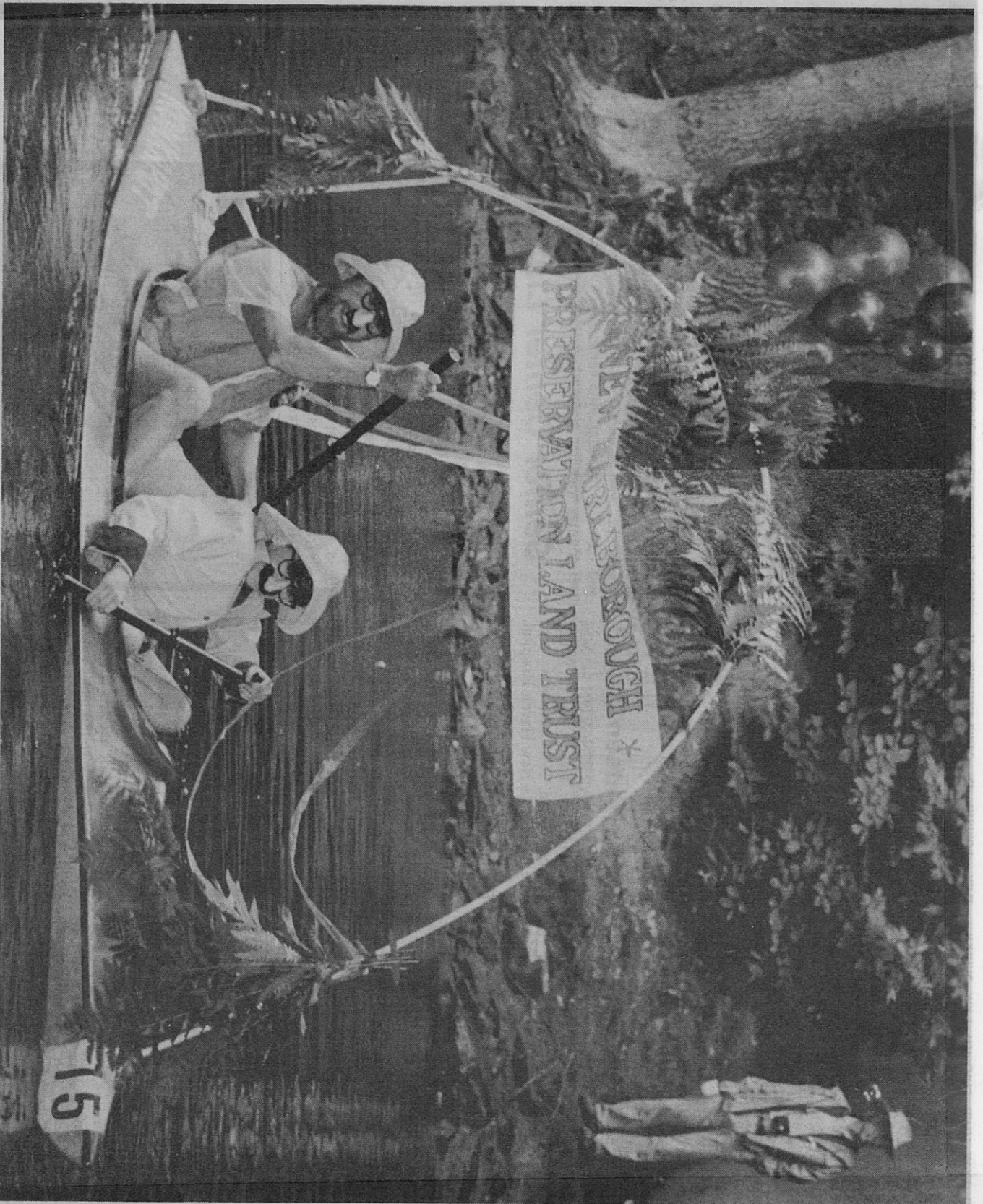


The Berkshire Courier.

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Great Barrington, Massachusetts — 35 Cents



New Marlborough Preservation Land Trust's craft sailed down the Housatonic River last Saturday. The false noses might have been protection against the rain that failed to dampen boaters' spirits in the first Housatilla Float. For more on the event, see pages 9 and 10 of this Courier.

Alfred R. Lenardson Photo

Housatilla Was Drenched With Rain, Enthusiasm

By BERNARD DREW
Staff Reporter

GREAT BARRINGTON — There was a steady drizzle. Five boats didn't enter the water. Most of the musical entertainment was scratched.

