

America's River Roots Festival

The America's River Roots Festival was a signature event to kick off the United States 250th celebration. It took place in Cincinnati from October 8th to the 12th and featured nine majestic Riverboats, a multitude of food vendors, bourbon tasting venues, scores of craft beer tents, over 50 live music acts playing on 4 stages on both sides of the river, and a fireworks show to cap it all off. Mixed in with all this excitement was a group of 40 classic boats.

When the news came out early in the summer of 2024 that there was going to be another Tall Stacks type riverboat festival in Cincinnati to kick off the 250th birthday celebration of our country, I was determined to get our classic boats involved. Inclusion in the event turned out to be more difficult to obtain than expected. While the addition of classic boats to the festival seemed like a perfect fit for the event to me, I had a very difficult time getting the request to the proper person for consideration. After over two months of phone calls and emails, I was able to make a strategic connection through a professional relationship my company has with the title sponsor. A couple of quick phone calls later, we were in! The original idea was to stage a parade of boats in front of the downtown riverfront on Saturday during the festival. While the permission and details were being worked out for this, the River Operations Team for the festival contacted me and asked if our group would escort the nine riverboats into town during the opening day parade on Thursday October 9th. A couple of days later another request was levied for our classic boats to escort the Belle of Louisville and The Natchez in the final day closing race. Absolutely! With great enthusiasm I accepted the invitations for both and inquired about the original request for a Saturday parade. That was proving to be a little more problematic as the River Operations Team was having a difficult time finding a window in the schedule where the passage of our boats would not cause problems with the riverboats as they moved in and out of **their** mooring spots along the riverbank while providing cruises for the thousands of people attending the festival. After much discussion we concluded that there was a 30-minute window Saturday afternoon that would work. Perfect! We now had three wonderful events as part of the festival that was expected to draw almost a million people to the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky riverfronts.

It was time to get the word out to the classic boating community that a once in a lifetime opportunity was going to occur in Cincinnati in October! Excitement for the event built quickly. It was not long before the block of 20 rooms that I had set up was full and needed to be expanded. The original reservation for 70 people at the revolving restaurant, Eighteen at the Radisson, needed to be enlarged as well. The enthusiasm for the event was tremendous! By the time the show started we had 40 boats, well over 100 people from 8 different states, and more than 30 rooms at the host hotel. We had a fantastic assortment of boats including several from

Chris Craft, Lyman, Hacker-Craft, and Century. Others joining in were a stunning Riva, a wonderful Greavette, an ultra-cute Dorsett, and a rarely seen Ducraft.

The event lived up to our expectations! The fun started Wednesday evening when the first boats arrived and were launched at our home marina, Manhattan Harbour. Thursday morning all of the remaining boats that needed to be launched were moved quickly into the water with help from the Ohio Valley Chapter team. Not long after the last boat was splashed and all the trailers were parked, it was time for a captain's meeting prior to heading out on the river for the opening day parade. What a great time it was! The weather could not have been better and being out amongst the beautiful paddle wheelers with their calliopes playing was a truly remarkable experience. The riverboats had a hard time maintaining their intended spacings but the group of classic boaters did not miss a beat! Everyone fed in to their assigned spots between the paddle wheelers as they passed by without any issues. As a precaution, our two emergency assistance boats were ready at the back of the pack to rush in to help if any of the classic boats had mechanical issues. Following the parade, our group returned to Manhattan Harbour for a short break before loading back in the boats to go to dinner at the Pirates Cove, a floating restaurant located downstream on the Ohio side at the Four Seasons Marina.

Friday was Poker Run Day. Because we had more boats than could be docked at one time at two of our poker run stops, we split the group into 3 teams of 10-12 boats. The 3 groups of boats were routed in different orders for the assigned stops to allow plenty of docks for people to tie up when they arrived. This provided for great fun on another perfect day as we passed each other out on the river while boating from stop to stop. Each player had to purchase a hand for \$20. One card was given to each participant to start and then a single card was picked up at each of the three stops. The final cards were given out when everyone returned to Manhattan Harbour. The host Ohio Valley Chapter provided food at each of the stops to make sure no one went hungry. Everyone had a great time and the lucky winner walked away with a handsome prize. Friday evening the group stayed at the marina. Everyone was treated to appetizers provided by the Ohio Valley Chapter and a live band on the patio overlooking the beautiful boats.

Saturday was Parade Day. Everyone had a leisurely morning as the parade was scheduled for late in the afternoon. After distributing commemorative show T-shirts, Polos, and hats that had been pre purchased by participants, the boats were back out on the river for the parade. LBOA member Jeff Feudner took the helm of my boat after dropping me off on the Ohio side to allow me to announce the boats and their crews as they passed by the Cincinnati riverfront. It went off without a hitch with only a few of the boats out of order due to a mechanical issue. The spectators were all smiles as they viewed the beautiful boats. After quickly returning to the marina to secure the boats for the evening and pull a few out of the water that needed to get headed home in the morning, it was time for dinner at Eighteen at the Radisson. This

wonderful restaurant located at the top of the Radisson Hotel has a tremendous 360-degree view of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The restaurant staff did an amazing job making sure the 100 plus diners were quickly served their preselected meals of either salmon, chicken marsala or New York Strip steak. After the delicious meal the group moved to the hospitality suite one floor down to do a little celebrating. The room has a stunning view of Cincinnati and the riverfront. It was a wonderful evening spending time together while watching the majestic paddle wheelers cruise up and down the river. A great time was had by all! Maybe a little too great for a few!

Sunday was a leisurely day with no event participation until late in the afternoon. This was probably a good thing given the hectic pace of the previous three days and the late night many of the group had the evening before. After one more captain's meeting to divide the boats into two groups, we were back out on the river for the Final Day Closing Race between the Belle of Louisville and the Natchez. Our lead pack of classic boats headed upriver in front of the two paddle wheelers at the sound of the starting cannon. The second group trailed behind. At a pre designated spot upstream, the front group turned and followed the riverboats, which at that point had also turned around, for the second leg of the race back downriver. The second group, that had trailed the racers on the first leg, now led them back downstream passing in front of downtown Cincinnati as the cannon went off a second time declaring the Natchez the winner. Great fun! The festival was finished off with a spectacular fireworks display Sunday evening. It was a fitting way to close out the wonderful weekend.

The event was a huge success. Except for the fact that all of us were pretty worn out from four days filled with boating fun, no one wanted the festivities to end. These four remarkable days of fun would not have been possible without the tremendous help of the Ohio Valley Chapter team. This is especially true of Dennis Ryan who joined me at all the river operations meetings, listened patiently to every one of my ideas related to the event, and then helped make sure everything went off without a hitch. Thank you to all who participated. It is certainly a classic boating experience none of us will ever forget.

There are quite a few videos online to see the event. Some of the best can be found by searching America's River Roots Parade of Riverboats 10-9-25.