

JUN 25, 1978
COURANT

Rafts Rerouted Away From Essex

By CLAUDIA VANNES

ESSEX — The Connecticut River Raft Race won't go from Deep River to Nott Island next year because of complaints from some merchants, town officials and residents, the raft committee chairman, Frank Burton, said Thursday.

The annual race, held last weekend, attracted more than 5,000 spectators who crowded the streets of town waiting for the launch over to the Nott Island and didn't patronize local businesses while waiting, merchants said.

Merchants complained to First Selectman Richard Riggio that because the downtown was blocked to traffic, potential customers

couldn't come to town to shop on what would have ordinarily been a busy summer Saturday.

Burton said, "The raft committee made a mistake providing a launch." He said people waited in long lines in town for the launch that delivered visitors to Nott Island, the finish line for the race.

"Those people were waiting for the launch, blocking the downtown and wanted to get to Nott's, not into the stores. We just couldn't clear the people out of town," Burton said.

"We can't do this to Essex again," he said. Burton has several other spots in mind for the terminus of next year's race although he doesn't want to disclose the

locations at this time.

Burton said the committee raised about \$2,000 for charity this year, but believes next year more money can be made and more order restored if the launch is done away with and spectators who come by private boat and line the shores are charged per head.

Many people viewed the proceedings free of charge from their boats and traveled to the island's festivities under their own power. The only people charged for the event were the raft racers themselves and those who traveled by launch.

"This isn't fair. We can make more money next year with less hassle by changing our method," Burton said.