

“Finis:” Anchored in Community, 1939-2025

Service to community is a time-honored tradition in the **Village of Fairport**. Next month, on **July 5, 2025**, an abbreviated version of one such event will bring to an end a very storied era in Fairport and **Lake County**. This month’s vignette looks back on the **Mardi Gras**, a proud community celebration! To this day, the special

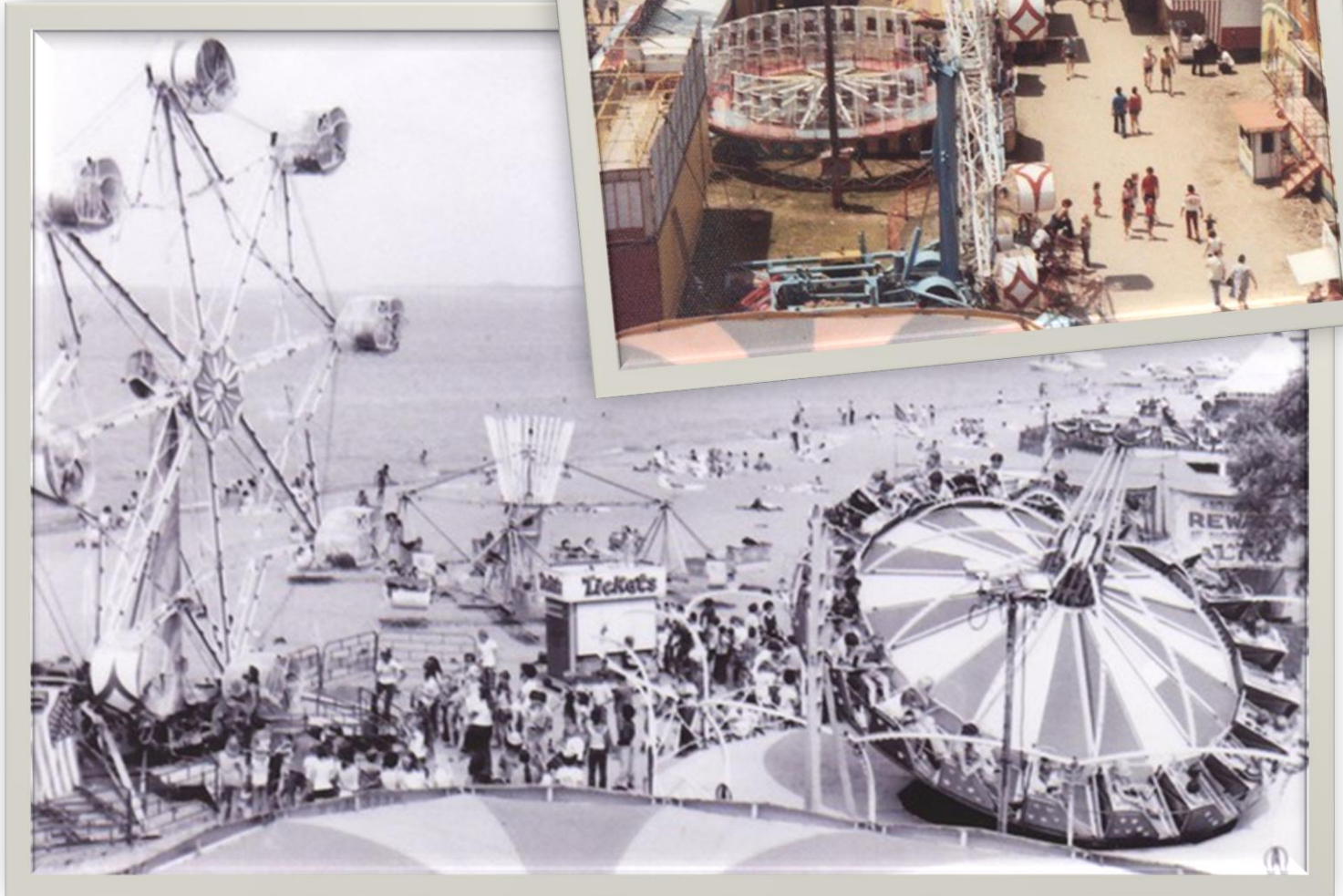
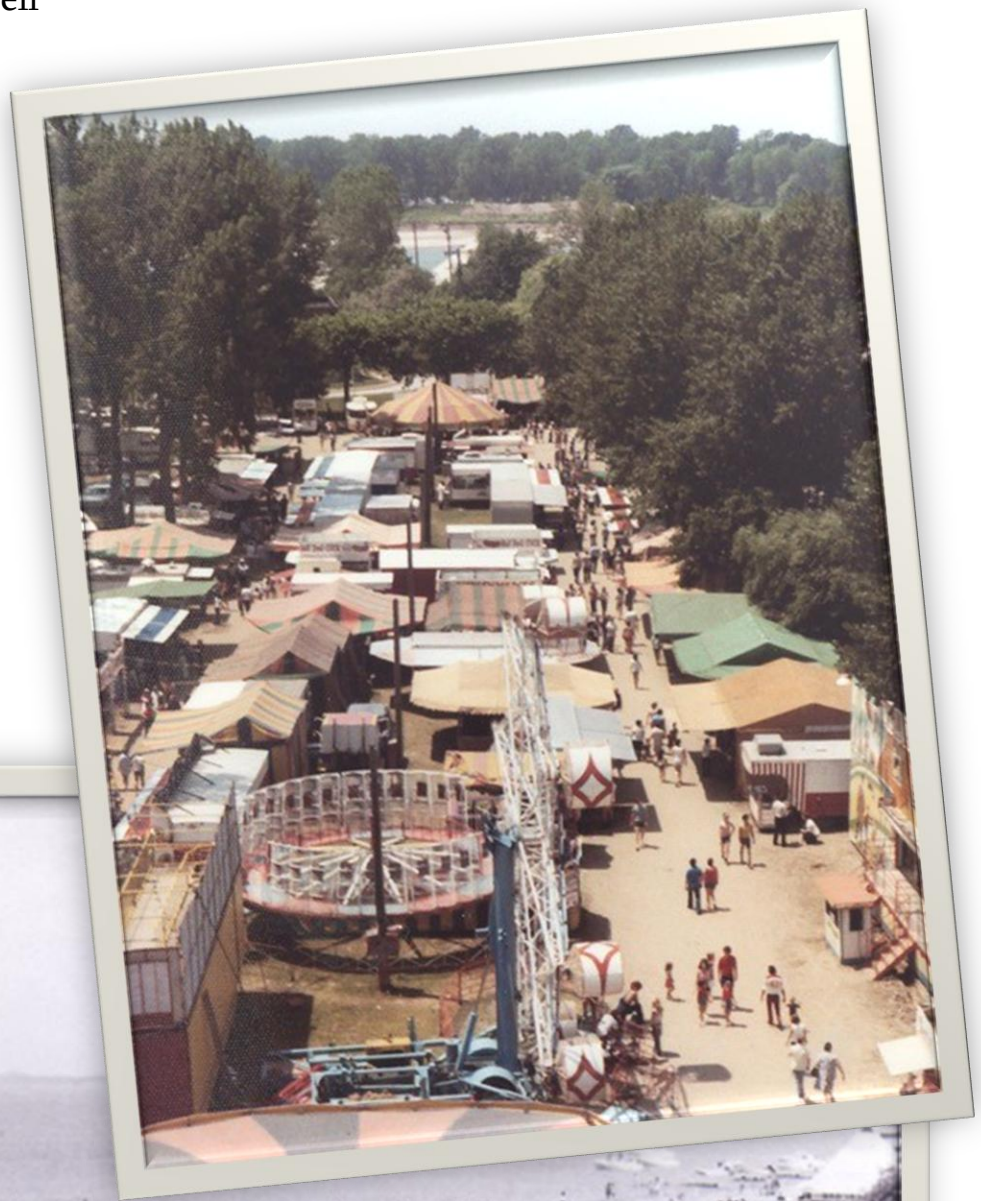


Carol Gray, 1952 Mardi Gras Queen

summer tradition binds generations of county residents. With unique candid and limited text, step back in time, and in person, for one final festival celebration.

