



volume 15 / number 8

October 2024

Message from the President . . .

Happy October!

What a fall we've had...warm temperatures and plenty of sunshine. It made pulling the boat that much harder last week. Somehow, it's not so bad to pull her when the temperature is 40 degrees and it's raining. Oh well, I know she's now safely secure for the winter, even if the temperatures are still 70 degrees.

The museum has finished its season and regular hours but can still be opened by appointment. And of course, the Edmund Fitzgerald Memorial and Cookie Walk are still ahead and hosted at the museum. As always, I truly appreciate all our volunteers for their hours hosting at the museum, without you we wouldn't be able to stay open every weekend during the summer.

As you know, we received a grant earlier in the year from the Michigan Historical Alliance to purchase a new shed. We purchased and installed the shed earlier this summer. It was recently painted to match the colors of the museum and looks fabulous. Only purchasing a couple shelves and some final reorganization remains. I will be completing our report back to the Michigan Historical Alliance with a final accounting of the funds and pictures soon. Again, a huge thank you to all involved with the purchase, installation, moving items, reorganizing, and painting. It looks great and is a relief to have reliable storage with doors that actually open!

As always, thank you for your continued support!

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

Edmund Fitzgerald remembrance – Sunday November 10 at 3:00 PM

The memorial of the Edmund Fitzgerald includes music by Songs ON THE BORDER, a presentation about the Edmund Fitzgerald and the ringing of the bell for the 29 lives who were lost during a storm on November 10, 1975.



Free Event on Sunday at 3:00 PM at the Harsens Island Museum. Refreshments (Chili, Corn Bread, Hot Dogs, Mulled Wine and Cider, and Sweet Treats)

Preserving Your History

We encourage, and would like to assist, islanders in getting their old photos, slides, negatives, and historical documents into digital format to preserve and/or display them. In addition, the Harsens Island Historical Society would like to collect digital copies of historical photos and documents of the island for the museum's collection.

You can bring photos, slides, negatives, or historical documents to the Museum to have them scanned and the digital copy put on a USB flash drive to take home along with the documents you brought for scanning. Some photos or documents may be of historic interest, and with the owner's permission, a digital copy would be retained by the Harsens Island Historical Society for the museum's collection.

The Harsens Island History Society is also looking for 8 mm or super 8 mm home movies taken on the island prior to 1960 for segments to be digitized and place in the archives. There would be **no fee for members**, but non-members would be asked to make a small donation.

You can make an appointment for scanning with Bob Williams at 248-388-0465 or email him at xharpspah@aol.com.



Harsens Island Fire Hall Dedication in 1938

History of Harsens Island – September 29

Thanks, Bob, for another awesome presentation about the island's history!



Labor Day Parade at Sans Souci

Corinne Trexler and Ellen Probst represented the Harsens Island Museum in the Labor Day parade. Corinne driving the Trexler’s classic car.



Museum Visitors in September



Visitors from the Clinton Senior Center on September 4



The "Super Seniors" from the Faith Baptist Church visited on September 19

American Corvette Club

Vicki Townsend coordinated with the Historical Society to visit the museum on September 29.

<https://americascorvetteclub.org/>



History of Some of the Early Settlers of Lower Section of St. Clair County

This history was recounted in a recent radio broadcast on December 15, 1939. The following is the script of a broadcast made recently over station WHLS, Port Huron, by H. A. Hopkins, secretary manager of the Port Huron Chamber of Commerce which deals with the early settlers in this section of the St. Clair River.

In previous broadcasts we have located the first settlers in Port Huron, St. Clair, Marine City and Algonac. But Harsens Island has yet to be inhabited as far as these broadcasts have gone. We will locate the aid of Aura P. Stewart, one of St. Clair county's first commissioners, who told W. L. Jenks all about it and some of the things that Aura told Mr. Jenks are now passed on to you.

Here is the Stewart chronicle: My father, Harvey Stewart, in November 1810 shouldered his pack and accompanied by a brother, journeyed to Michigan. My father stopped at Detroit and there married Miss Mary Graveraet, my stepmother, in 1814. In April 1815, my father moved his family and goods to Harsens Island and took possession of the house and the land of his wife that had been abandoned during the war. I was then only a boy of 12 years, but I felt impressed with the wild beauty of my home. The dense and almost impenetrable forests, the magnificent St. Clair River, the countless number of every variety of waterfowl flying over my head or resting and sporting on the river, the howling of wolves at night, the constantly passing and repassing of canoes of strange looking Indians, their stealthy tread through the woods and the merry songs of the French voyageurs propelling their canoes swiftly over the blue waters.

