

# Lovers, love-lorn discover romance in the moonlight

By M.B. Dillon  
staff writer

The folks at Boblo no longer hire a man to make sure couples maintain a respectable distance apart while dancing. And the 5-cent-per-dance fee has been dropped.

On summer evenings, young people no longer flock to Boblo's dance pavilion, reputed in 1915 to be the largest in the world.

But lovers and the love-lorn still board the 86-year-old Boblo boats on warm weekend nights, looking for fun and romance in old-style steamers listed by the U.S. National Registry as the largest and oldest passenger carrying vessels in North America.

Talk to entertainers who frequent Boblo, the ships' captains or crew, and they'll tell you people take to Boblo's moonlight cruises like carp to the Detroit River.

"It's unreal. If you've never been on one, you've got to go to believe it," said Steve King of Steve King & the Dillies, an oldies band that sells out whenever it plays Boblo. "The atmosphere is great. Being on the

boat, being on the water at night... it's really nice."

"The one level where the band is, the whole area is for dancing," added King, whose six-piece band packs the floor with its renditions of "Do You Love Me," "Mony Mony," "Shout," and Motown favorites. "For some reason people go crazy on the boat. They party hardy. They really have a good time."

"THE MAJORITY of the people that ride have never really seen the city or the riverfront," said Ken Horner, captain of the four-deck, 549-ton Columbiad. "A lot of people just sit on the upper deck and watch the scenery. There's a breeze on these hot summer nights. It's always cool down here."

Every day and every trip, the weather and scenery are different, he said, adding that "this summer, we've seen salt water vessels, iron ore carriers and ships from China, Manrovia, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Panama."

The drinking age on the boat is 21, but there's no age limit on the cruise,

said Shirley Cooper, Boblo receptionist.

"A lot of couples go on the boat, but so do singles looking for a good time," Cooper said. "Sometimes they end up meeting a single girl or single guy."

Nancy Yarost, Boblo's public relations manager, said the moonlight cruise "is very popular."

"Last year 33,000 people went on the moonlight cruises," she said. "You'll see anyone from 14 to 90 years old on board."

Wondering what to wear?

"Just about anything goes, but we suggest casual clothes," said Yarost. "But we're as likely to see women in a mini skirt and crop top as someone wearing a sequin dress."

Guys' apparel can range from natty to nautical. At Boblo, a "flat belly" decked out in tennis shoes, jeans with holes in the knees, a flight jacket and a skipper's hat blends right in with the 45-year-old sporting a coat, tie, pressed shirt, plaid pants and white shoes.

PASSENGERS aren't allowed to bring glass containers or alcohol aboard. But if you pack a picnic, you're free to enjoy it at the tables and chairs Boblo supplies.

Wine coolers, beer, hot dogs, potato chips, popcorn and ice cream are sold on the boat.

After you've crossed the gangplank, gaze across the river's blue-green swells and hear the S.S. Columbiad's steam whistle blow, drowning out sound for miles around.

You can almost picture the Canadian and American rebels who invaded Boblo Island in 1838 in quest of a representative government in



There's not much time left to sail the Detroit River on Boblo's moonlight cruises.

British Canada, and the Huron Indians who once occupied Boblo Island (or Ellouitendannant) as they called it).

Those long-gone compatriots prob-

ably wouldn't have believed that years later, dancing, romancing Detroiters would while away summer nights to the strains of reggae, rhythm and blues, soul and

rock/roll while floating down the river on a boat as long as a battlefield. But they do. Every weekend, all summer long.

## Now boarding . . .

It's not too late to enjoy a summer Boblo cruise. Here's what's in store for the rest of the season:

Friday, Aug. 26: Flashback (plays

oldies and popular tunes).

Saturday, Aug. 27: Teen Angels (oldies, Top 40).

Friday, Sept. 2: Sun Messengers (rhythm and blues, Latin, rock).

Saturday, Sept. 3: RH Factor (oldies).

Sunday, Sept. 4: Steve King and the Dillies (oldies) closes out this summer's Boblo cruises.

Priced at \$40.95 per person, the moonlight cruise leaves the Boblo dock at 11 p.m. sharp on Fridays and Saturdays, returning at 1 a.m.

To get there, take the Lodge Freeway to I-75 to the Clark Street exit. Clark is the first street past the bridge to Canada exit. Go south (left) on Clark Street two blocks to the river.

Passengers are advised to arrive by 10 p.m.

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Should you decide to stay over for sightseeing, check into the Princeton Motel, out on Douglass just beyond the Expressway. You'll enjoy its spacious rooms, ample parking, pool and color cable TV.

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