Earliest Car Ferries to the Lake Erie Islands, by Michael Gora

Before the first Sandusky Bay Bridge was completed in 1929, the fastest way to get from Cleveland or Sandusky to Put-in-Bay or Middle Bass was either via a ferry from Sandusky to Put-in-Bay or via two ferries. You would first take the Maley ferry from Sandusky to Cooke’s Dock near the southeast tip of Marblehead. You would then go to the north tip of Catawba Island where the Miller Ferry leaves from today, and take a ferry from there. But if you were coming from Toledo or Detroit you wouldn’t have the problem of crossing Sandusky Bay and could simply drive to the Catawba ferry dock as today.

If you wanted to take a car to Put-in-Bay or Middle Bass Island, the Neuman ferry Messenger from Sandusky towed a barge starting in 1921. Autos were loaded onto the barges and they were towed behind or beside the passenger ferries. Photos of the different ferries are below. The first picture is of the Neuman Boat Line ferry Messenger with an auto barge alongside. The first Neuman ferry that carried autos inside was the Mascot, but we are not certain when that ferry went into service.

The ferry Messenger was a small passenger and freight ferry used by the Neuman Boat Line to service the island route from Sandusky and Marblehead. Built in 1921 at Sandusky she had a length of 53' 5", beam 15' 8" and a depth of 3'. She serviced the area from 1921 – 1947.

The ferry Geo. W. Maley from the Maley Transportation Line ran a short route from Sandusky to Marblehead. Several photos are below, as well as schedules from 1919 and 1927. The Maley ferry never played a direct role in transportation to the Lake Erie Islands, but nevertheless played a very important role in local travel in the area.

Figure 1: The ferry Messenger arriving at Put-in-Bay in 1925

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As the brochures below indicate, the short ferry ride saved 62 miles of driving if you were traveling from Sandusky to Lakeside, and saved 25 miles driving from Sandusky to Toledo.

Figure 2: Autos towed on a barge by the ferry Geo. W. Maley, with Sandusky in the Background

Figure 3: The Geo. W. Maley and auto barge on the cover of the 1919 schedule
Figure 4: The 1919 Schedule for the Maley Ferry
Figure 5: The Cover of the 1929 Maley Ferry Schedule

Figure 6: The Interior of the 1929 Maley Ferry Schedule