



volume 16 / number 9

November / December 2025

*Message from the President . . .*

Happy Holidays!

The holiday season is here, and calendars are filled with events, get together with family / friends. I hope everyone had a warm and wonderful Thanksgiving. I was lucky enough to spend Thanksgiving with my kids / grandkids and close family, which always is special. Bonus – because I didn't host Thanksgiving my Christmas decorations were up earlier than normal this year. Nothing beats Christmas tree lights to warm up a room, my favorite!

As always, December reminds me of how quickly the year passed. The Historical Society's annual events were once again very successful and well attended. The Murder Mystery Night turned out to be a huge success and enjoyed by all who attended. Thank you to all the volunteers, members, and visitors that helped and attended our events!

And just like that, we are moving forward to 2026. The Board's annual budget / planning meeting in November, and as always resulted in excellent conversation and lots of ideas. As we finalize the numbers for the budget, planning will begin for our events, so stay tuned.

I know I say this every year, but at December as I reflect on the past year and look forward to the next, it seems appropriate to say it again - I'm truly grateful for all our volunteers who work tirelessly every year, to those who work to maintain the museum throughout the entire year (including the winter), the Board who supports me, the host volunteers that keep the museum open, and of course our members and donors who keep us financially stable . . . thank you, thank you, thank you!!

Cheers to a happy and healthy holiday season and new year!

*Joyce*

*Joyce Hassen, President*



## 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We encourage, and would like to assist, islanders in getting their old photos, slides, negatives, and historical documents into digital format to preserve and/or display them.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You can bring photos, slides, negatives, or historical documents to the Museum to have them scanned and the digital copy put on a USB flash drive to take home along with the documents you brought for scanning.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](mailto:xharpspah@aol.com).



Harsens Island Fire Hall Dedication in 1938

As the summer season draws to a close, I would like to say thank you to the following people for volunteering to host at the Historical Museum this year:

Dan Orlando, Ted Malys, Milissa Tischbien, Jerry Forton, Jeanne Burczycki, Linda Schoonover, Steve Nicol, Ellen Probst, Chris Knight, Noah and Jacob Pendolino, and Hannah Ownby, who helped in our Kids Corner.

Whether it was one shift or many shifts, I truly appreciate the time you spent helping us keep the doors of the museum open for visitors on beautiful weekends all summer long. We had over 600 visitors this summer from as far away as Brazil, Canada, and from 24 different states according to our Guest Book. It's wonderful to be able to share our rich island history with so many people.

Again, I thank you! If you, or anyone else is interested in volunteering next summer, please let me know.

*Corinne*



## Edmund Fitzgerald Remember The Gales of November Remembered = 50th Anniversary

The museum's Edmund Fitzgerald Remembrance event attracted a substantial audience for the 50th anniversary of the ship's sinking. On The Border performed "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," joined by Celtic Troubadour and Sailor John O'Hara. Guest speaker Ken Cameron recounted his experiences meeting Peter Pulcer, who captained the Edmund Fitzgerald from 1966 to 1972.

An emotional reading of the names of the 39 crew members lost was conducted, with Canadian singer-songwriter Gordon Lightfoot also being recognized among them. Notably, the first unrehearsed take of Lightfoot's recording of "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" became the widely acclaimed hit released in December 1975.



## WHERE THE WILD GOOSE FLIES

### Harsens – Land of Legend by Dorthy Mittsa

The spectacular fire last spring which destroyed 38 pleasure cruisers on Harsens Island drydocked at Marineland brought to mind many associations not only with the Flats and with its Old Club and Joe Bedore's place, and with the former amusement and picnic center, Tashmoo Park, but also the storied past of the island itself.

The first Indians associated with Harsens Island with which the earliest territorial pioneers were familiar were probably the Chippewas and the Mississaugas who had villages of some 200 inhabitants in the vicinity of Algonac. When Cadillac founded Detroit in 1701, he induced a number of Chippewas and Mississaugas, among others, to leave the Sault country and settle near Detroit, presumably to enhance the traffic of furs and make Detroit the central trading post instead of Mackinac.

