

# Autos Across Mackinac: Bridge Causeway Ground-breaking Celebrated

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protected harbor as a base for their bridge foundation work and then deed it to the city once the bridge opened to traffic.

The ferry workers, who had been the cream of local society for years, suddenly found they were taking a back seat to men they'd never met, from towns they'd never heard of. Still, with job-seekers and normal travelers, the *Vacationland* carried a record volume of traffic for February. Crossings for the first two months of 1954 were up 5.7% over the year before.

By mid-March, ferry crews expected to be called back from winter layoff at any time. While they waited, many joined their employer in Grand Rapids for a luncheon honoring seven ferry workers for 20 years of service. Leo Foglesonger, Levi Furlotte, Francis LaBute, William Nichols, Aloysius Vallier, George Thomson, and Alfred Tromblay were cited for their faithful work in the fleet. A veteran with just a little less service announced his retirement. Mate Ted Everson had joined the ferries in 1937, but left to maintain a fishing bait business he'd established to serve tourists several years before.

But no tourists came to the U.P. the weekend of March 13. A blizzard closed roads on Friday night and high winds kept the *Vacationland* tied up in Mackinaw City for most of the day Saturday. The tie-up nixed plans for the St. Ignace High School band and several other schools from the U.P. to compete in a music festival in Petoskey. The Bridge Authority took advantage of the closure to announce that when their crossing was completed, motorists could drive across the Straits in less than 10 minutes, as opposed to the 53 minutes it took by ferry under normal circumstances. And, they noted, there would be no waiting time before crossing, as the bridge

didn't run on a schedule.

Red-faced highway department officials rushed to announce they'd reprint the new 1954 Michigan State Ferry schedules which had just been distributed. Apparently, one of the new timetables had found its way to Senator W. A. Ellsworth's office and he immediately spotted an error. St. Ignace had been left off the map! He called Commissioner Ziegler, who apologized, and ordered the printing redone immediately.

The reprints arrived just in time for the spring schedule to go into effect on April 15. Andy Monson skipped the *City of Petoskey* and Pete Everson commanded the *City of Munising* to make hourly departures from each side, from 6 a.m. to Midnight. The boats also made night sailings from Mackinaw City at 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. and from St. Ignace at 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. The hourly runs actually started a week earlier than even that printed on the new forms.

"Absence of ice in the Straits enables us to give the traveling public the earlier benefit of two-boat service," Ziegler said.

As crews returned to the ferries to gear up for the upcoming season, Sim Christensen, in his ferry tales column, reported that Leonard "Hoot" McGraw "borrowed the skipper's field glasses aboard the *Munising* coming in from Mackinaw City. When asked what he was so interested in, says he: I just thought I spotted that rascal Christensen trying to sneak aboard the *Straits* ahead of me." He also noted the ax trophy Capt. Lloyd kept on the wall of the superintendent's office, saying he hadn't had a good night's sleep since he'd seen it.

"Honest Injun, Capt. I really am doing a better job now that we understand each other! But I do wish you'd go in for deer heads of something of that sort. Sell it! [the ax] I'll make you a good deal on it!"

While seamen wrapped up loose ends to fit out the remainder of the fleet, Merritt-Chapman & Scott engineers began construction of six triangulation towers to mark the exact line of the bridge they planned to build.

Meanwhile, civic officials put the finishing touches on ground-breaking plans. To be held Friday, May 7, Scorpion jets would fly over a huge parade as long as the parade route leading to the old causeway, where Prentiss Brown would dig the ceremonial first scoop of dirt with a silver spade. Invited dignitaries would speak, and various entertainments would be performed. The day would be capped by the largest fireworks display ever seen in Mackinac County up to the time. All in all, the event would cap a week-long celebration touted as the "most significant" in Michigan. The Catholic Church, which, at the time, required members to eat fish on Fridays, even gave special dispensation for its parishioners to eat meat any time and any place during the Friday portion of the festival.

The pending hoopla helped increase April's ferry traffic by nearly 3,000 autos over the same, strike-filled month in 1953. Captain Lloyd ordered the third boat, the *City of Cheboygan*, into the rotation, giving "better than hourly service" for the ground-

breaking crowds streaming northward.

The crowd turned out to be about 5,000 strong. Cold, snow, and winds early in the week may have chilled the mood of travelers, but by Friday the weather moderated and the sun even shown brightly at the noon groundbreaking. While their husbands looked on, Marion (Mrs. Prentiss) Brown, Mrs. Grover C. Denny, and Nancy (Mrs. G. Mennen) Williams jointly tuned the ceremonial first spade of earth from an iron box, which with other pertinent historical material was to be placed in the cornerstone of the bridge at a later time.

The celebration wasn't limited to the causeway. At Castle Rock, a huge statue of Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox, was unveiled. Bad weather forced cancellation of the planned public sinking of the retired gospel ship *Glad Tidings*, the former Arnold Line ferry *Elva*. She was finally sunk on May 11. The band concert scheduled for Athletic Park was also postponed by chilling winds, but the fireworks went off as planned that night.

The next day, much better weather brought much larger crowds as the activities moved to Mackinaw City. The *Petoskey Evening News-Review* estimated at least 15,000 people were on hand for the festivities on the south side of the straits.

In all the fuss, it was easy to overlook the note in the *Ferry Tales* column that week: "For sale, one ax, no questions asked. Never been used (yet.) This is a hot item, and I'd like to unload it real fast!" Christensen also reported there was a fast trip across the Straits by the *City of Petoskey*, which, it turned out, was racing the stork.

"I was told Chief Engineer Salty Williams entered the engine room just as the stork seemed to be winning, as we were turning the can. He sat down next to his firemen and began to limber up his old cat-o-nine tails. Has a wonderful effect, says Salty."

"Later on, during the race, I climbed up on the bridge to see

how this business was affecting the master, Capt. Pat Gallagher. What's the odds?, I asked the skipper as he reached over the handrail to wring out his handkerchief. Don't really know, he says. Doc Hamel is in my quarters now with the patient and he just ain't talking. The rest is up to the good Lord and Chief Williams."

"With stooped shoulders and wiping his brow, the good skipper resumed pacing the deck. Finally he stopped and turned to me and says: Chris, after 31 years of sailing, why does this have to happen to ME?"

The stork lost the race to the *Petoskey*. Though details weren't

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**Weekly Events**

**Rapids Lounge Entertainment  
Sault Ste. Marie**

**Thursday Comedy Shows  
start at 8 p.m.**

Dec. 13 - Dan Ellison & Todd Link  
Dec. 20 - Jef Brannan & Ian Gutoskie

**Live Music starts at 9 p.m.  
Friday & Saturday**

Dec. 14 & 15 - Touch of Class  
Dec. 21-22 - Bearwalker

**Northern Pines Entertainment  
St. Ignace**

**Wednesday Comedy Shows  
start at 9 p.m.**

Dec. 12 - Dan Ellison & Todd Link  
Dec. 19 - Jef Brannan & Ian Gutoskie

**Live Music starts at 9 p.m.  
Friday & Saturday**

Dec. 18 - Kickin' Country with Ray Wheeler  
Dec. 14 & 15 - Uncle Ugly  
Dec. 21 & 22 - Bottoms Up

**Manistique Comedy Night  
Every Friday Night**

Dec. 14 - Dan Ellison & Todd Link  
Dec. 21 - Jef Brannan & Ian Gutoskie

**Live Band Friday & Saturday  
Last Weekend in December**