The **Fairport Harbor Mardi Gras** has meant more than a few days of gala festivities, parades, queens (since 1950), contests, games, food and amusement rides to its history. It has been a local event that has endured, grown and prospered as it evolved since humble beginnings dating back to 1925. That year, the **Fairport Men’s Civic Club** began a tradition of annual street parties. **Water Carnivals** soon followed, beginning in 1934. **A Public Works Administration** first paving project on Chestnut Street in 1938 led to a **July 4,**

1939 Block Festival. Extremely well received by the community, residents began to campaign for a second event soon thereafter. **Mayor John O. Rendrick** embraced residents' wishes, and in 1941, a **Mardi Gras** tradition stuck. The village was decked out in special decorations and competitions held throughout the day. **U.S. Coast Guard** and nautical



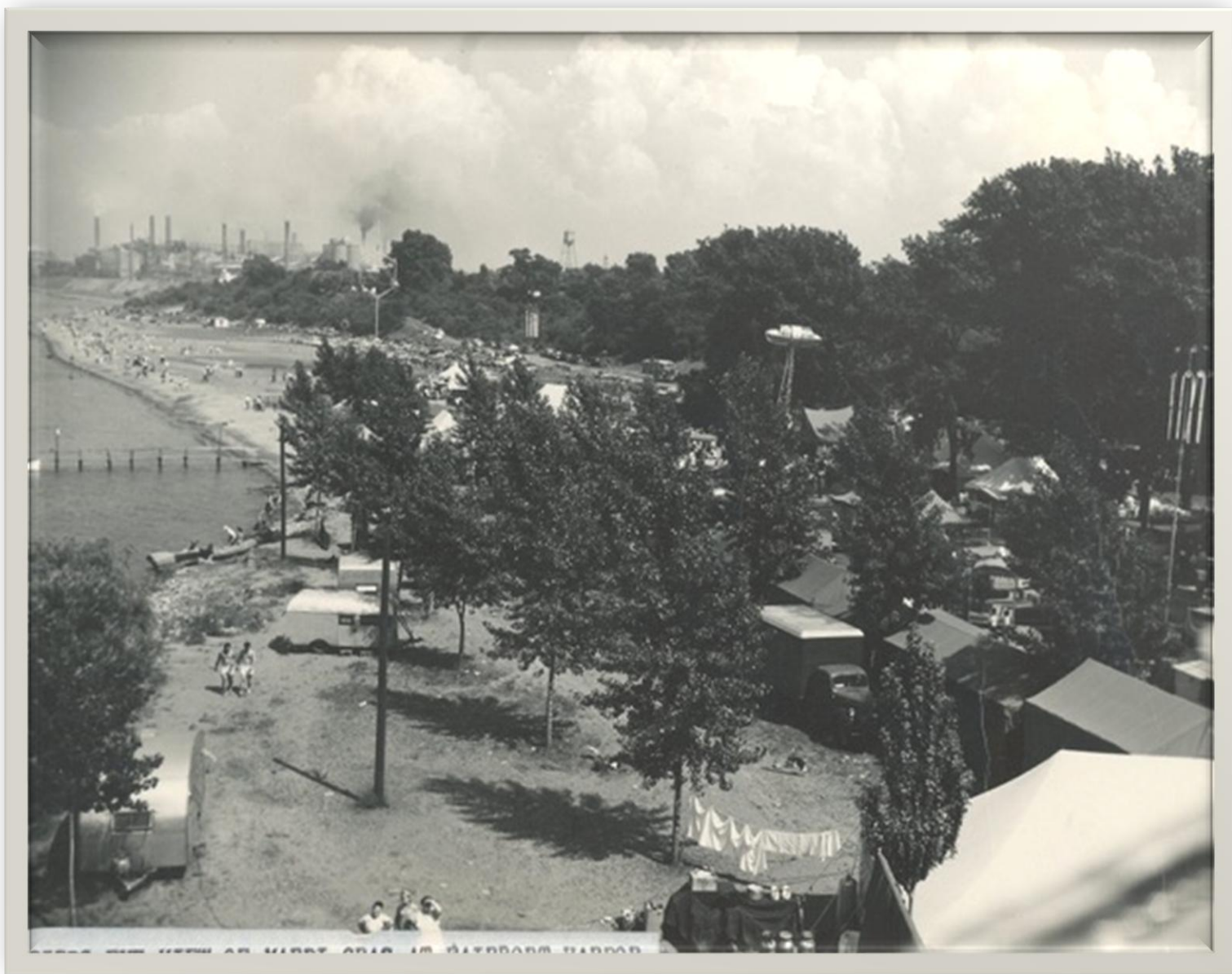
themed activities were featured, and a village parade was held that evening. An estimated 10,000 Lake County residents attended.

