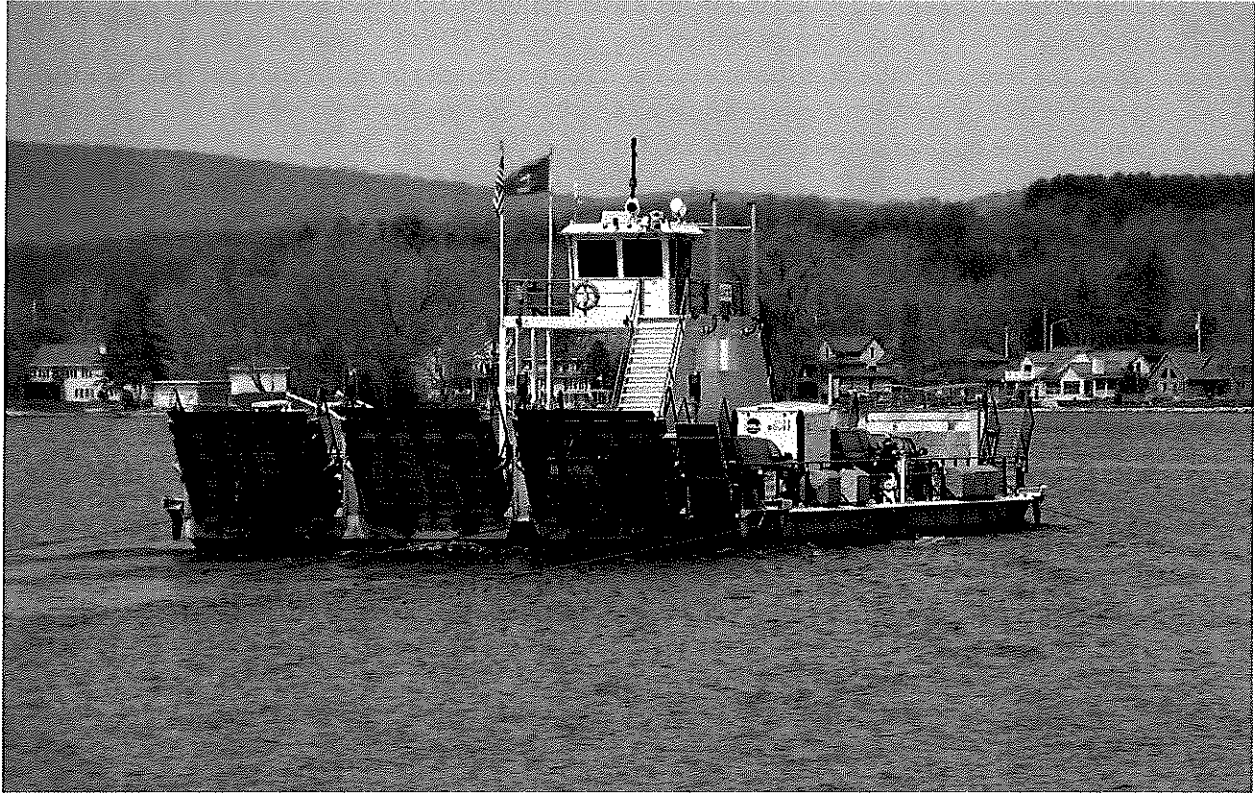


## Merrimac Ferry Presentation



Picture of COLSAC III

### **Interesting Facts on Merrimac Ferry**

Merrimac Ferry crosses the Wisconsin River between Sauk and Columbia counties. The ferry will remain open until ice forms on the Wisconsin River. The Merrimac Ferry, Wisconsin's only FREE ferry:

- Shuttles WIS 113 traffic 24 hours a day, seven days a week, between Okee on the east bank and Merrimac on the west.
- Holds 15 vehicles at a time, in addition to bicycles and pedestrians, and last year (2016) ferried over 288,000 vehicles across the river.
- Takes about seven minutes for a single crossing.

**Note:** Hazardous materials, including but not limited to, agricultural nitrogen, propane in excess of 100 pounds, and fuel in excess of 100 gallons, ARE NOT allowed on the vessel.

