

A Brief History of the Lowell Showboat



Lowell, an old Indian settlement, celebrated its 100th birthday in 1931. At that time the great depression was gaining ground and merchants and citizens in general seemed to have time on their hands. One night in February 1932 there was a back room conference in the drug store of the late State Representative, Dexter Look. The subject at hand was, "What can we do to create business, how can we keep the town alive and turn the conversation from depression to something more interesting and uplifting?" In this group was the President of the school board, the local newspaper editor, the Postmaster and a few merchants.

Among the ideas produced, the one eventually selected was the idea of a Showboat. Delegates from the committee call on the local American Legion Post and the Board of Trade. Both organizations were skeptical but both agreed to try anything once. The Board of Trade agreed to give financial support; the Legion to carry on the necessary work. A team was developed that eventually brought every citizen of the community together. The event was a tremendous success. The very first Showboat produced an attendance of nearly 5000 people and receipts of \$1,200.00. The Showboat's success and attendance continued to grow and over the years nearly one half million people attended this gala annual event!

The first Showboat was built in 1932 floated on oil drums and was called the "George Washington". In 1935 a second craft, the "Robert E. Lee" was built to resemble the old riverboat steamers that traveled the Mississippi River long ago. Since 1932 a total of five boats have been constructed, each with special modifications that allowed it to float on the shallow Flat River. With each craft a great deal of attention was given to preserve the atmosphere and appearance of the old-time riverboats. Its paddle wheel, its belching smoke stacks and its power beam all serve to present a visual atmosphere, while in reality the boat is powered by six outboard motors.

The Show itself was always in keeping with the Mississippi Riverboat Shows of long ago. A chorus, interlocutor, endmen, amateur and semi-professional acts all worked together to present an old fashioned minstrel type show. In addition, each year the Showboat would bring to its stage a well-known celebrity to round out an evening of fun and entertainment.

The Showboat has been an example of civic enterprise and a demonstration of what people can do in a small community when they all work together. There was not a person in Lowell that was too big or too small to have a part. Men women and even children from all walks of life have had a way in which they could participate.

While the Lowell Showboat was a non-profit organization, some money was made from time to time. Most of these funds were used to assist in local and civic projects. The only stipulation that was ever placed on the expenditure was that it had to be something that would be beneficial to all the citizens of Lowell. Since the summer of 2001, the Lowell Showboat has been the backdrop for the annual ten-week "Showboat Summer Sizzling Concert Series. This musical event provides free outdoor entertainment on Thursday evenings beginning in June on the banks of the Flat River at the Riverwalk Plaza.

The highly successful concert series has continue to preserve the original intent of the organizers to draw people to the City of Lowell and to provide an uplifting and entertaining experience.

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LOWELL SHOWBOAT BOAT CHRONOLOGY

1 ST Boat	1932	George Washington
2 nd Boat	1935	Robert E. Lee XII
3 rd Boat	1948	Robert E. Lee XVII
4 th Boat	1967	Robert E. Lee XXXVIII
5 th Boat	1979	Robert E. Lee

Captain/Interloctor	C.H. Runciman 1932 – 1954 (?)
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