Following the conquest of Canada by the British forces lands were located and permanent settlements made on the St. Clair River. At Pointe aux Trembles, there were four families: on Stromness, on Dickinson Island, and three also on Harsens Island. Between Pointe aux Trembles and Recors point there were fourteen families, and five families were settled between Recors and Black River. Residents on Pointe aux Trembles were the Chartier, Minnie, Basney and William Hill families. Chartier was the most prominent man in the settlement. Residents on Harsens Island were William Harsen, Jacob Harsen, Francis Harsen and Mary Stewart, formerly Mary Graveraet.

Dickinson Island

Captain Peter Laughton was the first settler on Dickinson Island; he was a retired British naval officer and had selected the island as part of the land he was entitled to draw from the British government.

Mr. James Harsen and his son in law, Isaac Graveraet, were the first settlers on Harsens Island. Harsen was a gun smith and Graveraet, a silversmith; they came from Albany for the purpose of dealing with the Indians and selected Harsens Island as the base for their operations.

The first settlers on the St. Clair River in what is now the township of Cottrellville were Captain Alexander Harrow, George Cottrell, William Brown, Joseph Minnie, Pascal Podvent and James Robertson.

Clay Township Settled

The British were very liberal in that day with the distribution of wild lands to officers of their navy. Captain Harrow, of the navy, located all the land on the river extending from the present site of Algonac to Belle River, Marine City. After the United States government came into possession of the northwest territory, embracing the state of Michigan, Congress passed an act limiting individuals to one section of land and Captain Harrow was compelled to make his selection in accordance with that act. The lands selected by him are now embraced in the township of Clay and extended from

Continued on page 6 . . .

Continued from page 5 – Early Settlers

Abram Smith mill in Algonac to the mill of W. C. and W. S. Roberts at Roberts Landing.

Captain Henry Ainsworth settled in the township of Clay in 1820 and purchased the Basney Farm at Pte. Aux Trembles.

Jacob Peer purchased the land Captain Andrew Westbrook and settled in Clay Township in 1821. He selected some 300 acres bounded south and west by Lake St. Clair but in 1827 the waters of the lake had risen so high that his farm was completely submerged. Peer next selected lands lying north of Algonac and when he died in 1855 left one of the best farms and orchards in the county.

Another of the early settlers in the south end of the county was Jacob Kendall, who purchased a tract lying about a mile north of Algonac, in 1825. John B. Kendall, one time sheriff of the county, was his son.

Mr. Aura Stewart continues his reminiscences for Mr. Jenks by relating about early ministers as follows: The first minister of the gospel who visited our county came to my father's residence in the winter of 1818. His name was Dickson, and he was connected with the Methodist Church. There were but three families on the island then and they all assembled at my father's residence to hear Mr. Dickson's discourses, which was the first preaching in St. Clair County by a Protestant minister. Two years after we had preaching once a month by Methodist ministers, their circuit being very large, embracing Chatham, Ontario, and the country along the St. Clair River. They were almost constantly in the saddle to meet their appointments.

My father, although a Calvinist Baptist, opened his house for these energetic men and encouraged them until they organized societies able to support their own ministers. Then Mr. Stewart went on to give his opinions of the Methodist ministers of that early day and those at the turn of the century, about 1900. Do not mistake me, please. I am about to quote Mr. Stewart. What follows is not my say so: The Methodist ministers of that day were poor, humble and devout men and the members of their societies lived the same prayerful lives. The Methodists of today, I think, have lost the religious simplicity possessed by the ministers of those early days. The ministers of today have more learning. The church has become wealthy. They have got a hold of the silver spoons and are standing on their dignity like other sectarian churches.

Mind you, I was quoting Mr. Stewart, who went on to say more about the Harsens. Jacob Harsen was the first purchaser on Harsens Island. Upon his death his son Bernard became head of the family. Bernard was killed by the explosion of a keg of powder. Another member of the family, James Harsen, met his death at the hands of a half breed, John Riley. James had gone over to Big Bear Creek on the Canadian side to trade with the Indians. At this time John Riley was there on a spree and as Mr. Harsen was stooping to enter the cabin, Riley fired his rifle, the ball entering Harsen's eye and passing out behind his ear. From this wound James Harsen died, six months later.