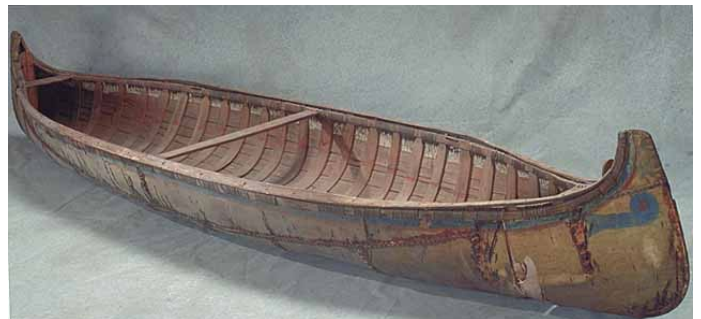
As one writer of Indian lore stated, "the proud and independent Mississaugas with their customary aloofness" chose to establish themselves not nearer to Detroit than what is now known as Harsens Island. But the writings of pioneers of later times, especially those reminiscing in the early 1900s at meetings of pioneer societies, speak mostly of the Chippewas and their customs.

Of the prehistoric Indians which may have inhabited Harsens Island we have little or no knowledge except perhaps of traces of mounds found there. These were, however, probably only burial mounds, for the island has been known as a favorite burial ground for roving tribes as well as the Chippewas and Mississaugas.

Here, from this spot, the warrior braves, in all their paraphernalia of savage splendor went out in their birchbark canoe to do battle with their foe. And to this spot, too, they returned amid wild whoops and hideous chantings with their trophies—strings of stained and reeking scalps waving from long poles, and with droves of shackled prisoners who were to furnish the material for the war feast.

But there were feasts of more pleasurable kinds—feasts to which the pioneers were invited and who, even though they did not anticipate great enjoyment, were pleasantly surprised at times. There was the time Mr. and Mrs. Brakeman were invited by the Indians to a sort of "dinner party". An Indian arrived one day with an invitation from the chief, bringing the chief's "card" – a small square of birchbark – and then extending the invitation to any other friend they wished. The Brakemans asked John K. Smith, another prominent pioneer, to accompany them and he accepted.

When the time arrived for the "party" an Indian, O-gau by name, came for them in a large canoe in the bottom of which he had placed clean rush mat and on which he did the paddling. Halfway across the river he gave a loud war whoop—as much as to say "we are coming"—and the Indians on the island answered in the same style, and as they landed the chief and other important Indian men met the party and shook hands with all. Mr. Brakeman brought with him presents of pipes and tobacco which the Indians received with enthusiastic grunts of approval.



Source: <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/collection/1918-birch-bark-canoe>

*Continued on page 5 . . .*

*Continued from page 4 . . . Land of Legend*

A large tent had been erected for the occasion and rush mats were spread over the dirt floor for the guests' convenience, and as they entered the tent an Indian kept beating on a drum made of a piece of hollow log over the top of which a piece of tanned deer skin was tightly drawn and brought down around the sides where it was held with strings of deer sinews.

Across two sides of the tent, near the top, long poles had been erected, and strung on these poles, from one end to the other, were pigeons nicely dressed and boiled whole. After much time spent in drumming and visiting several of the squaws—probably the "table committee"—busied themselves taking down the pigeons and passing them to the guests, each guest having two of the pigeons placed in their hands. There were no plates, or cutlery of any kind; the guests sat cross-legged on the rush mats and picked the meat from the bones with their fingers. The fowl were surprisingly palatable, and quite satisfying as a meal even without the little squares of maple sugar later passed to them for dessert.

Visiting was again resumed and continued until quite late in the evening, when O-gau reappeared, and after much hand shaking O-gau solicitously helped the guests into the canoe and then took them back across the river to their home on the mainland.



