

## “A Sanibel 1950s Christmas ... Residents, Snowbirds, Tourists, and Ferries.”

By Jeri Magg

During the 1950s, Christmas vacationers flocked to Sanibel with visions of sugar plums, warm beaches, and sand dollars dancing in their heads. This year’s Luminary event at the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village on Friday, December 2, from 3:30 to 5:30 will showcase the holiday season with wonderful 1950s displays throughout the village.

Visitors at that time, especially those with motor cars, had only one way to access the island, by ferry. Longtime residents talk about traveling on these boats, most remembering the long lines, swarming mosquitoes, and the reliability of Captain Leon Crumpler, who was asked by the Kinzies to take charge of the ferry.



In 1912, an auto ferry was proposed as part of the construction of McGregor Boulevard. The Sanibel Ferry was promoted in 1925 by W.E. Cogsdale, president of a building company advertising two developments on Sanibel. He ran a ferry between Punta Rassa and Reed’s Landing, then at the end of Bailey Road on Sanibel. Cogsdale’s ferry was taken up river for protection during the 1926 hurricane, and disappeared.

At about the same time the Kinzie Brothers Steamship line had won the contract to carry mail to the island. Many visitors wanted their cars on the island, so they’d have the cars disassembled at Punta Rassa and then reassembled on Sanibel. The Kinzies saw the need for a car ferry.

Two years later, in June of 1928, the first small Kinzie ferry, *Best*, began to carry automobiles from Punta Rassa to Sanibel. The *Best* could only carry seven cars, and made four trips a day. These trips proved an exciting adventure to early motorists who had to drive cautiously onto a ramp down to the ferry. Crews directed drivers so the load could be distributed evenly.

One time a nervous driver rolled aboard, put his car in reverse by mistake, stepped on the gas and shot off backwards over the stern of the ferry into the water. A hearty passenger volunteered to dive down and tie a rope around the car’s axle so it could be hoisted up. There was also a passenger with a bottle of bootleg who offered the volunteer a swig each time he surfaced. It took the diver a little longer to finish the task.

Finally, the hitch was made and the ferry pulled the “drowned” car around into shallow water where a big moving van on shore attached a long rope and dragged it to dry land. The only harm

done was that the car's owner had a box of canned goods and the labels washed off. When the fellow wanted to cook a meal, he had to guess which can was green beans or stewed tomatoes.

In 1958, from January 1, to April 15, the ferry departed from either Sanibel or Punta Rassa on the hour and half-hour. The rates were as follows: Cars and pick-up trucks -- \$1.00 each way, adults - \$.47 each way, children – 6-12, \$.25. Children under 6, no charge, and trucks, 1-2 tons with a 1-2-ton load, \$1.25 each way. Passengers didn't purchase tickets before boarding because a ferry worker on board collected the fees.

The ferry business became so lucrative that the Kinzies added more ferries, like the *Islander*, which held 20 cars. Service discontinued once the Sanibel causeway was opened in 1963.

At this year's Luminary, a small replica of the ferry *Best's* wheelhouse will allow visitors to relive a piece of the island's past. A docent portraying Captain Leon Crumpler will also be available to tell "ferry stories."

Don't miss this year's Luminary at the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village; it will be a blast from the past!

For more information about this event contact the museum at 472-4648 or go to [sanibelmuseum.org](http://sanibelmuseum.org).

The Sanibel Historical Museum and Village is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. It is located at 950 Dunlop Road (next to BIG ARTS). Admission is \$10 for adults over 18. Docent-guided tours are available at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. at no extra charge, based upon docent availability. There is handicap access to all buildings. For information, call 472-4648 during business hours or visit [www.sanibelmuseum.org](http://www.sanibelmuseum.org).