Emergency and/or planned maintenance closures of the ferry will be posted on the [511 Wisconsin Travel Information](http://511wi.gov/TravelInformation) website. <http://511wi.gov/Web/>

The following regulations shall govern its operation:

1. The maximum operating speed of the ferry shall not exceed 600 feet per minute.
2. No more than 15 vehicles will be carried on any one trip. (No commercial buses.)
3. Once the ferry has left either shore, whether it carries capacity or not, it shall not return to that shore to pick up additional vehicles until a complete crossing has been made.
4. When, in the opinion of the operator, weather conditions are so severe as to make a crossing unsafe, he shall arrange to so inform any waiting vehicles on either shore and shall not attempt a crossing until he deems it safe. Flashing lights are activated notifying travelers of temporary interruption of service. These lights are located at WIS 60 and I-90/94, WIS 19 and WIS 113, WIS 78 and WIS 113, WIS 78 and I-90/94 and at US 12 and County K.
5. All cables shall be replaced as often as necessary to minimize the possibility of breakage and the resultant delay in service provided.
6. Should a breakdown occur, causing stoppage of the ferry's operation, the county shall take such prompt action as is necessary to restore service in the shortest possible time. In such event, the regional office and maintenance section shall be promptly notified as to the cause of delay in service and the estimated length of time that the ferry may be out of service. The five ferry out of service lights shall be activated.
7. The operators shall report the daily number of trips, total type and number of vehicles carried, materials used, etc., on a "Weekly Report on Operation" form supplied by WisDOT. This report shall be submitted to the state maintenance engineer by the regional chief maintenance engineer at the close of each month's operation.
8. The total number of passengers carried on any trip shall not exceed the number of life preservers carried on the craft.
9. A seaworthy life boat shall be carried on the ferry at all times during the ferry's operation.
10. No alcohol drinking is permitted on the ferry.

**Brief History**

The Merrimac Ferry, which crosses the Wisconsin River between Sauk and Columbia counties, is Wisconsin's only free ferry. It shuttles WIS 113 traffic between Okee, on the east bank, and Merrimac on the west.

Ferry service has been provided in this area for more than a century. In 1844, four years before Wisconsin became a state, Chester Mattson, the second settler on the site of the village of Merrimac, obtained charters to provide ferry service at this location. The ferry was operated long before the development of a regular roadway.

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Old Merrimac ferry - carrying horse, a buggy and a few passengers.

Mattson charged either 0.35 cents or \$1 to ferry a team and wagon across the river, depending upon who you're talking to. But, whatever the fare, the ferryman earned it for his muscles provided a good share of the ferry's power until a gasoline engine was added around the turn of the century. Another private investor, W.P. Flanders, took over the service in 1849 for the sum of \$700, and for many years it continued as a private operation.

### Colsac

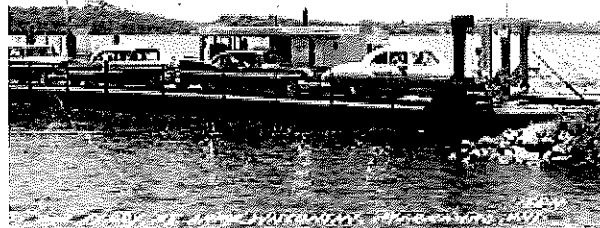
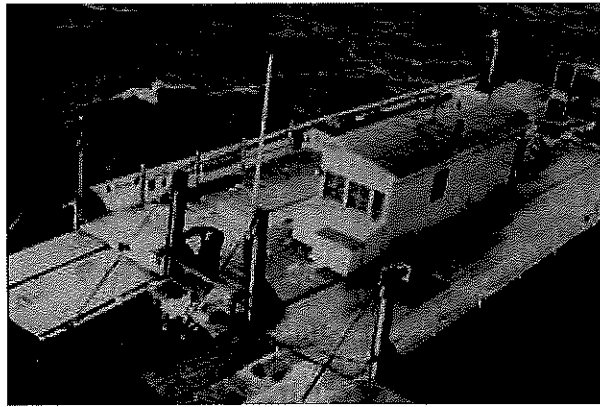
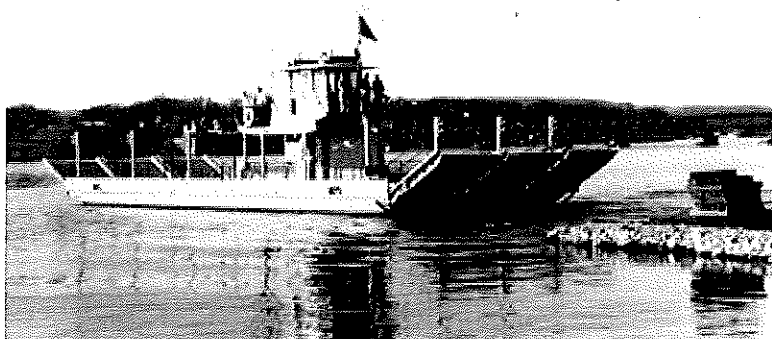


Photo courtesy of the town of Merrimac website.



