

Garfield Beach: get ready, get set, row!

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Topic Our Towns

On the morning of Aug. 28, 1890, about 2,000 people, a few less than expected, traveled to Garfield Beach on the Great Salt Lake to witness the boat races scheduled between the Provo Boat Club and the Garfield Beach Boat Club. The crowd arrived with high expectations.

Unfortunately, some major delays cast doubt upon the success of the regatta. These delays prompted a Salt Lake Tribune reporter to state, "Had the arrangements been more promptly made and the races started on time, the day would have been more lively." This may have been an understatement.

A one hour delay slowed the first race. A young man, who found another sport more interesting than boat races, loaded several girls into the boat selected to serve as the flag station on the race course. He and the bevy of beauties blithely rowed off into the lake. These merry-makers were nowhere in sight when it was time for the first race to begin.

Regatta organizers commandeered the steamboat "Little Harry" and steamed the craft three-quarters of a mile east of the big pavilion to serve as the flag observation station on the mile- and-a-half-long course. People on the steamer's deck watched to make certain that racers turned beyond the flag and did not cut the course short.

Although the race was scheduled for 3:30 that afternoon, it wasn't until 4:30 that the two heavyweight crews rowed up to the starting line. Provo's team consisted of William M. "Billy" Wilson, Joseph E. Daniels, A.L. Towie and Louis M. Smith. The bronzed condition of their arms and their precision rowing told of hard, incessant practice.

William Dinwoodey, Will Glassmann, M.E. McEnany and James Farrell formed the Garfield crew. Although their blue and white uniforms were resplendent, the Garfield boys failed to instill confidence in their friends.

Starter Ballou gave instructions to the teams and was only prevented from climbing to the platform on the flagstaff and firing the starting gun for lack of a ladder. Another small delay.

When the race finally began, both crews got off to a fast start. At first, their oars sent salt spray high in the air, as a visible emblem of their nervousness and, possibly, their lack of coaching. Then the crews settled down to business, and Provo took an early lead. Salt Lake City spectators on the "Little Harry" hung their heads and murmured, "The race is over," even before the boats reached midway in the course.

Provo's water paddlers reached the midpoint stake first and turned it without misfortune. The Garfield crew followed several lengths behind. On the return trip, the Salt Lakers mustered a burst of speed and briefly narrowed the gap.

The steering of both crews proved inaccurate on the way to the finish line. The Tribune claimed the sculls started off for Stansbury Island, and the referee's boat followed in hot pursuit. The newspaper waggishly described the effect this deviant course had on the crowd and race officials: "The spectators are in despair, and the judges at the finish line prepare to faint." The reporter asserted that at one point the Garfield crew stopped for a moment to see how far they were from Corinne, which was located on the north end of the lake.

Both boats crossed the finish line some distance from where they expected to conclude the race. At least, it could be said the boats traveled beyond the finish line; they were too far out in the lake to actually cross it. The crews did, however, manage to terminate the race on the south end of the lake. The Provo team came in way ahead of the Garfield crew, knowing the boys in blue and white, who were still out on the horizon, would be in any minute. Provo's winning time was 9:09.

Now, the other teams from both clubs anxiously awaited their chances for glory. The race between the two

lightweight crews, who were younger and lighter than the heavyweights, began after another long delay. Officials found it necessary to extricate a member of the Provo team from the comfortable nest of femininity that surrounded him in the pavilion.

Finally, at 5:10 both teams assembled near the starting line and held their oars at the ready. Don R. Coray, Ed Knowlden, George Dusenberry and A.E. Buckler represented Provo. Walter Bailey, Fred McCurrin, George Orr and W. Dinwoodey formed the Garfield lightweights.

From the very beginning, it was just as evident Garfield would win this race as it was that their heavyweights would lose the first race. A Salt Lake Herald reporter commented, "The general manner in which the Provo 'kids' handled their oars encouraged hope in the breasts of the Salt Lakers."

Garfield took a short lead as the boats left the starting line. The salt lovers were about four lengths ahead at the turn stake. Garfield efficiently negotiated the turn, but Provo overshot its stake. The Salt Lake Tribune correspondent sportily assumed this mistake occurred because the Garfield team placed the "razzle dazzle" on its opponent, and Provo thought its stake was located near Lake Park on the east shore of the lake.

