



Message from the President . . .

Happy September!

As always, Labor Day Weekend was filled with the best!! The Peter Henkel Memorial Classic Boat Parade, the Street Parade, the Turkey Shoot, and great weather to end the season for many. Labor Day has turned into one of my favorite holidays and once again family filled my cottage all weekend and the weather allowed us ‘warm’ water for swimming, sun for boating (albeit windy), parades, good food and a special engagement celebration for my son and his now fiancé!

The museum also had a great weekend. We welcomed visitors especially on Saturday, as Sans Souci was full of those enjoying the boat parade, street parade, Bloody Mary’s, food, and community. The museum maintains regular hours through September, there is still time to visit.

Although the museum only holds regular hours through September, we still have several annual events to look forward to this fall. The Pie Sale on October 5th, Edmund Fitzgerald Memorial on November 10th, and the Cookie Walk on December 6th. In addition, we have Bob Williams doing an encore of his Harsens Island history presentation on September 29th. You may remember, we had standing room only in July, so for those of you who want to attend for the first time, or see it again, join us!!

Joyce

Joyce Hassen, President

SAVE THE DATES

History of Harsens Island
Sunday, Sep 29
4:00 PM

Pie Sale
Saturday, Oct 5
10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Edmund Fitzgerald
Remembrance
Sunday, Nov 10
3:00 PM

Cookie Walk
Saturday, Dec 7
10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

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We encourage, and would like to assist, islanders in getting their old photos, slides, negatives, and historical documents into digital format to preserve and/or display them.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You can bring photos, slides, negatives, or historical documents to the Museum to have them scanned and the digital copy put on a USB flash drive to take home along with the documents you brought for scanning.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

Join us on September 29 for an Encore Presentation of the History of Harsens Island

Bob Williams will be presenting a History of Harsens Island. Bob will walk us through the history of Harsens Island, highlighting major events, the history of the golden era, and some of the people, places, and the businesses that make the Island special.

HARSENS ISLAND / ST. CLAIR FLATS - Historical Society Museum

2024 SPEAKER SERIES

BOB WILLIAMS

presents . . . The History of Harsens Island

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

4:00 PM

Free Refreshments || Suggested donation: Ten Dollars

The museum now has a new video and sound system in ALL THREE ROOMS!

The Weber Place

Article from Delta News 1996 by Richard Weber

Surely you remember the place. A stately frame, two story cottage resting securely on cedar piles . . . and having just about the best view of the South Channel. The structure was prominently placed on a large parcel of land on the north side of Maybury Highway at the St. Clair River. Accordingly, the views from the screen porch, which wrapped around three sides of the home, were spectacular. It was on that porch that I, as a very young child, was first scared to pieces by the steam whistle of a passing freighter. It was on that porch that I first experienced the approach of a really terrific Harsens Island thunderstorm. It was on that porch that the love and togetherness of my family all came together in such unforgettable, wonderful ways. It was on that porch.

But wait. This is all about very recent history. What caused the house to be built in that location over a century ago? The answer to that question has been attempted by several writers of interesting historical accounts of Harsens Island. I fear this tale will differ in some respect from their versions. I am relying on nothing more than the verbal passing of family history from generation to generation and some original documents from those years so very long ago.

It would appear my great grandfather Joseph F. Weber purchased the property for cash in 1881 from Louis Benoir. The



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purchase was “in company with William C. Maybury and William J. Craig of Detroit.” Historians will recall William C. Maybury was Mayor of the City of Detroit from 1897 to 1905. Also, Joseph Weber’s wife just happened to be the daughter of William C. Maybury. So, the purchase, by and large, a family affair involving Joseph Weber and his father-in-law. There can, thus, be little doubt, as to the origins of the name ‘Maybury Highway’ for the wide canal adjoining the property. The exact role of William J. Craig in the transaction is unclear, except that he did have a brief partial ownership. Seven years later, William Craig was dead. His brother, Samuel D. Craig, made several intense efforts to buy out the Weber / Maybury interests in the property. This bears some notice since Samuel Craig was, at the time, a member of the U.S. house Representatives. Harsens Island was obviously “hot” resort property back then for the political set! Several years later, Joseph Weber bought out the interests of both his partners.

Great grandfather Joseph Weber was not a politician. His primary business was lumbering the “Thumb” area of Michigan. “Weber Lumber” was then used in large quantities to build much of the rapidly expanding City of Detroit during the years immediately following the Civil War. The stress of running such a significant operation took its toll. Joseph Weber was ordered by his physician in 1881 to divorce himself from his work for a while. He was to “stay in a hammock” for an entire summer in a place where he could not possibly be disturbed. Such was the ‘Weber Reason’ for acquiring the property at the Flats. Perhaps, at this point, it should be clarified that the property was never owned or occupied by the Weber family associated with the J.L. Hudson Co. Strangely, that myth persists to this day.