Cars waiting in line to board the Merrimac Ferry, Colsac.



Merrimac Ferry, Colsac II.



Merrimac Ferry, Colsac III.

The original "Colsac" (a phonetic combination of the two names, Columbia and Sauk counties) was built in 1924 in Dubuque, Iowa. It was operated as a toll ferry by these counties until 1933, when it was acquired by the old State Highway Commission. It has operated as a free ferry since Columbia and Sauk counties turned it over to the state without charge.

Various methods have been used over the years to propel the vessel. Area residents recall stories of a "scow being pulled across the river by horses harnessed to a long cable," but later it was current propelled. A cable was stretched across the river on which the ferry rode and ropes were adjusted at the proper angle to take advantage of the current. In later years, a small gasoline-propelled boat was installed. The first Colsac was also propelled by a gasoline engine.

The village of Merrimac purchased the old ferry boat, Colsac, for \$300 to be used for historical purposes. It resided in the village park for many years and was finally "recycled."

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## Colsac II

Colsac II, built by Marinette Marine Corporation in Marinette, Wisconsin, cost approximately \$77,000 and was capable of carrying 12 vehicles as compared with the old eight-car Colsac. It transported four cars in each of the three rows across the water in about seven minutes.

It was christened on April 6, 1963. Tourists flock by the thousands to take the mile-long boat trip, despite the location of the interstate system bridge only 12 miles away.

Colsac II was retired from service on November 4, 2002.

## Colsac III

A new 15-car, \$2.2 million Colsac III was constructed by Basic Marine in Escanaba, Michigan and dedicated on May 6, 2003.

The Merrimac Ferry is still a sturdy and popular survivor among the river ferries.

In Wisconsin, for instance, the former Division of Highways built a new Interstate bridge across the Wisconsin River at Portage, then found that thousands of motorists were still driving 25 miles out of their way to wait in line for a chance to cross the river little faster than they would walk.

The trip is free; the scenery superb. But the main factor in its popularity is pure nostalgia... one of the reasons it survived the bridge boom of the early 1900s and is now the only ferry remaining on the state trunk highway network.

The peak of the season comes in August when up to 1,200 vehicles a day create a line up of 50 or more vehicles waiting their turn for the ferry. Small stands line the road on both approaches, dispensing soft drinks and ice cream at a staggering rate.

No accurate counts exist to determine the number of tourists, but estimates are in the range of 150,000 to 200,000 -- not bad for a village with less than 300 population.

That the ferry at Merrimac survived while about 500 others vanished is nothing short of amazing. The Wisconsin State Highway Commission was organized in 1911, and one of its first recommendations was for a bridge at Merrimac. But funds never materialized.

In the less sentimental days of World War II, the federal government offered to pay half the cost of a bridge to help get workers to a new ordinance plant at nearby Baraboo. Plans were drawn and the ferry seemed doomed. But the late Governor Heil vetoed the project because he thought the federal government should foot the entire bill.

In the early 1960s, when the new full-sized cars had reduced the original Colsac's capacity from eight to six vehicles, complaints about poor service began to pile up.

Studies were made; highway engineers suggested a bridge. But Merrimac had become "Never Never" land as far as bridges were concerned. In true Peter Pan style, residents of Merrimac

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formed an "I Believe in Ferries" club in protest. The division scuttled its plans for a bridge, and Colsac II went into service in 1963.

Again in 1967, people were certain the ferry was doomed with opening of the new Interstate. Tourists, they reasoned, would rather zip across on the new bridge and ferry traffic would dwindle and die. But they had underestimated the nostalgia factor.

### **Other Operating Ferries in Wisconsin**

#### Cassville (608) 725-5180

- Located in southwest Wisconsin on the Mississippi River
- Connects Cassville, Wisconsin, with Turkey Creek, Iowa
- Ferry fee for passengers and vehicles.