Provo eventually turned its scull, and the crew's steering and speed improved on the return trip. They almost managed to turn the race into a steeple chase. About 300 yards from their goal, however, a member of the Provo crew injured his arm. The Tribune said the Provo scull stopped like "Grandfather's Clock" as a result of this impairment.

The Garfield crew finished 13 lengths ahead of Provo, and they crossed the line a few feet from where they began. Officials posted no time for the race. The timer was so excited, he forgot to stop his watch.

Even though two more events followed, there was a general rush to the train after the lightweight race was completed. The visitors evidently felt the only interesting events were over.

Those who left early missed the only dunking of the day. In the single scull race, Provo's James Osburn took on Garfield's Benjamin Webber. Both skimmed over the water at a fast pace until they reached a point about half of the distance to the turn stake. Then, according to the Tribune, "Pliff! Over went Osburn into the brine." "Little Harry" went to his rescue, and Webber finished the lonesome ride to the finish line with a time of 9:50.

The Salt Lake Herald made the following wry comment concerning the damaged relationship between Osburn, the topsy-turvy sea dog, and his fickle friends: "Those who had their money on Osburn do not love him as much today as they did yesterday."

The last event of the day featured a double scull race. The Provo team pinned its hopes on Walter Barney and James Osburn. "Jimmy" likely felt a burning itch to win when the salt dried on his dapper black and gold uniform after he went bobbing for brine shrimp during the single scull race. If the two won this race, the Provo club could claim an even split with the club from the capital city. Osburn's conqueror, Ben Webber, teamed with William Dinwoodey to form Garfield's dynamic duo.

Both boats finished outside the flags in this closely-fought race. Osburn and Bailey won by about five feet with a time of 10:19. Some wags voiced the opinion that Osburn tumbled out of his boat on purpose during the single scull race. They claimed he was simply saving his strength for the final contest of the day.

The regatta ended at 6:20 that evening. Despite the delays, many spectators and most participants judged the day a success.

The races may have ended, but festivities continued that evening. At the Continental Hotel in Salt Lake City, the Salt Lake Rowing Club hosted a fine spread, including wine, for the Garfield and Provo sailor boys. Twenty-five people attended. At a late hour, the visitors from Provo and their boats returned home, feeling they had been treated very hospitably. The Provo band met club members at the depot and escorted them to their houses. Some

of them may have needed the help.

The Tribune revealed the fact that holding the races on the Great Salt Lake did not keep the fans in Provo from celebrating. The first incoming telephone call arriving at Provo's Enquirer office claimed both the heavyweights and lightweights won. The crowd assembled there to hear the results of the race gave three cheers and adjourned for a drink. Soon, a dispatch came in over the wire saying the lightweights had lost. All hands downed another drink.

Both Salt Lake City papers complimented Provo's heavyweight team. The Herald told its readers, "The Provo heavy weights are terrors." The Tribune hailed the achievements of the new boat club: "The Provo boys have spunk and the true grit to start in the way they have, and to accomplish so much in so short a time. ... Their four-oared crew are mighty good men." Many people looked forward to the next regatta, which was scheduled for Sept. 4 on Utah Lake.

As the day of the second race drew near, Provo's interest intensified, and the regatta became the town's main topic of conversation. Supporters of the Provo Boat Club wore black silk badges bearing the image of a four-oared crew and the words, "Provo Club." Many local businessmen gave their employees the day off so they could see the races. Loyal Provonians held the colorful opinion their heavyweight crew was in the pink and the town was about to be painted red.

Salt Lakers, on the other hand, showed little interest in the races because they generally believed Provo would win. Even though round trip tickets from Salt Lake City to Provo were a mere \$2, only 60 to 100 people were expected to make the trip from the capital city.

The Deseret Evening News complained the Provo team "had regular and systematic training for several months, while Garfield ... had little, if any." The Herald agreed, "It is hardly probable that the Salt Lake heavy four will get one of three races."

Despite this apparent lack of interest in Salt Lake City, members of the Prove club planned to act as hospitable hosts. The club organized a grand uniform ball held in the pavilion of the Garden City Resort on Utah Lake. The general public could attend the dance for the nominal fee of \$1. Provo also planned a banquet for the Garfield men at the Hotel Roberts after the races were completed.

Provo Boat Club members met the Garfield rowers and their boats when the evening train pulled in on Aug. 2. The Salt Lakers put their sculls aboard the Provo City Railway and rode to the shores of Utah Lake the next morning. They launched their racing boats and practiced for the big race.

To be continued

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