaac Garrett Graveraet. Isaac and Sarah had several other children, among them Henry Graveraet. Henry married Sophie Bailey, their only son was Second Lieutenant Garrett Graveraet. Garrett was one of the most successful recruiters of Michigan's Native American Indians. He was well known, well educated and spoke fluent Chippewa. The story below was adapted from the *Civil War Times* magazine. It tells the story of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Sharpshooters at the Battle of the Crater.



Garrett Graveraet

### American Indian Sharpshooters at the Battle of the Crater

Lieutenant Freeman S. Bowley was fighting for his life in the man-made hellhole that was the Petersburg Crater when he noticed that the former slaves in his company of the 30th United States Colored Troops were not the only men of color wearing Union blue and dodging Confederate Minié balls on the stifling hot morning of July 30, 1864. "Among our troops was a company of Indians, belonging to the 1st Michigan S.S. [Sharpshooters]," recalled Bowley many years later. "They did splendid work, crawling to the very top of the bank, and rising up, they would take a quick and fatal aim, then drop quickly down again."

More than 20,000 American Indians fought in the Civil War for both the Union and the Confederacy. Probably the best known were the Cherokee soldiers of General Stand Watie, who sided with the South in the Trans-Mississippi West. But the men Bowley saw were mostly Chippewas and Ottawas from Company K of the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, the largest unit of American Indians serving with the Union armies east of the Mississippi River.



Why did these men, who were neither citizens nor subject to the draft, leave the primeval pine forests and sparkling lakes where their people had lived for thousands of years to fight and die on the killing fields of Virginia? What motivated a people accustomed to white racism and government duplicity to send its fathers, sons and brothers to fight in a war to free black slaves while they themselves were not completely free? How could men, characterized by Michigan newspapers as "demi-savages" and "a poor, ignorant, and dependent race" resolutely stand their ground on the blood-slicked red clay slopes of the Crater while many other soldiers fled in terror.

The warriors of Company K were in the trenches before Petersburg because, by late 1863, the Union armies desperately needed men. President Abraham Lincoln had imposed a federal draft and assigned numerical quotas to be filled by each state's governor. Two years earlier, however, the Michigan Legislature had rejected an offer by George Copway, a Chippewa and well-known Methodist minister, to raise a regiment of Great Lakes-area Indians who were, as he put it, "inured to hardships, fleet as deer, shrewd, and cautious."

But the blood of Michigan boys soaking battlefields from Shiloh to Gettysburg gradually opened the lawmakers' eyes to the possibility of affording their American Indian population the benefits of citizenship, at least as far as it affected their ability to be soldiers. By late 1862, the supervisors of Oceana County, along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, informed authorities that "thirty-four Indians whom we regard as citizens of said county" had enlisted. The good fathers of Oceana County seemed to have put prejudice aside—and not coincidentally spared 34 white males and potential voters from the draft.

Laurence Hauptman's seminal study of Indians in the Civil War, *Between Two Fires*, argues that extreme economic necessity and the hopes of negotiating a more favorable treaty to protect their traditional homelands from white incursion were the primary reasons driving Michigan Indians into Union uniforms. But Saginaw Chippewa Chief Nock-ke-chick-faw-me, in a speech to the young warriors of his tribe gathered at Detroit, used a more sensational

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## Harsens Island and the Civil War *continued*

form of motivation. "If the South conquers you will be slave dogs," he warned. "There will be no protection for us; we shall be driven from our homes, our lands, and the graves of our friends."

Second Lieutenant Garrett Graveraet led one of the most successful recruiting drives. His father was a Franco-Ottawa merchant-fur trader, and his mother, Sophie Bailey, was recorded as "Chippewayan." Only 23, Graveraet was well known, well educated and spoke fluent Chippewa. He even signed up his own father, 55-year old Henry, who claimed to be only 45. The elder Graveraet became a sergeant in Company K and its only non-Indian enlisted man.

Along with Captain Edwin V. Andress and 1st Lt. William Driggs, Graveraet drilled the new recruits of Company K while Colonel DeLand and part of the regiment chased Confederate General John Hunt Morgan and his raiders through southern Indiana. When DeLand returned, he found 80 well-drilled men whom Lt. Col. John R. Smith, the mustering officer, characterized as "the stuff, no doubt, of which good sharpshooters can easily be made." In all, about 150 American Indians served in Company K during the war.

