

Maritime Festival – Historical Highlights

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C1988 – White Lake Maritime Festival Logo

The White Lake Maritime Festival was a celebration of water fun and summer sun. The popular festival began in August 1981 with the dedication of the White Lake Municipal Marina at Goodrich Park and became the premier “party” for the White Lake area for the next 30 years.

On Friday afternoon, August 21, a Young People’s Fishing Contest was held for ages three to five; six to eight; and nine to twelve year olds. Art Mikkelson was Event Chairman. Prizes were awarded for the largest fish caught in each of the three age groups. There was also a Children’s “Big Wheel” Bike race, sponsored by the American Legion with prizes awarded. The Whitehall Fireman had a Beer Tent and sing-a-long with Harry Barrett and Joyce Bourdon. And there was dancing to Shannon Popps and “The Reason Why”.

Following the 2:30 p.m. marina dedication on August 22, the North Farmington Marching Band held a concert. A fish boil began at 5:30 p.m. and a Venetian parade featuring

decorated local boats got underway at 7 p.m. The day's events ended with the Neptune Ball, featuring live music provided by Jim Todd and "The Star Liters - II" in the marina parking lot. An all-day beer and sandwich tent was sponsored by the Whitehall Fire Department.

The third annual Maritime Festival was held Thursday-Saturday, August 18-20, 1983. The celebration featured a water ski show, boat parade, beer tent, teen dance, kids' games, fish boil, hot-air balloon ascension, corn-on-the-cob and a charity auction.

The Whitehall Fire Department sponsored the event. Proceeds from the beer tent and other activities were used to purchase a new four-wheel drive vehicle for the fire department.

Whitehall Cheerleaders hosted a "hot butter corn-on-the-cob" and watermelon-slice concession to raise money to help cover travel expenses to competitions, uniforms, pom-poms and accessories for all the cheerleading squads.

There was a children's fishing contest in the afternoon. From 6:30-8 p.m., the WZZM TV-13 Weather Balloon was on site with lift-off scheduled for 8 p.m. (weather permitting).

At 7 p.m. a water thrill show was put on by the West Michigan Water Ski Association. Dance music was provided from 9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m. by "The Reasons Why".

On Saturday, there were Bingo games, dunk tank and children's games. The fish boil took place from 5-8 p.m. and the Venetian Parade was at 7 p.m. Dancing finished out the days' events.

Venetian Parade organizer Ed Dombrowski expected 75 to 100 decorated boats to participate in the parade. The parade started at the south end of the lake between the Yacht Club and the Channel. First, second and third place prizes were awarded to boats based on their decoration.

The 1984 Festival was held August 23-25 and was jointly sponsored by the Montague & Whitehall fire departments. Proceeds from the previous two Festivals resulted in the purchase of a new four-wheel drive vehicle for the Whitehall fire department. They were able to purchase a 1984 Chevrolet Suburban from Don Rypma Chevrolet for \$14,500. The new vehicle replaced a 1960 Civil Defense rescue vehicle.

In 1985 the festival was held on August 22-24. It was organized with the joint efforts of both the Montague & Whitehall Fire Departments as well as the Montague-Whitehall Rotary Club, the White Lake Elks and the Whitehall Montague Lions' Club.

This year's celebration was bigger than ever with more family events offered. New activities included a Lip Sync contest, free pony rides for children, a sailboard race and a firemen's water battle, combined with other popular events from years past.

The 2-hour water thrill show performed by the West Michigan Water Ski Association proved to be popular with a display of daring acrobatics and beauty.

The teen dance featured the local group "View Point". The beer tent music was provided by a local bluegrass group "Sugar Cured" at 4 p.m. on Friday night and by "The Reason Why" from 8:30 p.m. to midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Water races near the marina were held on Saturday afternoon which included an inner tube race and a sailboard race.