As to actually building the residence, an old letter states that Mr. Weber “should supply all the material and that Mr. Craig and Mr. Maybury to supply the labor.” During 1881, “improvements were made consisting of an 8-room frame residence, with a boat house. Also, the island aforesaid, was dredged up, sheet piled and leveled off, and other and divers improvements made.” This language is taken from a deposition made by Joseph F. Weber in 1909. This deposition and an 1894 painting of the property both confirm the residence was built on its own little island. In fact, the painting shows pleasure boats sailing around three sides of the house. The Bates automobile road at the rear of the property would arrive only decades later. The painting shows the house and some trees occupying nearly all of the above-water space on the “island.” During 1890, the “island” was further “dredged out, permanently sheet piled, leveled, 100 trees planted, and other improvements made rendering the island fit for residence purposes.” The total cost of all the improvements (including the house) came to the remarkable sum of \$2,000.00! A handwritten Clay Township tax bill for the year 1892 valued the property at \$1,000.00 and the total taxes were the princely sum of \$10.10.

All of these “improvements” were relative, of course. For generations, the only running water about the place was the river flowing under the boat house, which provided a constant flush to the latrine facilities located inside this building. I have vivid memories, as a youngster in the 1930’s, of being perched over that awesome hole . . . not daring to lose my grip on the platform. And I will never forget the pungent smell of that boat house . . . latrine, rotting wood, fish scales, old varnish, worn out line, marsh water, and soot – all in a potpourri never since matched.

The Weber cottage provided generations of family members and friends splendid summer adventures and relaxation and related delightful memories that long endured. Freighter watching, swimming, endless games of croquet, candy at Coulter’s store, the worn porch hammock on a hot afternoon, my grandfather shoring up a sagging foundation post with a car jack. Throughout the decades the main house has changed very little. The plumbing finally moved indoors with all

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the related frustrations of a mechanical pump. A new coat of paint now and then. Lots of trees were planted. During the 1920's, the truly stunning glass cupola atop the home was removed and a curious flat area remained in its place ever since. It seems the prohibition era bootleggers sneaking liquor in from Canada found the view of the river from the Weber's cupola to their liking. They would frequently break into the house and signal their companions from the cupola when it was safe to cross the river with their illegal cargo of whiskey. The U.S. Revenue Agents, of course, were not amused by this ingenuity. They asked the Weber family to remove the cupola. Once removed, it was never replaced.

Other changes, over the years, involved greatly expanding the filled land area. Ultimately, much of the property was surrounded with a steel break wall, the boat house was torn down and the house had direct access to the road. The U.S. government condemned a rear portion of the property to build the large rear range light serving the old South Channel freighter traffic. Robert F. Weber built a small log cabin at the very north end of the property. This cabin (which still stands) adjoins a dredged fact, during the 1950s and 1960s, the property was most extensively used as a cruising destination for family members. During this time, the old house was still lovingly occupied throughout the summers by Joseph Weber's granddaughter, Marjorie W. Bulkley (Bleakley).

The most devastating change for the Weber family was the dredging of the cut-off channel. This meant freighter traffic was no longer going to pass in front of their property on a regular basis. And, thus, much of the enormous charm of the location was forever lost. With reluctance and sadness, the property was sold to outside interests in 1978 . . . nearly 100 years after Joseph Weber first sought solace and relaxation at that special location. From time to time, family members would return to Harsens Island and, naturally, be drawn to look at the old house. How it had changed! The paint peeling, the screen porch screenless, the tilting to one side of the entire house, the buckled roof, the perpetual 'For Sale' sign. Gone were most of the trees. Yes, there was more steel break wall and more fill and more mooring spaces. But it wasn't the place of our memories anymore. After 115 years, the big, old house seemed so alone, so stark, so derelict and tired.



During a bitter cold, snowy day this past winter, my wife and I were driving through the flats. In the haze of a snow squall, we could barely see the ghostly outline of the old house. A sign at the road said 'Sold'. Another one said, 'Keep Out'. Yet, a mystical command drew us both out of the warm car. Drew us through a hole in the fence, down the long driveway. Drew us to stand again on the porch of that grand old house . . . a most peculiar 'coming home'. In that cold and wind, we stood on the porch for the very last time.

