

The Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade has quite a history, dating back to 1908. The early parades were held on July 4th. There were years when the parade did not occur, for instance during World War I. The event went by different names, including the Illuminated Water Parade and the Tournament of Lights, and is now called the Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade. One thing has remained constant throughout the years--a magical time is had by all!

[Click here to read about the parade's fascinating history.](#)

The Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade dates back to 1908. A year earlier, John Scarpa, an Italian gondolier, brought visitors from Pasadena across the bay in a gondola decorated with Japanese lanterns. He met Joseph Beek, developer of the Balboa Ferry Line and the major promoter for the early development of Balboa Island, and the two men started a lighted boat parade they called the "Tournament of Lights." This inaugural event took place on July 4, 1908, led by Scarpa's gondola followed by canoes. In 1913, the "Illuminated Water Parade" took place. Boats were judged and prizes were awarded for the best decorated vessels.

The early parades were held on July 4th. There were years when the parade did not occur, for instance during World War I, during which time Newport Harbor experienced an intense depression. In 1919, Beek began the tradition again with one of his ferryboats, the Fat Ferry. The lighted boat parade was

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Today the Tournament of Lights, now called the Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade, features as many as 100 boats. The parade is proudly hosted by the Commodores Club of the Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce and is hailed as "one of the top ten holiday happenings in the nation" by *The New York Times*. The parade is the premiere event of the holiday season in Southern California.

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Unfortunately this was to be the last parade for the next five years. World War I erupted and a severe depression hit Newport Harbor. It was not until 1919 that Beek, who at the time was operating ferryboats like the Fat Ferry, came to rescue the lighted boat parade.

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With the exception of several years during World War II, the Tournament of Lights was held every summer from 1919 through 1949. However, in 1949 the city fathers believed that the light parade was drawing too many visitors to the harbor and creating heavy crowding and traffic congestion. The Tournament of Lights fell out of favor.

Fortunately, back in 1946, Newport Beach City employees had outfitted a barge during the holiday season and installed a lighted Christmas tree. The barge was towed around the harbor while its passengers sang Christmas carols to residents on shore.

In later years, the Beek family came to the front again and provided one of their ferryboats for the floating Christmas tree celebration. Gradually, each year, other lighted boats fell in line behind the city employees' floating tree. Soon the Tournament of Lights came back as a Christmas celebration.

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For more information about the Christmas Boat Parade, please call (949) 729-4400.

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