The fifth annual Maritime Festival was held on August 21-24, 1986. In addition to a lot of the regular events, the first annual Maritime Festival Softball Tournament was introduced and was held at Montague Township Park. Originally scheduled to run three days, it was expanded to four days. Players from the east side of the state as well as local and nearby towns were among the 20 teams competing.

A Powder Puff Dinghy Race was also held. Entrants rowed a 4-mile course on White Lake from the channel and back. There were also jet ski races and inner tube races.

On Sunday there was a White Lake area community church service.

White Lake's annual fun-in-the-water event became a four-day event in 1987. It began on August 20 and ran through August 23. Norm Sargent was in charge of coordinating the event and was supported by members of the White Lake Elks, Rotary and Lions Clubs. A few new events were added including the Miss White Lake Pageant, scenic cruises of White Lake, canoe and sailboard races and a children's puppet show.

Six contestants competed in the Miss White Lake Pageant held in the Maritime Festival tent at Goodrich Park. Anh Kim Duong, a Vietnamese native who was residing in Whitehall, was crowned Miss White Lake. First runner-up was Tana Lee Glaser of Whitehall. Second runner-up was Karrie Anne Walters of Montague. The remaining three contestants were Tave Layne Glaser and Tamara Rebecca Szegda, both of Whitehall, and Patricia Ann Troost of Montague.

A Maritime Wedding took place, a first for the Festival. Montague residents Mike Hardenburgh and Mary Deruiter met at the Maritime Festival in 1986. The following year they were married on the White Lake shoreline on August 22, 1987, near the Maritime Festival food and beverage tent. Several people stopped their activities to witness the

marriage. A round of applause followed the brief ceremony. (Note: It is believed that they have both since passed on.)

It was estimated that 30,000 people were in attendance at the 1987 festival.

A number of new attractions were offered along with the return of popular tried-and-true events at the 1988 Maritime Festival which was scheduled for Thursday, August 18-Sunday, August 21.

The Miss White Lake Pageant returned, and children's games and activities included a puppet theatre production and free pony rides. Other returning activities included a fishing contest, photo contest, free water thrill show and a softball tournament.

Angela Mary Hyatt of Whitehall was crowned Miss White Lake 1988. She was one of seven contestants vying for the title. Melinda Sue Lam of Montague was first runner-up and Kristin Lee Schlarp also of Montague was second runner up. Rounding out the competition were Stacee Crebassa of Whitehall, Angelique Danyle Kowal of Montague; Charmen Lynn Larson of Montague; and Lori Anne Skinner of Whitehall.

This year's Maritime Festival was sponsored by the White Lake Area Elks, Lions and Rotary Clubs in cooperation with the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, White Lake Civic Council, Arts Council of White Lake, White Lake Community Education, White Lake Lanes, Graphic Arts and Printing, WPBK-AM, White Lake Area Sportfishing Association, Lake Land Outfitters, White Lake Beacon and other organizations and businesses.

The 1989 celebration kicked off on Wednesday night, August 23 with a teen dance from 7-11 p.m. Additional entertainment for the festival included a country music show, comedy ventriloquism team and a well-known jazz band.

On Thursday night, August 24, a Pig roast and fireworks were held. Alex Houston & Elmer comedy team performed two shows. The first show at 6 p.m. was geared for children while the second show at 7 p.m. was for persons 21 and over. The Shrimp Boil was on Friday, August 25. Marcus Belgrave and J.C. Herd Band entertained on Friday night from 8 p.m. to midnight. The ever-popular Fish boil was held on Saturday, August 26.

The Softball tournament at Montague Township Park was held Thursday through Saturday.

At half hour intervals trolley rides were available from the Misco Plant 3 parking lot. For just the cost of a dime, the trolley took riders along a scenic route with several stops along the way in Whitehall and Montague.

There were Children's games in the park and a Children's Dog Contest. An Arm-Wrestling Contest was also held.

Carmen Hatch was hired by the three sponsoring organizations to bring in new events and pump life back into the festival.

