

N E W S L E T T E R



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St. Clair Flats Historical Society*
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From The Curator

The recent passing of old timers Gary Grout and Barb Slocum highlights an inconvenient reality facing us here on the Island as well as the Flats in general. Our founding families are fading from our midst, and the rich history and heritage they represent may be lost with them if we do not act to engage each other and these old-line families. We must preserve the recollections, events, tragedies, and triumphs of our past in a way that can be centralized, secured, and properly maintained for our future generations. Your Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Museum (locally known as “The Museum on the Island”) was created for exactly this purpose.

This narrative is not about raising money. It is an appeal to raise the awareness and sensitivity in our neighborhoods to the task of preserving documents, photographs, and related memorabilia relating to Island Heritage. Last year we received three significant contributions of family historical records. The work to archive this material is ongoing thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers. We are a repository for this historically significant material, and we are aggressively pursuing genealogical histories of the families as well as their impacts on the historical development of our entire flats area.

Our objective is to preserve and interpret this wealth of history. Our exhibits are designed to broaden the awareness of our younger generations as to how we got here in the first place. Please help by keeping us in mind when you are confronted with that old shoe box or crate containing goodness knows what has been under the stairs for 20 years (or even better, in the attic for 40 years)! We are available to conduct interviews as a part of our oral history project. The interviews are preserved digitally along with photos and diaries. If you need specific help or would like to volunteer in our effort, please contact me.

Charles Miller, Curator, cmiller5179@gmail.com,
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Tashmoo Research Project

Michele Komar, one of our charter members, has been working on a research project since December 2016. First her great-grandfather, William Christian Harm (1901-1920) and then her grandfather, William Carl Harm (1921-1946), were successively Tashmoo Park superintendents.

The project looks at the period from 1896, when the park property was first purchased, through 1951, when the park shut its doors for good. It takes a close look, year by year, along with biographies of the White Star line principals and the ships that served the park and the White Star line. The project draws extensively on newspaper articles, excerpts from books and magazines, personal collections and photographs.

Recently, Bob Williams put out a plea for typists to help transcribe the hundreds of articles and six people responded to type and one to proofread. We thank you for all your help!

Upon completion, slated for late in 2018, this research will be donated to the Society. We can always use more transcribers or if you have material to contribute and can provide it in a digital format, please contact Bob Williams at xharpspah@aol.com, phone 248-388-0465, or contact Michele Komar (michelekomar@gmail.com) for more information.

Michele started our newsletter back in August 2010 and was editor until July 2014. She wrote and published the book *The Life and Times of Minnie Harm* in 2009, a compilation of her grandmother's life on Harsens Island.

President's message

In the last couple of months three of our very supportive members have passed away. As you may already know, Gary Grout, one of our founders, our first President and recent Chairman of the Board, has left us. Gary was a long time resident of the Island and an avid genealogist. He traced his family history on the Island back to the early 1800's with connections to the Harsen family. Denne Osgood, long-time member of our historical society and recent president of the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Association has also left us. Denne's family lived on property at the site of the old Grande Point Resort. A wagon from the hotel, prominently on display in the center of the museum, was a gift from Denne. Our third recent loss was that of Lifetime Member Clayton Evans of Seattle. Clayton grew up on the island, and his parents were teachers here. Though he was not able to visit the museum often, he was a great supporter and sponsored the very successful matching grant fundraiser that we conducted early in 2017. Last year Clayton celebrated his 100th birthday. They will all be dearly missed.

The museum

The museum is now closed until May, but the volunteers are busy working on projects for next year. During this period, the Newsletter is published on a bi-monthly basis; monthly issues will resume in April. Extra copies of the Newsletter are available in The Reader's Cove Library in Sans Souci.

Special Exhibit 2018

Our Special Exhibit 2018 Committee is already working diligently to put together something very special for museum visitors this summer. The seven-member committee has had a number of meetings, and each member is responsible for a different aspect of the special exhibit.

Our special exhibit is about the people and events that made Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats what they are today. The multi-faceted exhibit examines our history from the first pioneering settlements in the late 1700's and the interactions with Native Americans and the early French Voyagers through the Civil War, the rapid industrialization and commercialization in the 18th and 19th Centuries and the Golden Era of the Flats, to the impact of the St. Lawrence Seaway and environmental regulations on our Island home. Emphasis is placed on the people of each era with stories and heritage of the long-time families on the Island.

This is where we need your help! We would love to share with visitors the interconnections of people on the Island and the stories of the families which have been here for a while. Committee members have been in touch with many of our long-time residents, but we would also love to hear your family's story and include photos of past and current family members in our exhibit. Please consider dropping off some labeled photos and your family's story in the letter slot at the museum or contact me to make arrangements. Thank you. Bob Williams, President, 248-388-0465, xharpsah@aol.com.

The Story of a Beam

By Bob Williams

Back in 2005 I was speaking with Rodney Jessup, and he mentioned he was going to build a new pole barn in place of the broken down old garage at his property on Little Road. When I had been in his garage in the past, the old hand hewn wood beams that made up the main structure intrigued me. I asked him if he would be willing to give me the garage if I wanted to move it to my place at Stewart Farm on Stewart Road. I checked into the logistics and cost of moving the structure, and at the time it was not feasible for me. Instead I asked Rod to save the structural beams for me when he tore it down. During the deconstruction of the garage, many beams turned out to be unusable for any structural purpose due to their condition. In the end Rod delivered about a half dozen beams to Stewart Farm, and there they sat for the last 12 years.



