

The Boat Parade

John Scarpa, an Italian gondolier, and Joseph Beek, developer of Beacon Bay, the Balboa Ferry Line and the principal force in the early development of Balboa Island, established the Tournament of Lights.

In 1907, Scarpa began the tradition by taking a group of visitors from Pasadena across the bay in a gondola decorated with Japanese lanterns. In 1908, the first lighted boat parade took place, led by Scarpa's gondola followed by eight canoes.



In 1913, Walter Gustin promoted the event featuring lighted boats, the "Illuminated Water Parade," and prizes were given for the best decorated and best lighted vessels. Unfortunately, this was to be the last parade for the next five years as World War I erupted and The Great Depression hit.

In 1919, Beek rekindled the lighted boat parade. This resulted in the establishment of the "Balboa Tournament of Lights" in 1921. With the exception of a few years during World War II, the Tournament of Lights was held every summer from 1919 through 1949.

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. Today the Tournament of Lights, now called the Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade, features as many as 150 boats.