#### Lake Express (866) 914-1010

- Located in southeastern Wisconsin on Lake Michigan
- Connects Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with Muskegon, Michigan
- Ferry fee for passengers and vehicles

#### Lake Michigan Carferry (S.S. Badger) (888) 337-7948

- Located in eastern Wisconsin on Lake Michigan
- Connects Manitowoc, Wisconsin, with Ludington, Michigan
- Ferry fee for passengers and vehicles

#### Madeline Island Ferry Line (715) 747-2051

- Located in northern Wisconsin on Lake Superior
- Connects Bayfield, Wisconsin, with LaPointe Harbor on Madeline Island, Wisconsin
- Ferry fee for passengers and vehicles

#### Merrimac (608) 246-3872

- Located in south central Wisconsin on the Wisconsin River
- Connects Merrimac, Wisconsin, with Okee, Wisconsin
- Free ferry for passengers and vehicles

#### Washington Island Ferry Line (920) 847-2546

- Located in northeast Wisconsin on Lake Michigan
- Connects Northport, Wisconsin, with Detroit Harbor on Washington Island, Wisconsin
- Ferry fee for passengers and vehicles

## Operations

The Merrimac Ferry (Colsac III) opened on May 16, 2003. The ferry was constructed by Basic Marine in Escanaba, Michigan. The ferry is 45'-0" wide and 105'-0" long, and has three 10'-0" lanes which can hold up to five cars in each lane, for a maximum of 15 cars. Overall length of the ferry including ramps is 128'-9 1/2".

The ferry operates on a seasonal cycle and is closed when there is ice on the water. It has never been removed from the lake since installation. Length of operation has increased in the recent years due to public pressure to have service when the lake is open and free of ice. Previously, it ran on a set calendar season from April 15 to December 1. In 1997, the longest operational season on record was recorded which was from April 3, 1997 to January 13, 1998.

Maintenance and operation of the ferry is performed by Columbia County for the State of Wisconsin, Department of Transportation.

The Merrimac Ferry is annually inspected along with our statewide bridge inspection program. Since this is a special condition and different criteria to look for, a consultant is hired to complete the inspection. A routine inspection is performed on the steel diaphragms, stiffeners, and hulls which are the main structural elements of the ferry.

Operational elements such as the engines, cables, and other operations are done by Columbia County who maintains the operating components of the ferry.

Ferry contains:

2 engines

5.9 L Cummings Diesel Motor – have spare engine on hand for emergencies.

210 HP

Holds 1200 Gal of fuel

All sides are duplicates and only thing shared are drive motor and brake. Otherwise duplicates of all other parts

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Colsac II was originally powered with a mechanical drive system

Very high maintenance and not reliable

It had one engine mounted up by pilot house and was very noisy to operator

We converted to hydrostatic in the early 90s and achieved an up time rating of 99.95%

Originally we bought cheap imported cable and changed four to five times per year

In the mid-nineties we started trying different cables to get to where we are now about two per year

Colsac II went on the auction block I think in 2002 but what the bidders didn't know is that there was a dam they had to get over to get it down river.

When no one bought it the Columbia county highway dept. salvaged it on site and it sold for scrap

The startup for Colsac III did not go well and it was down with in one week of start up

After some preservice working together the DOT county and some contractors the bugs were eventually worked out

I can recall at least four different times someone drove into the river when the boat was out in the river two were intoxicated one was in the fog and one panicked and hit the gas instead of the brake



# Ferries Operating in Wisconsin





## MERRIMAC FERRY HISTORICAL INFORMATION

based on old information saved over the years.

Year	open	Days Operated	trips	Vehicles	Cost	fuel	Cost/ trip
<b>1933</b>							
1934				33,745			
1935				32,397			
1936				39,420			
1937				48,623			
1938				57,349			
1939		256		59,888			
1940		227		59,601			
1941		238		65,449			
1942		254		131,460			
1943				56,847	7,486		
1944		252		51,236	8,526		
1945		260		68,952	9,270		
1946		265		82,086	10,907		
1947		241		93,424	11,577		
1948		269		98,397	13,264		
1949		265		115,118	13,682		
1950		243		118,490	15,897		
1951		250		115,967	15,000		
1952		260		129,007	17,082		
1953				131,152	16,475		
1954				137,327	20,000		
1955		255		134,054	18,368		
1956		248		125,900	23,709		
1957		262		133,348	20,604		
1958		246		138,268	19,399		
1959		243		127,583	27,420		
1960		244		127,034	25,907		
1961		260		127,269	23,966		
<b>1962</b>		<b>249</b>		<b>107,309</b>	<b>72,269</b>		
1963		245		143,574	52,677		
1964		241		165,111	53,606		
1965		231		162,418	46,924		
1966		255		174,877	43,634		
1967		273		166,181	42,128		
1968					46,550		
1969					51,473		
1970					57,476		
1971	4/9/1971	252	39775	184,200	56,694		
1972	4/10/1972	238	37715	178,548	46,792	8050	1.241
1973	3/18/2017	271	40543	176,172	61,877	12699	1.526
1974	3/21/1973	264	42286	185,182	75,810	13021	1.793