Direct descendants of these Harsen brothers who settled on Harsens Island are living here in the county at the present time. Dr. Clark Harsen and Mrs. Max Ouimet, of Algonac and Mrs. Wendall McCormick, of Port Huron are great grandchildren of William Harsen, a brother of Jacob Harsen, the original purchaser of the land. Their father was Augustus P. Harsen, whose father was still another Jacob Harsen, the grandfather of these estimable Harsens now living in the county.

There are descendants of the first Harvey Stewart, now living in Algonac. Captain Nathaniel Stewart and Captain Millard Stewart. The death of Captain Albert Stewart, of Detroit, another descendant, who had a statewide reputation, occurred

Continued on page 7 . . .

Continued from page 6 – Early Settlers

during the past year. The Harsens, the Stewarts, the Smiths, were all families to whom we are proud to hark back.

Aura P. Stewart closed his reminiscences recounted to W. L. Jenks with an Indian story which is worth retelling here. It happened about 1816. Among the band of Indians here was a strong built Indian by the name of Black Duck. He had for a wife a daughter of Black Snake and was strongly attached to the American government. Black Duck was an invited guest at a great Indian feast held at or near the mouth of Black River. At this feast much whiskey was drunk, and many speeches made. Indians from Canada were there and one of these boasted of his power and bravery as a warrior and related how many Americans he had killed and scalped during the late war. As soon as the Canadian Indian had finished his speech, Black Duck jumped to his feet, seized a tomahawk and approaching the late speaker yelled out – You are a great brave; you have killed many Americans; you have taken their scalps. The American you killed are my friends and you shall kill no more. Black Duck buried the tomahawk in the boastful Indian's head and the pleasures of the feast ended. Black Duck knew that the avengers of blood would be upon him for, with the Indians, it was a case of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Therefore, he hastened to lay his case before Governor Cass and seek the governor's protection. Black Duck was placed in the fort for safety. Governor Cass was well acquainted with half breed Joh Riley, who had rendered valuable service to our government in the war. Through Riley a proposition was made to have the matter settled by paying the Indians for their dead relative according to their valuation by a selection of goods from the public store at Detroit. The grieving Indians demanded forty quarts of whiskey, which they thought entirely sufficient to soften their hearts and cause their tears to flow more freely over their dead relative. The governor's secretary drew an order for the forty quarts of whiskey, which was honored, of course. Hearts were softened, a season of mellowness ensued and while everyone is mellow this broadcast will be brought to a close, bidding you good night and wishing you all good cheer.

COOKIE WALK

Saturday, December 7

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Bakers Wanted: Please donate 3-4 dozen cookies. All types of cookies are welcome; rolled, pressed, bar, no-bake, molded and drop.

- Put your cookies in cellophane bag, 2-3 cookies per bag depending on cookie size
- Free cellophane bags are provided, call Chris Knight 586-242-4560
- Drop off cookies Friday Dec 6 at Chris Knight's house **or**
- Drop off cookies Saturday Dec 7 at Museum between 9:00 – 9:45 AM



Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2024

Date	Day	Time	Event
October 5	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Annual Pie Sale
October 19	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
November 16	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Planning Meeting via Zoom
November 10	Sunday	3:00 PM	Remembrance Edmund Fitzgerald
December 7	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk
December 21	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom



Museum Hours

Summer Schedule (June, July, August, September)
Saturdays 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Sundays 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Winter Schedule (October through April)
Closed but Open by appointment



A publication of the Harsens Island St.
Clair Flats Historical Society

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 44
Harsens Island MI 48028

Museum Address:

3058 S. Channel Dr.

www.harsensislandhistory.org

HISCFHS Board of Directors 2024

Chairman of the Board

Bob Williams

President

Joyce Hassen

1st Vice President

Chris Knight

2nd Vice President

Ellen Probst

Treasurer

Corinne Trexler

Secretary

Rebecca Verschave

Directors

Terry Wiggins

Sue Wrobel

Nancy Bonacquisti



The historical society is looking to add to its collection. We accept donations of artifacts, photos, documents, and stories related to the Island and surrounding area. If you would like to add your family history to the museum archives, we can help you capture your memories for future generations.