#### **Before you go . . .**

A big thank you to Jerry (one of our summer hosts) for volunteering to refresh the museum's outdoor sign, which was overdue for an update. He endured both unpredictable weather and persistent yellow jackets that weren't keen on having their home painted.



# Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2025

Date	Day	Time	Event
December 6	Saturday	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Cookie Walk
December 20	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting via Zoom

## Museum Hours

Summer Schedule (June, July, August)
Saturdays 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Sundays 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Winter Schedule (September 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](http://www.harsensislandhistory.org)

**HISCFHS Board of Directors 2025**

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**Joyce Hassen**

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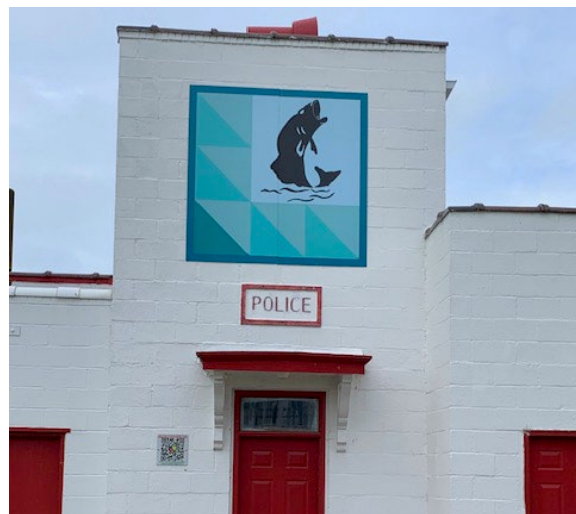
The historical society is looking to add to its collection. We accept donations of artifacts, photos, documents, and stories related to the Island and surrounding area. If you would like to add your family history to the museum archives, we can help you capture your memories for future generations.

Please contact our curator; Chris Knight at  
[chris.knight@comcast.net](mailto:chris.knight@comcast.net)

**Harsens Island Historical Society**

The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats History Society has a quilt block on the building and a QR code is mounted next to the side door. Using the camera app on your phone, scan the code and it will show the link to the Historical Museum page in the [Quilt Trail](#) site.

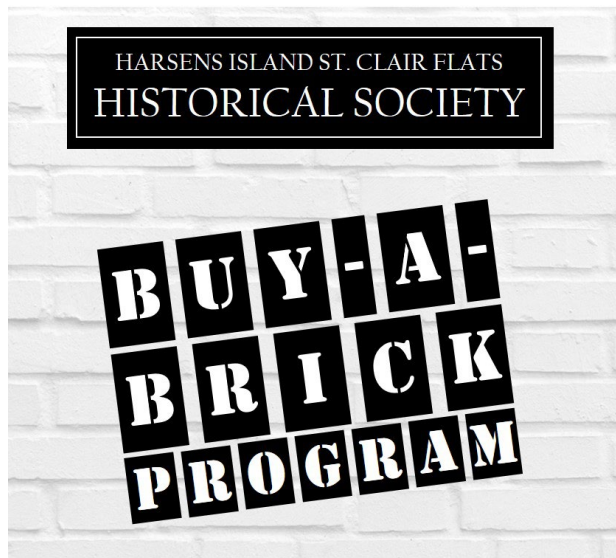
The [Historical Society of Michigan](#) published their 2024 Winter Issue of the Chronicle. The new Harsens Island Historical Society Quilt Block was mentioned in the magazine.



## *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](mailto:xharpspah@aol.com).



**BUY-A-BRICK Order Form is included below.**





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

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2026

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:

- Individual (1 Member Only) \$20.00
- Family (1-2 Adults + Children < 18) \$30.00
- Business \$50.00

Lifetime Dues:

- Lifetime Individual \$300.00
- Lifetime Family \$500.00

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

(\* The necessary roof replacement in 2024 has left reserve funds low)

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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would be interested in volunteering as a museum host this summer (greeting visitors, answer questions, if possible, & record museum shop sales).