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March / April 2024

Message from the President . . .

Happy Spring!

Happy spring...despite winter's hold on the weather with snow and cold temperatures, spring is in the air with the return of migrating birds, early spring flowers peeking through (in some cases peeking through snow) and buds starting on many trees.

It is certainly spring at the museum, as the Board is working hard finalizing plans for several events for the upcoming summer season. We have three speakers coming this summer, Joel Stone's presentation The History of the Detroit River through Paintings, Bob Williams' presentation The History of Harsens Island, and Daniel Harrison with a few topics choices from which we still need to decide. Please see the calendar and save the dates for these fabulous speakers! We also have the return of the ever-popular Pie Sale, Edmund Fitzgerald Remembrance, and Cookie Walk events.

Spring has also revealed the urgency to fix the roof over the original part of the museum building. The rain and melting snow have not been friendly, with water getting into the building almost daily. We are working on getting emergency repairs completed, with the knowledge more extensive and long-term repairs are necessary soon. A huge thank you to John Eidt who checks the museum daily and has mopped the floor and dried out areas where water has gotten into the building. More information will be shared as we move forward with this project.

Thank you to those who have renewed your membership, we truly appreciate your support!

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

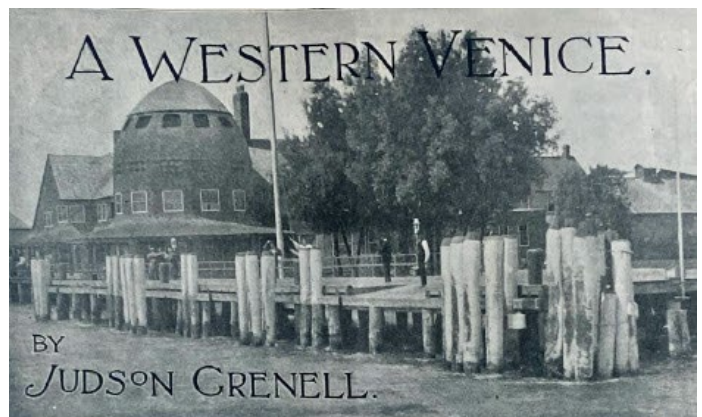
The Illustrated American

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A Western Venice by Judson Grenell

On the border line between the United States and Canada, at the mouth of the St. Clair, where it empties into Lake St. Clair, is a village spiles, the only one of its kind along the great lakes, if not indeed, the only on this continent.

The river thrusts itself into the lake through three outlets, forming a delta still famous for its fishing and duck hunting. For unnumbered years these gaping mouths

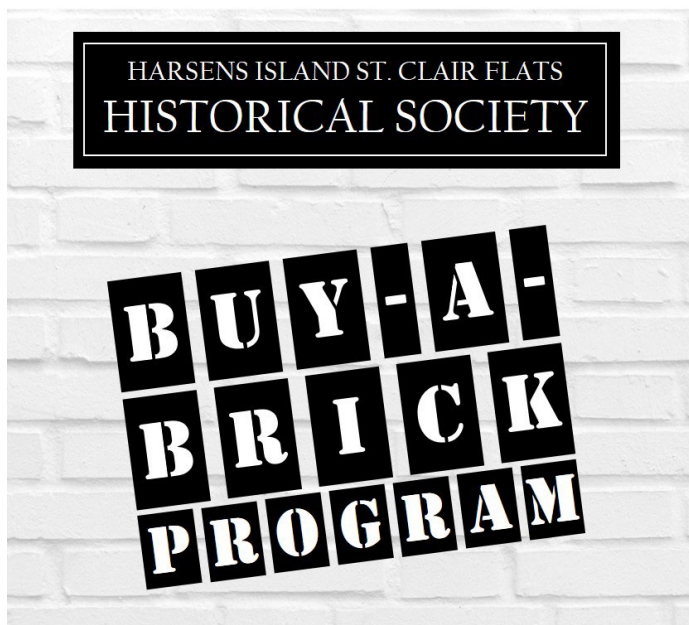


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Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society Building Renovation BUY-A-BRICK Program

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 at the end of this newsletter.