Please contact our curator; Chris Knight at
chris.knight@comcast.net

Is your house more than 100 years old?

The Michigan Heritage Home™ program recognizes houses that were constructed at least 100 years ago and are in substantially original condition. That designation comes with a handsome cast-aluminum plaque that lets everyone know that your home has its own rich heritage and historical significance. This distinguished plaque, authorized by the Historical Society of Michigan, will remind both new and longtime community members of your home's contribution to your shared heritage.



For more information click here to go to the

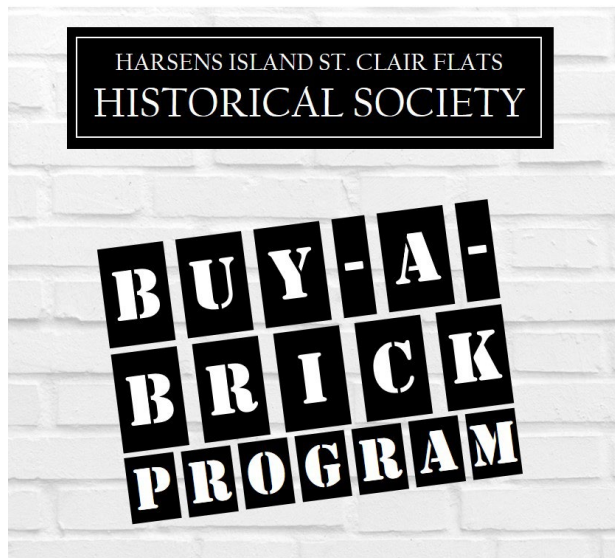
[Michigan Heritage Program](https://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home)

<https://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home>

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society Building Renovation BUY-A-BRICK Program

The past three years we celebrated the completion of several renovation projects; in 2020 the Clayton Evans Room Addition, in 2021 the Karen and Drew Peslar Library and in 2022 the large exhibit space at the entrance to the museum named the Nancy Boulton / Gary Grout Room.

To help maintain the museum's infrastructure and a healthy financial position for our Historical Society, we are reactivating our BUY-A-BRICK Program.



Members and friends can support the Historical Society and assure the continuance of the museum by donating \$350 to our BUY-A-BRICK program. Donors will be recognized or may designate a memorial on one of the bricks inside the museum. Of course, they may remain anonymous if they wish. Donations of any amount to support the renovation efforts are welcome and appreciated. To sign up, or if you have questions, contact Bob Williams at 248-388-0465 or xharpspah@aol.com.



BUY-A-BRICK Order Form is included below.

Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society
Building Renovation BUY-A-BRICK Order Form

I / We would like to ‘BUY-A-BRICK’ to support the Museum.

Indicate on the three lines below the inscription you would like on the brick using up to 25 letters, spaces, or special characters per line.

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Print Your Name _____

Your Phone Number _____ - _____ - _____

Your email address _____ @ _____

_____ **Enclosed is my check for \$350 made payable to HISCFHS.**

_____ **I will not be purchasing a brick at this time but have enclosed a donation for the renovation.**

Payments should be made payable to “HISCFHS” with “BRICK” on the memo line and mailed to the HISCFHS at P.O. Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028.



PO Box 44
Harsens Island
MI 48028
www.harsensislandhistory.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2025

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ Spouse: _____

Primary Mailing Address: _____ Member No. _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____ Spouse Cell: _____

E-Mail Address: _____ Spouse E-Mail: _____

Additional Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Additional Phone: _____ Membership Type: _____

Annual Renewal Dues:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual (1 Member Only) | \$20.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (1-2 Adults + Children < 18) | \$30.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business | \$50.00 |

Lifetime Dues:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Individual | \$300.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Family | \$500.00 |

Building Donation / Roof: \$ _____ Other Donation: \$ _____

(* Original Building Roof)

If desired, please specify use:

Newsletters are emailed to members. If you require newsletters via postal mail, please write a note on your returned application.

Please complete and send with a check made payable to: **Harsens Island Historical Society.**
Mail to: Harsens Island St. Clair Historical Society, P.O.
Box 44, Harsens Island, MI 48028

OFFICE USE ONLY:

Date received: _____

Check # _____ Amount \$ _____