

Clank, clank, clank

When any friends or family that visited us wanted to take a boat ride on the lake, we always suggested they take the ferry instead of the Barbara J (Conneaut Lake Cruises' stern wheel excursion boat). The ferry was cheaper and gave a better and longer ride.

Passenger -1970s

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The ferry always looked the same. It was white with those black rub rails around it. Inside was plain wood. The seats were red and the floor gray.

Passenger - 1950s

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All I remember is getting off the dock into the boat and seeing that you had to go so far down inside. Deep in. Once you were in the seats it was fine, but it seemed really far down. The inside was roughly finished. The wood



and all. We should have gotten splinters up our... you know!

Passenger - 1950s

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You were close to the water. When you got in the boat you got down into the boat. You sat inside the hull. You were 'way down low. You know, you could look into that green water as the waves peeled off the side of the boat. It felt like you were moving along.

Passenger - 1970s

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I only took one ride on it with my brother and two of my cousins. We were over at the Park and decided to take the ferry to Town and back. This was about 1976 or 1977. I was around twelve years old. I remember the rear seat that wrapped around and had the brass upholstery nails going around it. It was an uneventful trip. It was the last trip of the day and it was dark before we returned to the Park.

Passenger - 1970s

The boats were originally built in the typical Conneaut Lake configuration. That is, with their steering wheels in their bows. Nobody seemed to remember them that way, no surprise since the wheels were moved to the port side of the boats sometime in the early 1930s. For the next few decades, the hubs for the wheels remained in the bow location, granting crews opportunity for mischief.

The wheels were on the side when I worked there. In the Outing you could still see where it was connected - in the front panel. Being the employee I was, I got down inside the bow of the boat. You could see the hardware, the cabling that turned the wheel.

Crew - 1950s

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We would take the wheel off the hub on the left-hand side beside the smokestack and take it up and put it on the hub up front and drive it from the front. We did that to delight the passengers! It was fun driving from the front except that you didn't have a visual on the people on the boat. So when you're coming into the dock it was not good 'cause people had their arms hanging out. So it was better being where you were even though the smokestack was in the way. It comes to mind that it was easier on the Redwing to do that steering wheel trick because I don't think we could get the wheel's bolt off the Outing. It comes to mind that it was easier to get the Redwing's bolt off and take the wheel up front.

Crew - 1950s

Even when it remained in place, the odd, sideways wheel caused trouble.

That sideways wheel. It sure was confusing when you first started.

Crew - 1950s

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The steering was hooked up differently in the two boats. One you pushed forward to go right, the other you pushed forward to go left, but I can't remember which boat was which way. You'd go out and, no, you had to go the other way. Most of the time, I ran the Outing.

Crew - 1950s

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That crazy sideways wheel was hard to get used to! It's been so long I can't remember which way it went, but I think it was push it and go left, pull it and go right. That's backwards from what it should have been but that would've been about par for the course. It became natural after a while, but if you stopped to think about it you were in trouble. There was a chain in the connection between the wheel and the rudder. You could hear it – clank clank clank – as you spun the wheel.

But the controls couldn't have been simpler. The wheel, the throttle and the gearshift. Out on an empty lake anybody could've driven her. The hard part was thinking ahead, watching all of the other boats, and landing. The ferry couldn't turn on a dime and took a long time to stop and you had to plan ahead or there would be trouble.

Crew – 1970s

Many people never realized that there were two, nearly identical boats – which made the generic term “ferry boat” all the more useful. To many of the crew, the differences were clear. Kind of...

The only way you could tell them apart was the wheel. The Outing's steering wheel was box-shaped, the ring. Had rails the whole 'way around. Had screw-heads or rivets. The Redwing's wheel was like a toilet seat. Perfectly round.

Crew – 1950s

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We always ran the Outing. It was more dependable than the Redwing, for some reason.

Crew – 1950s

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My dad liked the Outing the best. It had easier steering, but I was partial to the Redwing.

Crew – 1960s

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If there was something the matter with the Outing, they were doing work on it or something, we would run the Redwing. There were times when I ran the Redwing an awful lot. Paul Scofield would say “Why don't you run the Redwing for a week. Get the batteries charged for the weekend.”

Crew – 1950s - 1960s

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Just the Outing would go as a passenger boat. The other went as an excursion. They'd pull someone off one of the other boats that knew what was going on. Lloyd Holland's first job was to do the excursion boat.

Crew – 1950s - 1960s

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Now, the Redwing would be used as an excursion boat - like the Barbara J. They didn't use it for stops. If they did, the Outing was broken down or it was a busy day. They'd just make a regular run around the lake. They wouldn't stop. It wouldn't interfere with the regular schedule at all.

Crew – 1950s

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I remember standing on Midway dock and having a ferry go by 'way out in the lake. I'd get mad as the dickens because I thought it was passing us by. I came to understand, later on, that there were two boats. One for passengers and the other for tours. But I didn't know that when I was a kid!

Passenger – 1960s

But, the boats weren't perfect.