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have been encroaching on the lake proper, until the distance from solid ground to deep water varies from five to seven miles. As the south channel is the one mainly used for commerce, at its most westerly point the United States Government has built a canal 300 feet wide and a mile and half long, in order to escape the delays and dangers to be encountered in threading the shallowing outlets; and it is through this south channel, averaging half a mile in width, and this government canal, that the immense fleets of grain, lumber and ore-laden barges pass in going from the upper to the lower ports.

It is impossible to say which of the three channels has filled up the more rapidly, but certain it is that the wash of the passing steamer has accelerated the shoaling process, for many of the houses that a few years ago were all the time surrounded with running water, in the dry season are now from three to fifteen feet away from the channel's sloping north bank. In the course of time, it has happened that whatever a fringe of reeds along the north side of the south channel indicated a shallow, spiles were driven through from two to four feet of running water making the foundation first for shooting-boxes and later on for the pretentious buildings. From this modest beginning, united with the fact that the great body of water kept the air cool in the summer, and the discovery that it was laden with health-giving ozone, a peculiarly striking village on spiles has grown up, with highways of water, and sail and rowboats, the principal means of conveyance.



Naturally, as one house after another encircled some convenient point, the question of land suggested itself; and as the cheapest way to obtain it was to dredge, gradually behind the fringe of dwellings that followed the fringe of reed canals were dug, from thirty to fifty feet wide and from six feet to ten feet deep, and the soil thus secured utilized in filling it in. So around many of the cottages this is now solid ground with flowerbeds, gardens, grassy lawns where tennis is played, and willow trees whose drooping branches and green leaves add variety and color to the scenery.

Between these groups of dwellings are numerous natural channels to the water beyond, and on pleasant days the surface of this bay is dotted with speeding catboats or with freighted rowboats heading for some favorite fishing ground.



The margins of these waterways, running at right angles with the main stream, are also beginning to be utilized for building purposes; for south channel's northern bank is about all preempted in one way or another, making it cheaper for the latecomer to stake off a new plot on one of these courses rather than pay the price asked by those who with Yankee enterprise, have made sufficient improvements, through driving spiles, or dredging cuts, or building breakwaters, to claim government possession.

As this modern Venice is only thirty miles from Detroit, Michigan, with its 300,000 inhabitants, it is natural that its advantages should have been perceived by those seeking to combine health and recreation. So, from time-to-time fishing and shooting clubs have been formed, and club houses built, until a summer resort has been evolved by natural growth; for between the

Source:

<https://whirlwind2.com/blog/2019/6/21/genesis-of-a-catboat-and-the-wooden-boat-show-1>

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government canal – called in the local vernacular “the piers” – and the point where the three channels forming the delta begin are the flourishing Lake St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club, the Mervue, the Rushmere, the Marshland and the Grand Pointe clubs, besides hotels which cater to the general public – unique and costly buildings capable of accommodating several thousand club members, tourists and transients. And these, with somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred summer cottages, and fifty or so dwellings whose owners live in them the year round, make the beginning of what is destined to be a large, permanent and prosperous community.

One naturally wonders why the south side of the south channel is not built upon. And are the other channels also without settlers? The north and middle channels are gradually being appropriated, yet so long as there are any sites to be obtained at reasonable figures on the south channel these latter will be preferred. Man being a socially inclined creature, he declines to even a couple of miles away so long as he has the chance of settling in the neighborhood of congenial people. He enjoys the bustle and excitement as load after load of excursionists are dumped by all manner of craft on to the public and private docks; and he delights too, in viewing the commerce of the river – a never ending procession, from the palatial 400-foot passenger steamer plying between Duluth and Buffalo to the old-time schooner, a remnant of the fleet that once dominated the lakes. And in all this may he not, in a measure, claim possession? For does not the swell of these boats, passing as they do through his front yard, wash his very doorsteps?

As to the south side of the south channel, that is an Indian reservation, under the control of the Canadian Government. And just above the flats proper – the local name given to this delta – on the Canadian side of the river, is a considerable settlement of Aborigines, the tag end of numerous tribes. The flats were for years their natural fishing and hunting ground, and many a voyageur in the olden time met his death along these shores; for the redmen, though originally intent only on war with finny denizens of the place, seldom slip an opportunity to obtain a scalp or two as evidence of valor.