Rod Jessup's garage in 2005

Then in 2017 a collection of papers and documents from Jean Nelson was donated to the Historical Society. In December our Curator Chuck Miller handed me a document he found in the collection which he said I might be interested in because of the paper's island historical references. *Continued on page 4*

“The Story of a Beam” continued from page 3



The structure of Rod Jessup's garage.

The 74-page document was entitled “Phase II Archeological Evaluation of 20SC124 and 20SC135, The Grande Pointe Development, Harsens Island, Michigan,” Prepared by Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc. of Jackson, Michigan. C. Stephan Demeter, Principal Investigator, dated June 1992, Draft R-0123. Once I started reading it, I had a hard time putting it down. Here were stories of archeological investigations in the area of the property which we refer to as “The Boys Club,” technically known as Camp Drusilla Farwell. I read that though the Michigan Historical Site “Harsen House” on Golf Course Road is assumed to be the original location of Jacob Harsen, in fact that house was actually the home of his descendant, Jacob Harsen III and that the original Jacob Harsen resided on a site farther east, later used for the Boys Club. In support of that fact the document provides a map from 1809 showing a designation of a building labeled “Harsens” at the location of the later Boys Club, on the North Channel about a half-mile from the South Channel. Additionally, in support of the belief that the original Harsen homestead was on the Boys Club property is the fact that when the island was divided into five separate lots, the Boys Club parcel was designated Lot 1. It would be standard practice to number the lots with the existing homestead being Lot 1.

The “Memoirs of Aura P. Stewart,” written in 1876 and published in “The History of St. Clair County” by A.T. Andreas & Co. 1883, said in referring to an explosion at the original Harsen house, “At this explosion, a looking-glass of my stepmother's was blown nearly a mile, and was found in the south channel of River St. Clair.” It should be noted that the distance from the Harsens House at the Boys Club site is about 0.45 miles while the distance from the Harsen House on Golf Course Road to the South Channel is about 1.83 miles. I am convinced that the original Harsen house and homestead was on the property today known as the Boys Club. That in itself was a real eye-opener.

Then, on page 37 of the *Archeological Evaluation* I read the following: “In order to clean a site for the Camp Drusilla Farwell office building (constructed in 1954) the Harsen house was removed from its original location to a new site 1 mile to the west, on the Rodney Jessup property (2387 Little Road) (Yax, personal communications 1992). This structure, which may have been built immediately after the destruction of the original Harsen house in 1802, is presently employed as a garage.”

Though Jacob Harsen the First is believed to have died sometime around 1800, either he or his immediate descendants constructed, sometime around 1802, the building that later became Rod Jessup's garage, and parts of which are sitting in my backyard.

Come spring 2018 one of the beams will be selected to be moved to the Historical Museum for permanent display along with this story. It will be unveiled as part of the 2018 special exhibit “The People of Harsens Island and the St. Clair Flats.” Be sure to stop by and check it out.

Steam Whistle Project Update

In December we conducted a fundraising campaign for our J.B. Ford Steam Whistle Project. As part of the campaign one of our members offered to match up to \$5,000 in donations received October through December. We are very pleased to announce that our membership has come through for us again, and we received the full \$5,000 in matching funds. We now believe we have all of the funds needed to complete the project.

You may have noticed that the area in front of the museum where the compressor room is to be built has been cleared, and foundations have already been poured. The next step is the erection of the masonry walls. Unfortunately, with the winter upon us the project cannot proceed further until early spring, when freezing will not affect the mortar used to hold the blocks together. I guess we will just have to be patient and hope for an early thaw.

Historical Society remaining events for 2018

TBD = to be determined

Locations may change – See our website at HarsensIslandHistory.org for the latest information.

All members welcome to attend any Board meeting listed as Board/Membership meeting.

Museum hours

May 26th – 28th - Saturday, Sunday, Monday - Memorial Day Museum Open House

(Special open hours - Saturday 11:30am – 3pm, Sunday 12 noon – 4pm, Monday 10am – 3pm)

Summer (June, July, Aug, Sept.) 2nd Fri. 6 – 8 PM; Thurs. & Fri. – 12 - 4 PM, Sat. 10 AM – 3 PM; Sun. Noon – 4 PM

Winter (October through April) Closed, but, open by appointment.

March - 10th - Saturday – 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

May - 5th - Saturday - 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

26th – 28th - Saturday, Sunday, Monday - Memorial Day Museum Open House

(Special open hours - Saturday 11:30am – 3pm, Sunday 12 noon – 4pm,

Monday 10am – 3pm)

June - 2nd – Saturday – 9:30 AM – Museum host orientation at the Museum

2nd – Saturday - 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

2nd – Saturday – 3:00 PM – Museum host orientation at the Museum

8th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM at the Museum

9th – Saturday – 3:00 PM - Lecture series

16th - Saturday – 11 AM - Delta News collectors meeting, open to the public

July - 7th - Saturday – 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

13th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM at the Museum

14th - Saturday – 3:00 PM - Lecture series

23rd – Friday – Voyagers arrive via canoe at museum for three-night encampment.

August- 4th - Saturday – 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

10th - Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM at the Museum

11th - Saturday – 3:00 PM - Lecture series

18th – Saturday – 4:30 PM Wine and Appetizers at the museum.

5 to 6 PM **Annual Membership meeting** at the museum.

Sept. - 14th – Friday – Social hour – 6 to 8 PM at the Museum

Oct. - 6th – Saturday – 10 – 3 PM - Pie Sale at Museum

13th - Saturday – 10:30 AM – Board/**Membership meeting** at the Museum

Dec. - 1st – Saturday – 10 AM– 3 PM - Cookie Walk at the Museum

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society
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