It was hard to see at night back when I was on it. We had used stop lights on it. What they used for the red and green lights were the turn signals you used to see on really old trucks. And then it had a back light. Sometimes it was just a light put on the back. Sometimes it was a stake. The headlight was off an old truck. It shone straight ahead so you could see the dock just before you hit it!

Crew – 1940s – 1950s

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Before we built the new canopy on the Redwing, the boat used to have a spotlight on the front, which was an illegal light. It was on there because, when you approached, you could use it to see the dock. The Fish Commissioner, who was George Moore at the time, pointed out to us what a hazard that was. He said coming across the lake, that's a blinding light. It wasn't an order, more of a reminder. He came up to me and said "Hey, that light on the front is a real hazard." I went out myself in another boat one night to check it out and he was right. A spot light of that dimension shining down on the water would scatter lights for a very great distance in front of us.

Owner – 1960s

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The damn thing hated to back up! And God help you if you were backing up and to the starboard side. The prop or the torque or the rudder or something just made the boat impossible to handle in reverse. That's why we had to land so weird at the Midway. Damned, stupid thing.

Crew – 1970s

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In the late 1970s or early 1980s the Redwing broke down and came into our dock. We let the driver call to the Park for help. We had the only dock in the area that the ferry could come into easily.

Lakefront Resident – 1970s

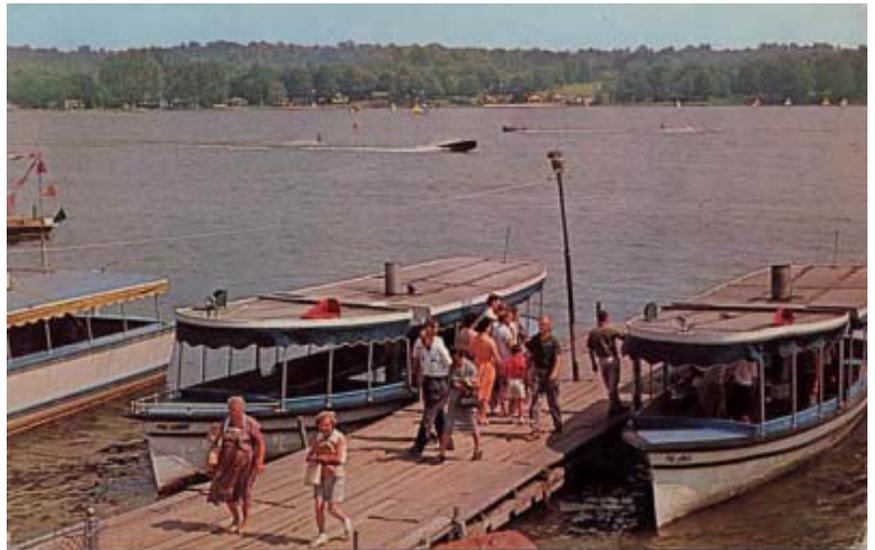
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I drove for years and never had a breakdown. You'd have trouble, rough engine, balky transmission, that sort of thing, but never anything really big. She ran day after day with not too much maintenance. I thought she was doing fine, considering her age.

Crew – 1970s

The commonly used name of the boats could cause trouble.

This'll sound silly, but one of the greatest things about being on the fer-



ry was listening to people try to avoid the word “ferry” which sounds like “fairy” which has a whole other meaning to some people. Men, especially, seemed to have trouble saying “ferry boat” and would say stuff like “those boats” or “that boat there” or “passenger boat.” God forbid you say something to a tough guy like “How'd you like your ride on the ferry?”

Crew – 1970s

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One of the things I think about is the jokes when folks started coming out of the closet, you know, were willing to say they were gay. I'm sure you heard it a hundred times; “Hey, I knew we were expanding but I didn't know we had our own navy!”

Crew – 1960s

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People would make fun of you, guys around your age, especially. “Oh, here comes the *ferry* boat driver.” I used to think “Why don't you just shut up!”

Crew – 1970s

Image: The Outing, mid-1960s. Sitting at the Park, waiting for passengers, calm water, blue skies, the Oakland Hotel in the background, this is the perfect ferry picture. You can clearly see the exhaust stack running up from the engine hatch through the center of the roof and the amidships doorway on both sides where passengers entered. Just to the right of the stack is the sideways wheel. Passengers sat around the outside edge of the boat. The life preservers are still in the ceiling as there are no large wooden boxes to hold them on the interior deck. How do we know she's the Outing? Easy, she has a rail up and around her bow. *Copyright Jacqueline Holland Elliott.*

Image: The Outing and Redwing at the Park dock, early to mid-1960s. Seeing the two ferries side-by-side makes it easy to understand how some folks figured there was only one boat. But a sharp eye, and knowing what to look for, makes it easy to tell who's who. The Outing, on the left, always had a railing around her bow, a detail the Redwing rarely, if ever, carried. On the left hand side this card is the stern of the Shoreline Cruise that ran on the Lake for over 20 years. A World War II-era plywood landing craft, it was brought to the Lake from New Jersey in the late 1940s by Paul Scofield and fitted as a passenger boat. *Courtesy Don Hilton.*

We surfed the waves

You could give that boat all the gas you wanted. Once it reached a certain speed she wouldn't go any faster. All she'd do is hunker down and throw off big-assed waves, especially if you were someplace shallow, like approaching or pulling away from a dock.