Now, however, an Indian is seldom seen in these regions, except when the more comely squaws from the reservation take down a boatload of baskets and exchange them with the summer tourists for ready money. The marsh land itself with its opportunities for hunting and fishing, has been leased to a Canadian club, the members of which, each fall, assemble there to indulge in these sports.

The only buildings on the Canadian side of the channel are the ones built for the caretaker, on the westerly point of the reserve, and the clubhouse, some five miles from the mouth of the channel.

It makes a strong contrast, on the American side of the dividing line between the two nations is a row of brightly painted cottages, hotels, and clubhouses; on the Canadian side is but a dreamy waste of marsh grass and reeds, over which ducks lazily fly, for under them is but an occasional signpost giving warning to trespassers. Someday, when the Indians have been bought out, or have died out, a new impetus will be given to this locality, and a greater Venice will spread its boundaries toward the south.

There are no titles to flats really. When the government survey was made, many years ago, all this territory was under water so deep that it was considered a part of Lake St. Clair, and the possessions of those along shore stopped at the natural channels that separate the flats from the marsh land and reed fringed bay further out. So the only titles the settlers have are those of squatters, and where they settle and improve, there they are secure in their possessions.

No one who has seen it can ever forget the nights when the new Venice lies in starlight and silhouettes itself against the background of somber waters. From cottage door and window, from lamplit dock, hotel, and clubhouse, gleam a thousand

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flickering lights, sending their rays in shimmering shafts across the rippling channels. Upon the porch's hammocks swing, in which now rest half-weary souls, fearless of the shadows; and beneath the cottages play the quivering waves, lulling to sleep with rhythmic swish the happy, resting inmates. The pleasure boats rock idly in each slip with lowered sails and sleeping rudders.

To those who stay awake is vouchsafed a procession of brilliantly lighted steamers, sending back their own reflections to mingle with the radiance from the shore; to those who sleep come gently back again in dreams the pleasant memories of the day. As the night advances, one by one the cottage lights go out, like suddenly extinguished stars, and by and by new Venice silently lies, a shadowy city in the waters.

Yet Michigan's Venice has its dangers as well as its pleasures. Occasionally, in the early summer, southwest storms, as sudden and short-lived as they are severe, sweep over the lake and swoop down upon what is apparently a fated settlement. As the black clouds send forth their thunderbolts the heavens are opened, and with the rush of rain come cyclonic winds that lick the waters from the bays and set every building trembling. Then there is consternation among the summer visitors. All places alike seem insecure and doomed, for the dazzling lightning plays simultaneously from every



part of the heavens. It is as fearful as it is grand, and though a house has never yet been overturned, not a few tourists take the first boat for solid ground as soon as the storm has subsided.

The inhabitants of this delta find their prototype in the lake-dwellers of history. Here can be found men and women who have practically lived over running water all their lives; who have never gone to school; who can neither read or write; and children who have never seen the inside of church or Sunday-school. Some of these modern lake-dwellers, too, have traps in the floors of their dwellings, through which is flung the debris of the house, whereupon it becomes flotsam or jetsam, to be carried away with the current or to sink to the bottom of the lake. And history would again repeat itself should some scientist of the fiftieth century stumble across a curious looking mound in this particular spot, and, delving therein and finding cooking utensils, tin cans, bottles, shreds of clothing, the bones of extinct animals and other fragments mysteriously preserved from the ravages of time, construct therefrom a history of the age when a particular people inhabited this delta.

Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2024

PLEASE NOTE: All events and locations in the following schedule are **tentative**.

Date	Day	Time	Event
April 20	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom
May 18	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
May 25	Saturday	TBD	Museum Opens
June 15	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
June 8	Saturday	11:00 AM	Special Event – Joel Stone The History of the Detroit River through Paintings
July 20	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
July 20	Saturday	11:00 AM	Special Event – Bob Williams History of Harsens Island
August 17	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
August 17	Saturday	TBD	Annual Membership Meeting
August	TBD	TBD	Special Event –Daniel Harrison
August 31	Saturday	11:00 AM	Labor Day Parade
September 21	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
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	TBD	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

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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 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 2024

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 \$ _____