

1950's – The Decade of Boat Races on the Cass



Competitive boat racing on the Cass River became a popular community spectator sport during the 1950's. Sponsored by the Frankenmuth Conservation Club and held at "Hubinger's Grove" located on the banks of the Cass River east of the current boat launch, the first race was held on Labor Day, September 4, 1949. The race, and all subsequent races held in Frankenmuth

were sanctioned by the Michigan Outboard Racing Association. That first race drew 1200 fans to watch an afternoon of racing by 18 drivers from across the area. Five races were held in categories of boat engine size; 7 1/2 hp, 10, 16, 22, and 50. A purse of \$350 was awarded the winning drivers. Admission to the event was \$0.50.

The following year (1950) the race program was expanded to two races, one in June and the second on Labor Day. By 1953 the program was expanded again to three races. "Frankenmuth's race course gained the enviable distinction of being the finest in Michigan when it was established several years ago" noted the Frankenmuth News. By then, attendance had grown to 3000 to 3500 per race day and event proceeds began to be saved for the Conservation Club

House, now located on Curtis Road.

On June 24, 1956 some 50 boats competed in the races. Racers came from as far as Toledo and Traverse City. Most were from the more immediate area; Lapeer, Flint, Bay City, Reese, Saginaw and Frankenmuth. Herb Weber of Frankenmuth took 2nd place in one of the races. "Thirsty fans downed 1700 bottles of pop and 2500 bottles of beer", reported the Frankenmuth News.

The Labor Day Jamboree of 1956 was a 2 day event, with the boat race being the major draw the afternoon of Sept. 3. M.F. Hick Leslie was general chairman of the weekend event and Chief Henry Zinck was food chair. By now the race had expanded to 60 drivers and 12 events. Common racer names mentioned during these years included;



Nick Keller of Reese,
piloting the "Flying
Dutchman"

Danny Alever piloting #464

Paul Bolf of Saginaw

Mel Schmidt of Saginaw

Don Kinsey of St. Charles

Herb Weber of

Frankenmuth

Harry Demski of Midland

Bill Bowland of Saginaw

Spills and crashes were
common, but injuries few.

"Nick Keller's boat was
slammed broadside but was
able to stay in the race.

Keller was hit a second
time and was run up on the
bank and out of the race.

No damage was done to
Keller's boat". (No mention
of any damage to Keller)

In 1958 the race event was
still drawing large crowds.
Over 4000 people attended
the June 29 event with over
50 boats competing. The
last race was held on June
28, 1959. The Labor Day
Jamboree of 1959 was held
at the Conservation Club
facility on Curtis Road, and

boat races on the Cass
River became part of
Frankenmuth's rich history.

Source of information:

Frankenmuth News

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