Crew – 1970s

Some of the most persistent ferry boat memories have nothing to do with being on the boat.

I was born up route 322 by Corry School in 1934. I spent many hours at Dennis Beach at the Town end of the lake, watching the boats going back and forth. I knew how long it took the ferry boat's waves to get to shore from their path across the lake.

Expatriate – 1940s

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We surfed the waves over at Midway Beach. There weren't too many boats on the lake in those days, so the ferry's wave was a big deal.

Visitor – 1950s

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The ferry threw really big waves. We'd pretend it was like a tidal wave and jump and splash through them. It sounds kind of goofy, I guess, but there weren't that many boats on the lake then and a really big wave was something to yell about.

Visitor – 1960s.

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The ferry made the biggest wave of any boat on the lake. We'd wait until it'd cruised by and then pretend like the waves were washing us ashore. Sounds sort of strange saying out loud, but we were kids then.

Visitor – 1970s

Image: The Redwing departs Midway, July, 1955. A heavily loaded ferry pulls away from Midway dock, heading south for Shady. Here, you can see one of the two elms that shaded Midway dock. Notice how empty the lake is of other boats, despite the pleasant weather of a very pretty day in July. Ferry pilots of the 1970s and 1980s had to contend with much heavier traffic in their time on the lake. *Copyright Ramsey Frist.*



Oh, the ferry boat

Childhood memories are often some of the most interesting.

We used it to tell time. Mom would say “come back when you see the ferry 3 times.”

Visitor – 1960s

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It's strange, but I remember waiting for the ferry. If you were waiting to go to the Park it took forever for the boat to get there. You could see it coming clear down the lake and it would get bigger and bigger until it arrived. It sure seemed to travel faster coming home than it did going to the Park.

Passenger – 1960s

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We used to stand at the dock and see who could see the ferry first. I always saw it last. My brother would stand right beside me and point over my shoulder and I'd line my eyes up with his arm and still couldn't see it. Turned out I needed glasses, badly.

Passenger – 1960s



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I don't know how old I was, three or four, but I remember kneeling backward on my seat with somebody holding my waist, and looking at the water go by the boat. It seemed like we going so fast! The boat hummed as it went along. It had this vibration that you felt all through the boat. When I was little, I'd turn around, kneel in my seat and rest my chin on the red rail that ran along the top of them. I could hear it in my head. Hmmmmmm. Like that.
Passenger – 1950s

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Real early memory would be actually being laid on the bench in the ferry. I was small enough that I could actually lay on the bench and be looking up and seeing the awning, the bunting that went around the roof. The boat had a distinctive hum to it, like the whole boat almost, like vibrated as it went through the water.
Passenger – 1960s

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The ferry hummed the best lullaby in the world. Parents would bring a cranky, tired baby on board and within the first five minutes, boom, fast asleep. I even hated ringing the bell at Midway for fear of waking the kid up. Some parents would stay on for an extra trip just to give junior, and them, and extra hour of rest.

Crew – 1970s

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One of my very first memories is about the ferry. I'm in the boat, it's moving, the sun is at my back. I get up and walk to the front of the boat where there's a gumball machine attached to the wall. That's it. I've been told that the machines were removed in 1958. That would make me a year and half old at the time.

Passenger – 1950s

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Gumball machines. The Kiwanis put them in the boat. Up front. Falling off. I remember they came and filled them. Took the money out. I never saw that money, that I can remember. I remember them. We couldn't get the steering wheel on the front hub as long as those gumball machines were there.

Crew – 1950s

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I visited the lake with my grandparents, must have been the early to mid fifties. I was in grade school. I remember that we were going to visit Uncle Oscar. His farm was not too far away. What I remember most is that, after taking one look at the boat, and watching people board her, my grandmother refused to ride. It was just Grandpa and me!

We had such fun. Because Grandma was not around to watch, Grandpa gave me a whole handful of pennies for the gum machine. I seem to remember a peanut machine too, but maybe not. I remember that the seats looked a little splintery. In those days all young girls wore dresses and I didn't squirm about too much. The day was sunny and I remember a smell that I couldn't identify, mildew and fuel exhaust, maybe? That was the only time we went to the lake.

Passenger – 1950s

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We were pretty little – four, five, six, in the 1940s. Mom would take us down to the dock and the three of us would get on the boat which Dad might be driving, or somebody else, because they ran two boats all day Sunday. We'd get on the boat, ride up to the Park. Mom would sit and watch the boats come in. Every once in a while get a free ride from Harvey Shadle. Give us each a half dollar and turn us loose in the Park for the rest of the afternoon.