Company K's first encounter with the enemy came in the confused fighting known as the Battle of the Wilderness on May 6, 1864, north of the Chewing farm almost halfway between Parker's Store and Wilderness Tavern. Skilled at skirmishing as well as sharpshooting, the Indians first rolled in the brush and mud to camouflage their blue uniforms. The rest of the regiment soon adopted the practice before every engagement.

Sergeant Charles Allen was severely wounded in the fighting that followed and died a week later in Fredericksburg. He was the first from Company K to die in battle. But on the afternoon of May 12 in the tangled woods and swamps around Spotsylvania Court House, the company faced an attack by Brig. Gen. James H. Lane's North Carolinians, and the toll was much higher. Eight men, including Sergeant Henry Graveraet, were killed, and two more died later from their wounds.

Around 10 p.m., under the cover of an artillery barrage, remnants of five North Carolina regiments from Brig. Gen. Matthew Ransom's Brigade swarmed over the defensive position of the severely depleted sharpshooters. After fighting that was often hand to hand, the Rebels forced the surrender of the defenders—who had covered the retreat of their comrades. Men of the 56th North Carolina confiscated many of the Indians' prized rifles, with their uniquely carved stocks.

## The US Sharpshooters



In 1861, after the shelling of Fort Sumter in South Carolina President Lincoln requested the remaining Union States send troops to help squash the southern rebellion. Hiram Berdan, an engineer, inventor and noted marksman believed that he could raise a regiment of the best rifle shots from each of the loyal states. On the 14th of June 1861, Colonel Berdan finally received authorization to raise a fighting regiment of Sharpshooters.

To join the sharpshooters you had to tryout. Applicants had to fire 20 shots at a 10 foot target at a range of 200 yards, the first ten at rest and the second ten standing. Then a piece of 50" string was measured from the center to each hole with a knot being tied at the center of the 1st hole then the knot was placed at the center and measured to the next hole until each hole had been measured. If the applicant had any string left he was allowed to join if not he could join another unit, just not the sharpshooters.

On the 24th of September 1861, the 1st Regiment (10 Companies) had been formed and had arrived in Washington to begin its camp of instruction. On the 28th of September 1861, Colonel Berdan received authorization to raise a second regiment of Sharpshooters due to the number of volunteers that passed the shooting tests.

Company "K" in Michigan was formed on March 30, 1862.

Even though the sharpshooters were recruited from the various northern states after the war started they were given the designation of US as a regular army unit rather than a state militia. The units hardly ever fought as a regiment, usually one or two companies were assigned to different army corps to act as scouts. When in combat rather than shoot at confederate infantry unit's the sharpshooters had a number of targets to shoot at such as Officers, Artillery Gunners, Messengers, Drummers and Buglers (since that was the way officers communicated with their troops).

Company K had only two casualties in the action. Oliver Ar-pe-targe-zhik from Walpole Island succumbed to his wounds in Washington, D.C., on July 9 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Lieutenant Garrett is buried next to his father on Mackinac Island, deep beneath the soil of the land of the Great Hare, which was sacred to his family and his ancestors. But the 1st Michigan's greatest loss from that day was not understood until after the war. More than 80 soldiers, including 14 from Company K, were captured and sent to Andersonville Prison; 37, including

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## Harsens Island and the Civil War *continued*

eight from Company K, never returned.

To break the stalemate between the two armies in front of Petersburg, Burnside devised a plan to dig a tunnel 510 feet long under the Confederate defenses and detonate 8,000 pounds of gunpowder. Four brigades of his IX Corps, led by Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero's "Colored Division," were supposed to swarm into the abyss, sweep the dazed defenders aside and pour into the Confederate trenches. They were to move swiftly to occupy some high ground about 500 yards away known as Cemetery Hill and then roll into Petersburg.

Reluctantly, both Grant and Maj. Gen. George G. Meade approved the plan—but insisted that the Colored Division not lead the attack, fearing that if it failed, Northern abolitionists would rail about needlessly sacrificing mostly untested black soldiers. Burnside had the commanders of his three white divisions draw straws, and Brig. Gen. James F. Ledlie, the most incompetent among them, got the short one. The 2nd Brigade from Willcox's division, including the 1st Michigan, was to be the third unit in, and the Colored Division, with Bowley and the 30th USCT, would follow them.

The mine detonated about 90 minutes late. Bowley, a quarter mile behind the front lines, vividly recalled, "From the earth there burst a red glare of flame, followed by the black smoke; with it came a terrible rumbling, that lengthened into a muffled roar. High into the air rose the cloud of smoke and dust, and with it great blocks of clay and many dark objects that might have been men or cannon. Back to earth the mess fell again, with another shock almost equal to the first."