Maritime '90, set for August 22-26, promised plenty of fun activities, some old and some new. The softball tournament continued, canoe races were held at the Galleon near the channel and a Biathlon had a course in Montague.

The festival kicked off on Wednesday, Aug 22, with a "Wild Video Dance Party". Combine a 5,000 watt concert surround sound system, a 200 sq. ft. video screen, dazzling lights and special effects along with the favorite music videos and what occurred was like a live MTV. A live V.J. and Sunny 104.5 FM DJ were on hand.

The West Michigan Water Ski Association once again performed. An Arts and Crafts show was held on Friday and Saturday.

Popular Lansing area rock and roll band the "Sea Cruisers" played music from the 1950-1980 on Friday and Saturday night.

Saturday was the Second Annual Children's Dog Contest. The traveling zoo from John Ball Park allowed children to see and touch a mammal and reptile and zoo personnel talked about the animals.

A sub-eating contest was sponsored by Subway between 4-person teams from Montague and Whitehall.

During Maritime'90 a 16-team men's Double Elimination Softball Tournament was held at Montague Township Park.

A Teen Dance Party for 19-year-olds and under was held on Wednesday, August 21, from 7 p.m.-11 p.m. to get the 1991 Maritime Festival started.

Lumberjacks from the Great Lakes Timber Show provided three 45-minute shows on Thursday and Friday. The show featured log rolling, axe throwing, tree climbing and sawing. An old-fashioned crosscut saw raced against a modern chainsaw. Chainsaw carving was also part of the show.

"Dr. Zap" Energy Show from Impressions 5 Science Museum was featured on Saturday, August 24 as well as the Water Ski Show. The 3rd Annual Biathlon was held at Montague Township Park on Sunday, August 25.

August 19-22, were the dates for the 1992 Maritime Festival. Festival goers enjoyed the familiar activities, including the water ski show, music in the beverage tent, a teen dance, trout pond, fish boil, trolley rides, arts and crafts, Children's dog contest, sailing charters, shrimp boil and softball tournament.

New this year was Karaoke on Thursday from 7 to 11 p.m. The first Maritime Doubles Shuffle-board tournament was held on Thursday and Friday. Young and old alike had a fun time at the musical shows by singer/ventriloquist Marc Thomas and Max the Moose. There was also a sailing regatta as well.

Keeping the favorite events, adding new ones and bringing back some of the old ones were on the minds of the 1993 Maritime Festival sponsors. The event opened on Wednesday, August 18, with a Teen Talent Show and dance.

After an absence of several years, the Venetian Parade returned.

The 2nd annual White Lake Maritime Shuffleboard Tournament on Thursday and Friday, August 19 & 20, was held at Montague Township Park. There was the Shrimp Boil. Karaoke, and an Art and Crafts show. The “Sea Cruisers”, a popular rock and roll band performed. Children’s activities began with the trout pond. The children’s dog contest was held and Marc Thomas and Max the Moose returned.

The Randy Lorenz Memorial Softball Tournament began Friday. The 16-team tournament continued on Saturday.

Friday was a “Cruise Night” for owners of collectable vehicles, many of which were in Saturday’s car show. Saturday also included a sailing regatta and fishing tournament.

There was also clogging, the fish boil and the traditional water ski show.

As no information about either of the Maritime Festivals in 1994 or 1995 could be found, we’ll jump ahead to the 1996 Festival that was held August 15-17.

On Thursday morning around 8 a.m. the 2-day shuffleboard tournament began at the Montague Township Park. The festival officially opened at 5 p.m. on Thursday with food, beverages and evening entertainment by the country western band “Tuscon”.

Arts and crafts vendors were on hand Friday and Saturday. A softball tournament began on Friday and continued through Saturday.

The fourth annual Friday night car cruise lined up at 6 p.m. and left the city at 7 p.m. heading to Stoney Lake. On Saturday the car show returned to Covell Park and the public was able to view the cars from 10a.m. to 2 p.m.