But Saturday's Housatilla Float went off as scheduled. And it was an invigorating time for well over 100 participants and volunteers and perhaps twice as many viewers along the banks of the Housatonic River.

Forty-five floats in the river celebration ranged in theme from Viking women to hunters in a floating duck blind, a Keystone Kop to Do-Si-Do-ers from Gould Farm. A trio of visiting Stockbridge Munsee Indians led the formation, which paddled, pushed, wedged and prayed its way from Bridge Street to Eisner Camp Institute for a warm fire, awards ceremony and assorted home-cooked munchies.

Onlookers viewed proceedings from near Searles Middle School and from the Barrington Fairgrounds.

If the river's condition wasn't apparent to participants ahead of time, the Housatonic's low water — revealing myriad old tires, grocery carts, concrete blocks and even a car battery, half buried in sand just below the reviewing stand — quickly emphasized the need for major cleanup.

This week's Berkshire Courier on Pages 9 and 10 provides a list of contributors and volunteers; float prize winners; a thank you and review by parade organizer Rachel Fletcher; and a selection of photos from the first and — we trust — far from last river celebration.

Reporter Bernard Drew was also a participant in the Housatilla.

'Protect River,' Indians Say

By BERNARD DREW
Staff Reporter

GREAT BARRINGTON — Sheila Moede had vowed she wouldn't make another trip to Western Massachusetts.

"I was in Stockbridge in 1987. But I felt I wouldn't come again. I was doing the same thing over and over," she said. Mrs. Moede is historian with the Stockbridge Museum Historical Library Museum of the Mohican Nation in Bowler, Wis.

But when friends Arlee and Jim Davids invited her to make a cross-country trek to attend the Housatonic River Float Aug. 3, she decided to drift with the wind.

"I met some really great people," she said. "I'm glad I came."

Monument Mountain and the lowlands just north and south were traditional home to the Mohicans. (Mrs. Moede said that when she writes a history of the tribe, she intends to spell the name Mahikan.) In 1609, members of the tribe met explorer Henry Hudson at Schodack, near Albany, N.Y. The native Americans tolerated the "Europeans" for a time. But a mission established at Stockbridge in 1734 was

homeland. And now they've found great Berkshire interest in the tribe, and many new friends. Mrs. Moede is looking to add to the museum's archives, and hopes to spend a couple of months next year doing research in Stockbridge and in Albany.

"We've been coming for several years and were told people never find artifacts," Mrs. Moede scoffed. The archaeological dig now in its second year in Great Barrington belies that. The dig, in fact, under the guidance of David Parrott of Monterey, so intrigued the visitors that they spend several hours themselves carefully sifting the soil. Mrs. Davids found remains of a hut post mold. (The site has been carbon dated as being at least 2,000 years old.) "I've never seen anything like it," said Mr. Davids, obviously impressed.

The Stockbridge Munsee have many questions. Where was Chief Konkapot's cabin in Stockbridge, for instance? Common lore has it located near the Housatonic River not far from the bridge which goes to Ice Glen.

Are there really bones beneath the Stockbridge Indian grave marker? Mr. Davids said he didn't get a strong feeling, when he visited the site. Mrs. Davids wondered if the stones weren't piled there when

the golf course was constructed. "We ask a lot of questions, when we come around," summarized Mrs. Moede. This past trip, the visitors answered more questions than they asked. Whisked from visits to the archaeological dig to touring Konkapot Brook with David McAllister of Monterey to leading the Saturday afternoon river celebration, they barely managed to break away for a quiet climb of Monument Mountain.

The Stockbridge Munsee said that the growing interest on the part of people here -- from Polly Pierce of the Stockbridge Library to Emilie Piper of the Berkshire Archaeology Group to Mr. Parrott and others of the Mahingan Institute, which is overseeing the village site excavations -- along with the long-sought return last winter of the Stockbridge Bible to the tribal museum has gone a long way toward soothing old aches.

Still, Mrs. Moede and Mr. Davids didn't hesitate to speak their minds on the Housatonic River's condition, following last weekend's flotilla. Mr. Davids, a game warden, put South Berkshire residents on probation, so to speak. When he comes back, in a year or two, he hopes to see great progress in the river's cleanup.

The native people, the Stockbridge Munsee reminded everyone, lived in harmony with the land.