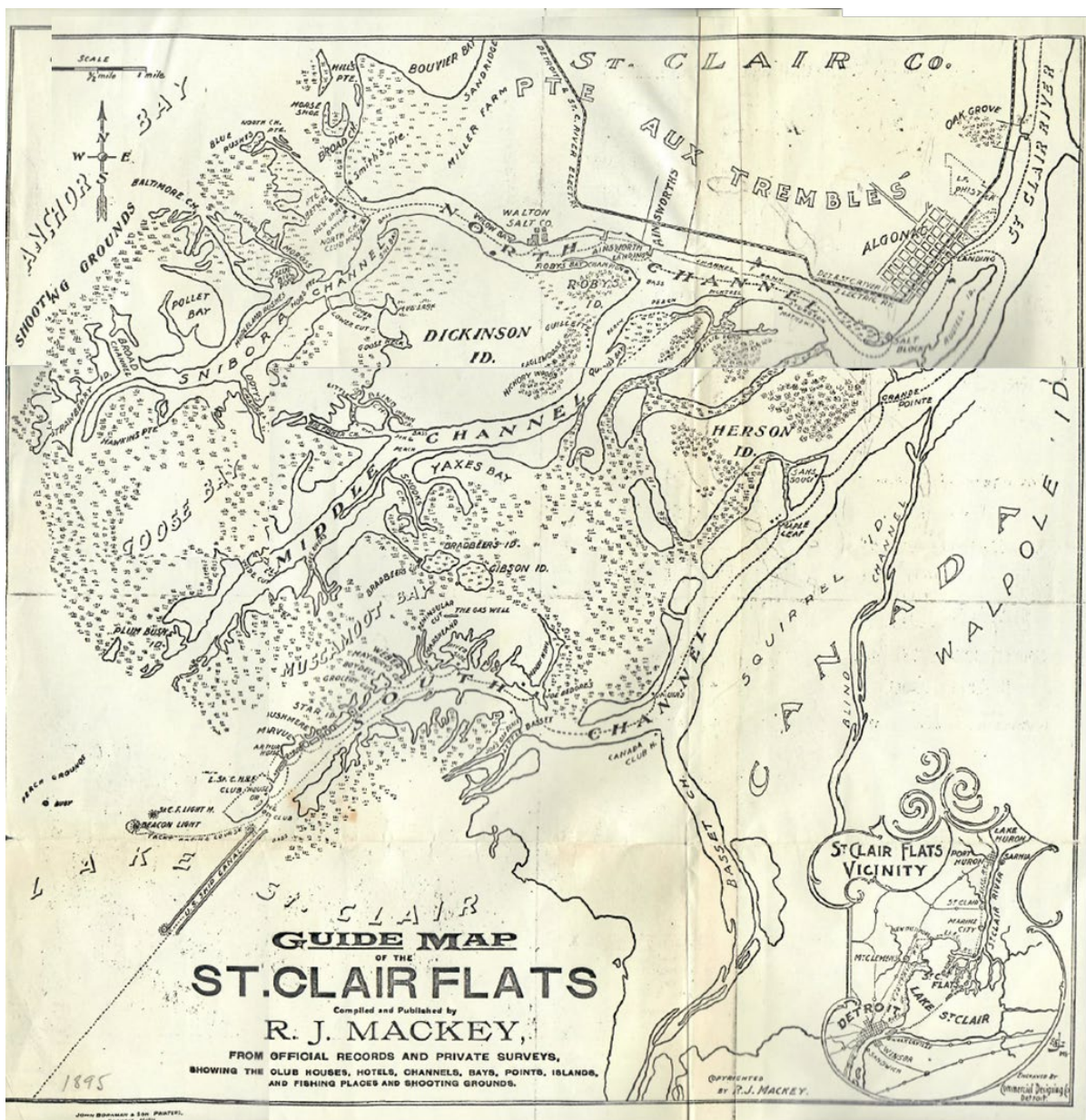
The house is now gone.

I wonder if the wreckers noticed the car jack in the ruins.

Mapmakers of Yesterday

Contributed by Howard Hallas in Sarasota, February 1971

As you know, the labyrinth of channels makes this area something of a mystery to today's boatsmen, especially early in the year before the marsh grasses have come up again – and I imagine it was even more of a mystery to a casual mapmaker in 1895, unless he was a Yax or Sears. One is inclined to be a little suspicious of cartographers of recent vintage who spell 'lily' as 'lillie', and "Herson Island" appears as "Harsen" on much older maps. When I fished up there, we often went to the "sny" – either the "sny burra" or the "syn cardy". This map shows the "snibora". Earlier maps show that these terms are slurring of the old French. The former was "chenal a bourand" and the latter "chenal ecarte". The original of this map was an early advertising piece, with notices of hotels, groceries, doctors and undertakers on the reverse side.



Harsens Island Historical Society Calendar 2024

Date	Day	Time	Event
September 21	Saturday	9:30 AM	Board Meeting at the Museum
September 29	Saturday	4:00 PM	Special Event – Bob Williams History of Harsens Island
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

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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

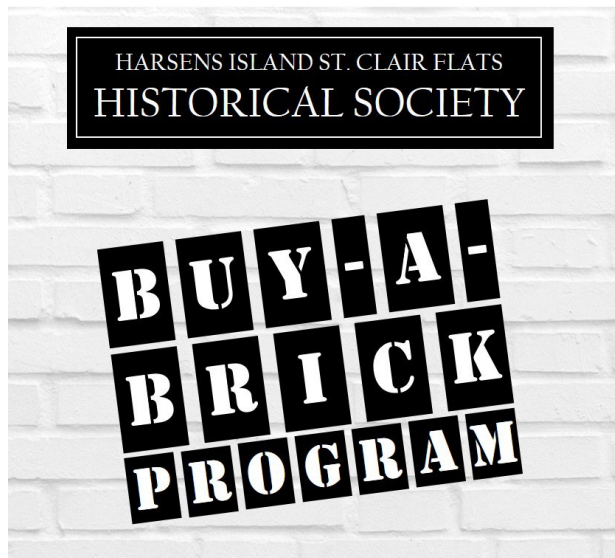
[Michigan Heritage Program](https://www.hsmichigan.org/awards/michigan-heritage-home)

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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 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 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 \$ _____