The shrimp boil was held on Friday evening and the fish boil on Saturday. Marc Thomas and Max the Moose hosted a children’s sing-a-long.

A sailing regatta took place on Saturday afternoon and a water ski show. A Venetian parade floated across the lake in the evening. Rock and roll music from the 50s and 60s was provided by the “Sea Cruisers” on Friday and Saturday nights.

The 1998 Maritime Festival sailed in August 20-22. The shuffleboard tournament began on Thursday at 9 a.m. at Montague Township Park and concluded there on Saturday. Live music featuring vocals, guitars and hammer dulcimer began at 7:30 p.m.

Friday activities included ventriloquist David Stewart on the stage at 5 p.m. His “squeaky-clean” act included funny songs, comical situation and audience participation.

Live music on Friday and Saturday nights from 8 p.m. to midnight was provided by the “Sea Cruisers”. There was a sailing regatta on White Lake and a water ski show.

Maritime Festival 1999 was a two-day event held Friday & Saturday, August 20 & 21.

The shuffleboard tournament started on Thursday morning at the Montague Township Park as in previous years and continued through Saturday. There was a trout pond, face painting and cat and dog contests for the kids. The fish boil, water ski show and a Venetian parade rounded out the event.

Play games. Dress up a dog. Fill a ravenous appetite, quench a parched palate or sit back, relax and take in some tunes Thursday through Saturday, August 17-19 during Maritime Festival 2000.

Thursday morning started with a Shuffleboard tournament. Live entertainment on Friday and Saturday was provided by the “Sea Cruisers”. Saturday included a softball tournament, Arts and Crafts, Pet Parade, watermelon seed spitting contest and a Belt Sander Race which was sponsored by Hunt’s Hardware.

The West Michigan Waterski Association put on their water ski show with a lot of stunts, costumes and comedy from the group.

New in August 2001 was a community picnic and a 5K run (on Thursday, August 16), a Cub Scout Rain Gutter Regatta and a watermelon seed spitting contest on Saturday, August 18, and a Golf Scramble on Sunday, Aug 19.

Returning for the year was the popular shuffleboard tournament, softball tournament, arts and crafts, sailing regatta, belt sander races, water ski show, shrimp boil and fish boil.

The Friday night Shrimp Boil began at 5 p.m. and lasted until the shrimp were gone. The traditional Fish Boil sponsored by the White Lake Area Sportfishing Association began at 4:00 p.m. Saturday at Goodrich Park pavilion.

During the festival there was plenty of other food to eat. Food booths had bratwurst, hot dogs, strawberry shortcake and sweet corn. Restaurants in Whitehall and Montague, with inside and outside dining, offered summer specials during the festival.

Entry forms for the Saturday sailing regatta were available at the Crosswinds Marina and the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce office. Registration and the skippers meeting was at 10 a.m. at the Crosswinds Restaurant. The race began at 1 p.m. and awards were presented at 5:30 p.m. in the Festival tent.

In the Entertainment Tent had the ever popular "Sea Cruisers" from Lansing, the rock and roll, Beach Boy 60's and 70's band that drew dancers from along the lakeshore.

In 2001 & 2002 the Maritime Festival was co-sponsored by the Whitehall-Montague Lions, the Montague-Whitehall Rotary, White Lake Elks and the Chamber of Commerce. No other information is available for the next several years.

The annual Thunderbolt 5k and cross-country team challenge marked the beginning of Maritime Festival August 14-16, 2008. The Venetian Parade was held in 2008 after several years of absence. Illuminated boats of all sizes from participating marinas followed a parade route on White Lake so people on shore could get a good look at the unique site. A variety of prizes were awarded to the participants.

The August 20-22, 2009 Maritime Festival was highlighted by many water-related events including a trout pond, sailing regatta, water battles, fish boil and Venetian Parade.