ColSac I

ColSac II

1975	4/16/1975	233	39443	177,862	74,585	12376	1.891	
1976	3/25/1976	250	42029	196,943	90,084	13451	2.143	
1977	3/30/1977	244	40545	189,873	98,951	12269	2.441	
1978	4/11/1978	234	39783	189,710	100,625	12008	2.529	
1979	4/6/1979	246	39212	189,292	119,899	12067	3.058	
1980	4/4/1980	252	42891	213,301	144,024	13857	3.358	
1981	4/6/1981	255	43191	199,145	164,898	13732	3.818	
1982	4/16/1982	241	38815	193,664	156,390	13663	4.029	
1983	4/4/1983	242	40714	179,435	110,073	12657	2.704	
1984	4/25/1984	242	37924	204,501	139,356	11971	3.675	
1985	4/10/1985	236	39708	197,502	150,561	12021	3.792	
1986	4/15/1986	230	39623	195,597	176,987	13283	4.467	
1987	4/15/1987	230	40271	210,402		11020		
1988	3/15/1988	230	36328	206,199	221,702	10577	6.103	
1989	4/13/1989	111	38150	219,806	214,670	11410	5.627	
1990	4/9/1990	227	41347	223,438		14285		
1991	4/15/1991	225	40514	221,174		14009		
1992	4/13/1992	230	41855	242,897		14089		
1993	4/19/1993	221	40814	243,993	286,273	12663	7.014	
1994	4/14/1994	233	44009	242,574	336,461	13923	7.645	
1995	3/29/1995	252	41597	237,090	419,704	11542	10.090	
1996	4/1/1996	263	45676	256,993	388,313	11716	8.501	
1997	4/3/1997	283	51415	285,763	411,534	14123	8.004	
<b>1998</b>	<b>3/3/1998</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>49997</b>	<b>283,819</b>	<b>416,985</b>	<b>14690</b>	<b>8.340</b>	closed Jan 1999
1999	4/5/1999	258	49112	293,837	474,687	13818	9.665	
2000	3/13/2000	268	47553	309,067	388,861	14338	8.177	
<b>2001</b>	<b>4/11/2001</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>45669</b>	<b>436,055</b>	<b>436,055</b>	<b>15901</b>	<b>9.548</b>	Most Vehicles
2002	3/19/2002	228	40791	305,135	383,417	18410	9.400	
<b>2003</b>	<b>5/16/2003</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>30830</b>	<b>167,978</b>	<b>533,263</b>	<b>12378</b>	<b>17.297</b>	ColSac III
2004	4/23/2004	241	49045	278,448	544,494	20549	11.102	
2005	3/30/2005	247	49243	289,778	618,994	17864	12.570	
<b>2006</b>	<b>2/24/2006</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>48493</b>	<b>290,509</b>	<b>593,151</b>	<b>23115</b>	<b>12.232</b>	Earliest Opening
2007	3/28/2007	247	48196	303,341	685,436	19359	14.222	
<b>2008</b>	<b>4/28/2008</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>50383</b>	<b>276,207</b>	<b>667,656</b>	<b>14600</b>	<b>13.252</b>	Latest Opening
2009	3/24/2009	258	50155	355,993	677,315	11410	13.504	
2010	3/19/2010	285	43965	304,877	743,954	20495	16.922	
2011	4/1/2011	265	50077	253,936	870,843	15873	17.390	
2012	3/14/2012	283	56474	291,896	650,024	24244	11.510	
2013	4/12/2013	229	45437	271,698	709,410	18390	15.613	
2014	4/11/2014	219	51501	305,138	779,861	22797	15.143	
2015	3/27/2015	277	54411	302,915	802,229	23631	14.744	
2016	3/25/2016	257	49387	288,506	783,926	22719	15.873	