Official reports describing the actions of the 1st Michigan in the Crater are scant. Colonel DeLand was stunned by an exploding shell almost immediately upon entering the fight and went to the rear. Captain Elmer C. Dicey, who assumed command, was captured and did not file an after-action report.

Nevertheless, Raymond Herek, the regiment's modern-day historian, has pieced together an account of their last moments in the Crater. "Some of the Sharpshooters," Herek wrote, "among them Pvts. Sidney Haight, Antoine Scott, and Charles Thatcher, covered the retreat as best they could before they pulled out. Scott (Co. K) was one of the last to leave the fort.... Thatcher, Haight, Scott and [Charles H.] DePuy all were cited for the Medal of Honor for their exploits that day." Thatcher, Haight and DePuy, all white, received their medals in 1896. Scott, the Pentwater Chippewa, died in 1878—probably never knowing that his exceptional bravery had been recognized.

## The Sharps Rifle

The sharpshooters were armed with the Sharps, a light (eight pounds, eight ounces), breech-loading, single-shot, .52 caliber rifle, combined a high rate of fire with excellent long-range accuracy. By releasing a catch a soldier could pull down the trigger guard, which dropped the breech and allowed him to insert a combustible cased linen cartridge. Returning the trigger guard closed the breech and sheared open the cartridge.



A trained rifleman could put ten 370-grain slugs a minute down the 30-inch barrel in the same time it took a soldier with a muzzle loader to get off three, and the breech-loading feature allowed him to easily reload while prone an awkward operation with a muzzle-loader. Sighted to eight hundred yards, the Sharps were quite accurate and could reliably hit a man-sized target at half that range with some record shots at well over a thousand yards. The Sharps rifles used Colonel Hiram Berdan's 1st and 2nd U.S. Sharpshooter regiments sported a double "set" trigger. Pulling the rear trigger would "set" the front one, which would then fire the weapon at the slightest touch.

Herek lists only three men of Company K as killed, one wounded and six captured in the Crater. All the captured sharpshooters were sent to an old tobacco warehouse in Danville, Va. Overall, the 1st Michigan lost 62 men in the ill-fated assault.

The Crater was the last major action for the Indian sharpshooters, though Company K did some fighting at Ream's Station, Peebles Farm, Hatcher's Run and the final assault on Petersburg in April 1865. The 1st Michigan was the first Union regiment to enter the evacuated city. The men marched in the Grand Review of the armies in Washington, D.C., on May 23, 1865, and were mustered out of service on July 28.

Of the 1,300 men who served in the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, only 23 officers and 386 enlisted men were on the steamer that brought the regiment home. For the widows and mothers of those who were disabled or had died, meager pensions were all the government offered as consolation. Sophie Graveraet, who lost both her husband and only son fighting in another man's war, received \$15 per month until she died. ■

## Gettysburg Monument

The *Michigan Sharpshooters* are honored by a monument and a position stone at Gettysburg. It honors companies in Berdan's sharpshooters and marks the location they occupied on July 3, 1863.

The 1st United States Sharpshooters, Companies C, I, and K and 2nd United States Sharpshooters, Company B (Michigan) served as a member of Ward's Brigade in Birney's Division of the Third Corps, Army of the Potomac.

The monument was dedicated June 12, 1889. It is made out of Westerly granite with bronze state shield on a stone base. Overall height is seven foot. The monument sits atop a boulder. A bronze state shield is on the west side.



## Lansing Monument

This monument was erected on the capitol lawn in 1915 to commemorate the 1st Michigan Sharpshooter Regiment that was organized during the winter of 1862 and 1863 in Kalamazoo.

The total enrollment had been 981 men and officers. The Civil War left the regiment with only 365 of those men to be mustered out at the end of the war. 113 Officers and men died on wounds of war, 41 died as POW's, 109 died of disease, 353 were discharged due to disability following wounds of war.





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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**

**Nov, Dec** - closed - open by appointment and for Christmas Sale (Dec)

### **November**

9<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - 11:30 AM - Board Meeting (Museum)

19<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - *Songs That Tell a Story* presented by Thomas Gordon (Museum)

10am, 12pm, 2pm, 7pm

19<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Dinner with Thomas Gordon - 5pm, Schoolhouse Grille, by reservation only

### **December**

7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> - Saturday and Sunday - 10 AM - 3 PM - Christmas Sale (Museum) Dates Tentative

7<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - 10 AM - 3 PM - Cookie Walk (Museum)