What has made the Mardi Gras a one-of-a-kind street fair are the two key elements that continue to this day. First, it has been and remains a strictly local event. A village committee of Fairport residents plan the annual parade theme, event schedule, and day-to-day organization in its entirety. Second is the unique aspect of allocating proceeds to projects and causes beneficial to the village at large.

Estimates suggest that more than \$250,000 of proceeds have been dispersed to various chosen Fairport causes. One year, \$15,000 went to the **Pilot House** at the **Lighthouse Museum**. Donated display cabinets in the museum still are in use to this day. \$2000 has been contributed to 'tuck' the tower (repair of mortar between the bricks).

Another year, \$10,000 was donated for the purchase of a new fire truck. \$1,000 was gifted for the fire department's radios. \$1,000 was given toward their uniform purchases. Additionally, \$6,000 was given for the purchase of a village truck.





\$5,000 went to purchase school band uniforms; and \$2,000 was gifted to school athletic programs. \$17,000 was provided for village erosion control and another \$2,000 for village sidewalk repairs. Even the 1960s state champion **Skippies** experienced the generosity of the Mardi Gras committee members.

Unfortunately, times change and, oftentimes, traditions lose support. Gripes surface, calls for newer and better amusement rides are voiced, and requests for an improved parade or fireworks show pop-up. Sadly, despite event totals often reaching 15,000 visitors and thousands of dollars in charitable donations being distributed annually, the post-covid era made the event unsustainable.



Amusement ride companies both large and small were harder to secure. The local volunteer pool dwindled to about a dozen willing souls. Funding the popular event became an ongoing concern, as well as providing a safe and secure entertainment zone on the beach.

The **86th and FINAL Fairport Harbor Mardi Gras** will be Saturday, July 5, with a parade kicking off at 5pm. Bring your lawn chairs, grab a spot on the parade route streets, and share in the final chapter of this special local history institution. **The 2025 theme calls for children to decorate their bikes to lead the last parade.** A final **Mardi Gras Queen** judging will take place. From 6-10 p.m., visitors are asked to gather at the lighthouse hill to enjoy food truck vendors, live entertainment and the culminating celebration - **The Fireworks Spectacular** at dusk. The beloved tradition deserves to be savored one last time.

Sources: Fairport Harbor Ohio, 1976. News-Herald-Local Lore, June 27, 2011.
FHHS Porthole, February 2025. News-Herald, February 1, 2025. Gazette News, June 20, 2025.

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