Joy and Sadness on the Housatonic

For many of the intrepid boaters who braved Saturday's rain to participate in the Housatilla Float, it was a journey of joy, celebrating great progress in cleaning up the river in recent years and focusing public attention on the need to continue the effort to restore one of the area's foremost natural resources.

For the Mahican Indians who led the procession, marking the first time in two centuries that members of the tribe had ventured onto the river in canoes, it was a journey of profound sadness as they threaded their way among rusty shopping carts, auto parts, old tires and other symbols of mankind's disrespect for nature.

Both feelings were appropriate.

Less than a half-century ago, the Housatonic was an open sewer, a repository for the household and industrial waste of every community along its length. At the end of each day, residents within walking distance routinely carried their garbage to the nearest bridge and dropped it into the stream.

The river changed color almost daily, depending on the color of the dyes dumped into it by the paper and textile mills on its banks. From time to time, chemical-poisoned carp and suckers—the only species of fish that could live in the stream at all—floated belly up by the hundreds, stinking in the hot summer sun. The river in those days was truly a regional disgrace.

Against that backdrop, the fact that the Housatonic has been returned to fishable and boatable condition in recent years is indeed a cause for joy.

Today, brown and rainbow trout thrive

and grow to awesome sizes in the swifter sections of the river. In some sections, even the pollution-intolerant brook trout can be found. Smallmouth and largemouth bass swim in its slower, warmer stretches, along with pike, perch and pickerel.

And the river can now be boated and waded without fear of encountering raw sewage or caustic chemicals.

Nevertheless, it still reflects the ravages of more than a century of abuse, a depressing amount of it quite recent. Shopping carts and auto parts litter its banks and bottom, along with broken glass, tin cans and other waste from our throw-away society. This mindless disrespect for the river is what saddens the returning Mahicans—and should sadden us as well.

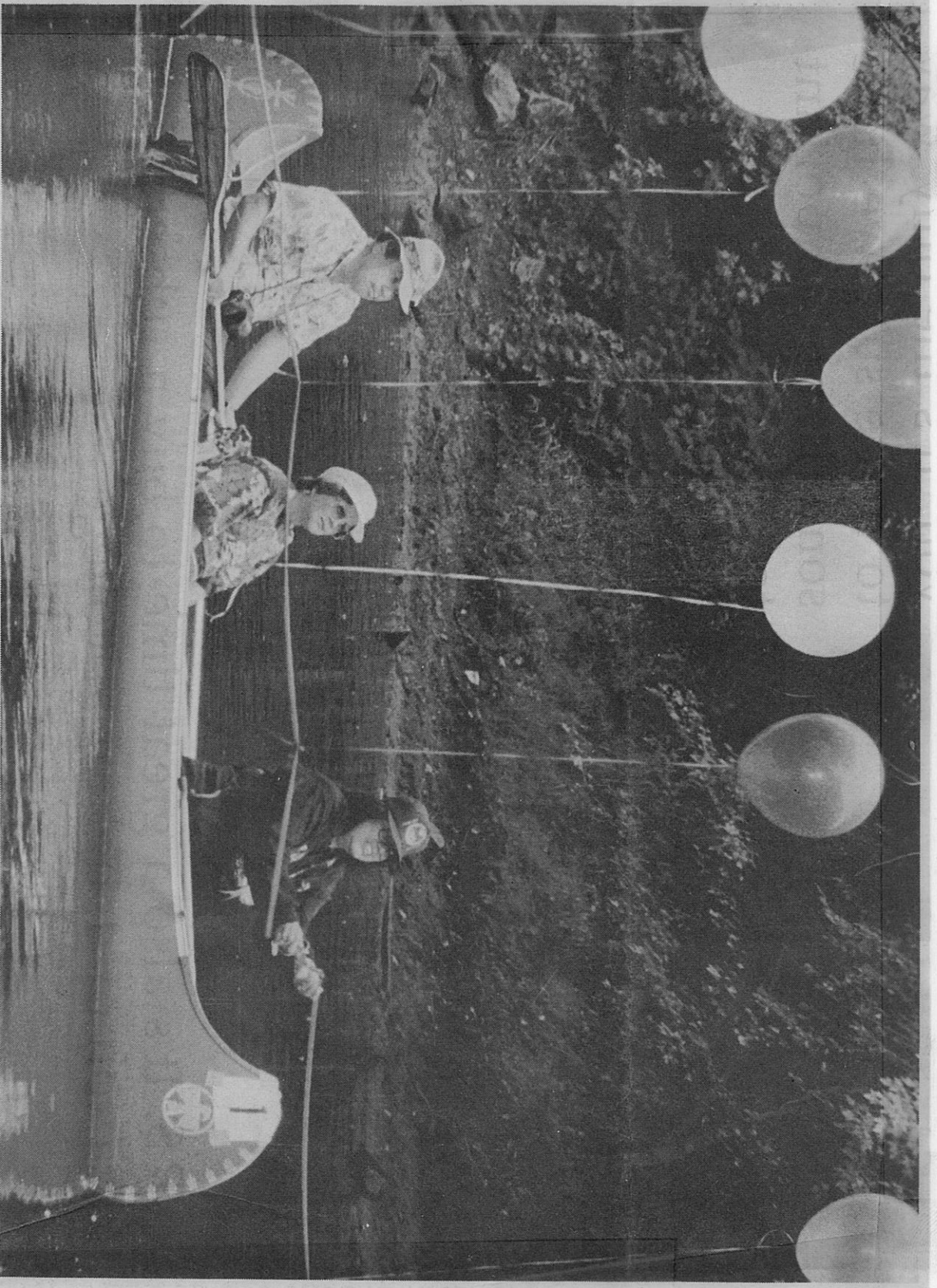
One of the principal reasons for last Saturday's Housatilla Float was to call the public's attention to that disrespect. And many of the same people who organized the Housatilla will be back in the river from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. this Saturday, tackling the mammoth job of ridding the stream of some of the tangible evidence of it.