A 5K run was a highlight for Thursday, the first day of the festival. Runners gathered at Funnell Field in Whitehall for the 5K run. The race began at 6:30 p.m.

The annual Maritime Family Sailing Regatta featured sailboats racing up and down White Lake. The regatta began at 1 p.m. and sailors raced their boats from the first marker past the narrows to Crosswinds Marina. Registration and a skippers' meeting were scheduled for 10:30 a.m. at Crosswinds Marina. Awards were handed out at 7 p.m. inside the Entertainment tent at Goodrich Park.

Children's games and activities are planned for Saturday. At noon on Saturday, firefighters from local fire departments took part in an oversized water fight. The White Lake Fire Authority also hosted a foam penny scramble and other children's activities as part of the picnic. Local police officers handled the cooking of the hot dogs at the community picnic, which also featured live entertainment. A donation was recommended for the 6 p.m. picnic with the proceeds going to the White Lake Food Pantry.

The annual Fish Boil was held from 4-8 p.m. on Saturday at the band shell in Montague.

The Entertainment/Beverage tent was the site of a variety of music styles during the festival – Tommy Foster and the “Foster Kids” took stage on Friday night performing top 40 rock from 8 p.m. to midnight.

Saturday had two musical acts: Ein Prosit, a 40-piece German oom-pah band played from 4 to 7 p.m. “Hot Logic” returned to the festival that year and played rock music from 8 p.m. to midnight.

The 28th annual White Lake Area Maritime Festival was held Thursday-Saturday, August 12-14, 2010, at Goodrich Park. It began with a community picnic sponsored by the White Lake Beacon and HarborLight Credit Union which started at 6 PM on Thursday. Local police were doing the cooking and entertainment was provided by the Whitehall Sesquicentennial Band. A \$2 donation was recommended, with proceeds going toward the Whitehall Sesquicentennial. A Sesquicentennial birthday cake was served, and fireworks begin at dusk.

The food and beverage tent opened at 4 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m. Saturday, and the food vendors served until 11 p.m. both days. After 8 p.m., it becomes an adults-only atmosphere. On Saturday evening, the Shrimp Boil was held in the tent.

Tommy Foster and the Chairmen of the Board were the Friday entertainment in the beverage tent. They performed a wide variety of top-40 rock ‘n’ roll tunes from 8 p.m. to midnight.

Saturday was the big day for everything that goes on...For the kids, Saturday brought games, activities, Bubbles the Clown, and his twisted balloon creations and a trout pond.

From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. artists displayed their wares at the “Arts and Crafts by the Lake.”

The fire department water battle was held near the Park at Noon. The annual Maritime Family Sailing Regatta began at 1 p.m.

From 4 to 7 p.m. at the tent, a 30-piece traditional-style German “oom-pah” band, Ein Prosit, performed a variety of German, Austrian and Bavarian folk-style music with alphorns.

The Venetian Boat Parade started at 9:30 p.m., with illuminated boats of all sizes from participating marinas lined up to parade past bystanders on shore. A variety of prizes were given to those participating.

Saturday night’s musical entertainment was the local classic rock band Onager, which played from 8 p.m. to midnight in the beverage tent.

In a March 26, 2013, MLive article, the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce announced that it would discontinue the White Lake Maritime Festival that year, citing declining attendance and rising costs.

The event which began in 1982 as a way to celebrate the anniversary of Whitehall Municipal Marina and to promote the WL area, eventually grew to be the highlight summer event in northern Muskegon County before its decline began.

Despite its past popularity the festival failed to rekindle the public's interest. It just ran its course and had a lack of interest. That year the Chamber incorporated a number of elements of the Maritime Festival into other events and replaced the festival with a wine and jazz event in August.

The Magic of Maritime Returns - In July 2025, the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce announced the return of the Maritime Festival which is scheduled for August 6-8, 2026. After a thirteen-year hiatus, we look forward to the magic of maritime returning to the White Lake area. Watch for more details in the coming months.

