

## Barnegat Bay A-Cats

The 2001 Barnegat Bay Yacht Racing Association will open on June 23 with a Historic event. For the first time nine A-Cats will crowd the starting line in a bid for the Bay Championship. This year two new boats join the fleet, Raven and Spy II, proving that 79 years after the first boat was launched The fleet is not only active, but also thriving.

On July 4, 1922 Judge Charles McKeehan's Mary Ann raced for the first time. She not only won that day, but every race that year. Built by Morton Johnson of Bay Head and designed by noted naval architect Charles D. Mower, she was a very distinctive craft. The 28 foot long and nearly 11 foot Wide hull was topped by a 49-foot mast and 28-foot boom. Mary Ann's most unusual feature was her Marconi or triangular sail that was a staggering 605 Square feet.

Mary Ann made such an impact that four new boats of similar dimensions were built for the 1923 season. Mower designed the Bat, built for Edward Crabbe by Morton Johnson and the Helen, built for Frank Thatcher by Hopper's Basin in Seaside Park. Francis Sweisguth designed the other two, both built by Kirk's in Toms River. F.P. Larkin owned Tamwock and Forcem was built for A syndicate headed by Edwin Schoettle. The Helen and Forcem were unsuccessful and disappeared from racing by 1925. The Tamwock was lost with 40 other boats in a boatyard fire in Island Heights in 1940.

In 1924 the Spy, designed by Mower and built by Johnson for Frank Thatcher, entered the fleet. For the 1924 racing season, the catboat fleet was divided into Class A and Class B to give the older boats a chance. Mary Ann and her sisters thus became Class A Catboats, or A-Cats. The last of the original A-Cats, Lotus, was launched in 1925. Lotus Designed by Mower and built by Johnson for Joseph Truitt of Island Heights.

The A-Cats continued to race for the next fifty years for a variety of owners and in varying states of repair and disrepair. By the late 1970's the four remaining boats Mary Ann, Bat, Spy, and Lotus were becoming tired. In stepped Nelson Hartranft of Ocean Gate who owned all of the boats in turn and sold them to those willing to restore and race them. In 1980 Hartranft ordered a new boat from David Beaton and Sons of Mantoloking. The new boat was to be built from the plans of the original Tamwock, which had recently been discovered in an antique store in South Toms River. In 1982 Wasp was launched, the first new A-Cat since 1925. Between 1980 and 1988, the four original boats were restored to their former glory. In 1985 Mary Ann, Bat, Spy, and Lotus were placed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places.

1990 brought a new Tamwock-built to Mary Ann's plans by the Philadelphia

Maritime Museum for Peter Kellogg of Bay Head. Two more boats joined the fleet in 1994. Vapor was also built to MaryAnn's plans in Philadelphia for Peter Kellogg. She was named for the first boat to win the Toms River Challenge Cup in 1871. The Ghost was built by Beaton's for William Fortenbaugh using the same plans as Wasp. The Ghost has yet to lose a Bay Championship.

This year Beaton's launched another boat, Raven for a syndicate from Metedeconk River on June 2. Raven is a sister of the Ghost. This year The Spy is being retired from racing and will become an on land display at the Toms River Seaport Society. To replace her, Spy II is being launched on June 9 at the Tuckerton Seaport. Spy II, also a Sweisguth design, was built by the Independence Seaport Museum for an Island Heights syndicate. This will be an exciting year of Racing on Barnegat Bay!

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