Don't leave it all to them. They need help. Pull on your boots and spend a couple of hours undoing the damage that has deprived you and your family of the use of a precious natural resource for altogether too long.

To paraphrase a popular environmental message:

We didn't inherit the river from the Mahicans. We're borrowing it from our children and our grandchildren.

Housatilla '91 Sailed Down the River



Arlee Davids of the Stockbridge Munsee Indians, whose ancestors last sailed the Housatonic River 200 years ago, cut the ribbon to begin the boat parade last Saturday. In the

balloon-adorned canoe with her are Jim Davids and Sheila Moede. They came from their Bowler, Wis., home just for this event and led the parade.

Alfred R. Lenardson/Photo

Housatilla '91 Sailed Down the River



An estimated 200 people, protected by umbrellas and raingear, watched the Housatilla float by on the Housatonic

River last Saturday. These viewers were photographed at the Barrington Fairgrounds.

Alfred R. Lenardson Photo

Many Thanks To Many People, Says Housatilla Co-Organizer

To Participants in the Housatilla Float:

How easily we malign and neglect the Housatonic, yet last Saturday's flotilla of nearly 50 amazing and preposterous vessels made the river irresistible.

When we conceived the flotilla as a way of celebrating the river as our common link, we never imagined there would be such an outpour of support from artists, businesses, environmentalists, sportsmen, and families alike. As our Stockbridge Indian friends reminded us, we have a long way to go, but we have also come a fair way. Last Saturday's flotilla helped turn our sense of the river around, reminding us of what it once was in our lives and what it can be once again.

If the weather was poor, spirits were high. If it took a parade to produce a desperately needed rain, no one seemed to mind.

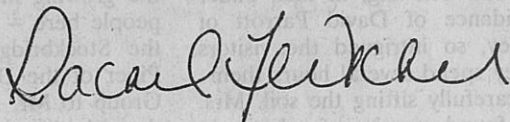
Many thanks to the 80 volunteers and 70 contributors of materials and assistance, making it possible for an all-volunteer, free event.

Thanks to everyone who slugged and sloshed it out in the rain, from ever-optimistic directors of traffic and preparers of food, to those standing in water and in rain at strategic points along the route, making sure every boat got into the water, through the course, then up and over the take-out bank.

To would be spectators who didn't realize we were parading in the rain, our sincere regrets, but by Saturday nothing would stop us. Regrets also to entertainers unable to adapt their program to soggy conditions. To those who could, thanks for being such good sports.

Thanks to the property owners who generously extended the use of their banks. Thanks to a first-rate technical crew working tirelessly to prepare a navigable and viewable course. Thanks to our sponsor, the Great Barrington Land Conservancy, and to the judges, thanks for dignifying our event.

And finally, thanks to the boaters for having the vision to image what a Float could be and the courage and faith to take its maiden voyage.



Rachel Fletcher
The Housatilla Float Committee