

After 83 Years, Yacht Club Appears To Have Put Down Roots

The Lavallette Yacht Club is one of the town's oldest institutions. It was founded in 1904, and one might reasonably wonder why, in that time and place, it seemed like a good idea.

Consider the setting. A tiny town with two streets reaching from beach to bay; the rest of the bayfront all but inaccessible; the bay itself brackish, weed-choked, and without marked channels. It would be four years before the main channel began to make its way down from Bay Head, and another 21 before the opening of the Manasquan Canal brought a cleansing tidal flow to the head of the bay.

But Toms River, Island Heights and Seaside Park all boasted yacht clubs founded before the turn of the century; Lavallette residents were well aware that those clubs were the focal points of social as well as yachting activity in their communities. And if Lavallette did not really need a yacht club, it surely needed a social center. There was no school; the church was small and in service as the Borough Hall; and the fledgling R to R Club as yet had no home of its own.

Whatever the reasons, a small group of year-round residents and summer visitors met on Aug. 14, 1904, in the R to R Club's temporary quarters in Joe Patterson's house on Vance Ave. and there and then organized the Lavallette Yacht Club. Parenthetically, it should be noted that although there was no formal link between the two clubs,

there is no doubt that the Yacht Club was sired by the R to R and owed much of its early vitality to the R to R's members and guests.

The following account of highlights in the Yacht Club's history is adapted from the 1976 "History of Lavallette," published by the Lavallette Bicentennial Committee, and updated with material provided by Doris Law, the Club's historian.

In the course of its lengthy existence, the Lavallette Yacht Club has known its share of ups and downs, and has surely set some kind of record for lateral movement. The Clubhouse originally looked out upon the ocean from a dune near Bond Avenue; in 1915 it was hauled and shoved to the bayfront at President Avenue; 32 years later it was uprooted again and moved to its present location on Swan Point.

From the beginning, the division of interest between sailing and sociability was recognized. When the Clubhouse was built upon the beachfront in 1905 it was designed to serve as a center for community activities. Simultaneously, Charles C. Eareckson, the first Commodore, offered the Club a lot on the bayfront at President Avenue. Here a Bay Annex was built in 1906 to provide shelter and a sail loft for the members whose boats were moored nearby.

The beachfront club

fulfilled its role as community center with notable success. It provided the town with dances, dinners, and entertainments throughout the summer season; housed meetings of all types, and for at least one summer was the home of the Sunday School classes of the Union Church.

At the same time, the Bay Annex was gaining in popularity. In 1912 porches and lockers were added, and by 1914 tennis courts were being constructed there. Suggestions that the Clubhouse itself be moved to the bay, however, were met with strong objections that the bayfront was not a safe place for ladies at night.

The timidity of the ladies and the gallantry of the men were overcome by a Northeaster in the winter of 1914-15. The Clubhouse was damaged, and in the summer of 1915 it was moved on skids through the dunes and brush to join the Annex. Joe Stillwell did the job, which included addition of porches on the first and second stories. He charged \$1,922.

In its new location, the Club continued to flourish, and to serve the growing town. By 1917, the custom of sponsoring Labor Day games was established. Youngsters and young adults gathered on the beach in the morning for foot races, sack races, three-legged races, and ocean swimming contests. In the afternoon, activity switched to the bay (although the transition was always slow and sometimes a bit disorderly,

due to the summer residents' tradition of holding open house on Labor Day) for more swimming, canoe races, tub races, and canoe tilting. The whole town turned out to participate or to watch, and the games were a highlight of the year until the economic pinch of the early thirties, together with entry lists which had grown unwidely, brought them to a halt in 1934.

In these years on the bayfront, too, the Club consolidated its reputation as the home of some of Barnegat Bay's leading sailors. There is some doubt as to when the first formal sailing races were held at Lavallette, but there is tangible evidence, in the form of a small silver cup, of a Labor Day Race in 1908. The cup, originally won by Commodore Eareckson in the catboat R to R, serves today as a perpetual trophy for the season series winner of the Senior Sneakboxes.

Commodore Eareckson was the first of many sailing commodores. Notable among his successors are Jim Kean, whose "Stormalong" dominated the Bay's fleet of 20-foot sneakboxes in the late 1920's, and Fred Winkelman, who compiled an enviable record in the 17-foot catboats before sailing "Lotus" to an unprecedented string of victories in the Class A Catboats in the latter 1950's. Commodore Charles Archbald, an internationally known skipper of sailing canoes before coming to Lavallette, established a



Peter Paige Photo

Since 1948, the Yacht Club has been on Swan Point. Above, the 1984 Commissioning ceremony.

tradition in 1928 when he offered a perpetual trophy for open competition by 15-foot sneakboxes. "The Archie" has endured as a feature of the Bay sailing season; today it still draws as many as 20 entries, many sailed by skippers who grew up in sneakboxes and went on to fame in more modern classes.

In the days when the 15-foot sneakbox was the backbone of the Barnegat Bay Yacht Racing Association, Lavallette boasted a fleet which ranked with the best. As the BBYRA fleet grew more diversified, so did Lavallette's. Over the years, the Club has had champions or contenders in virtually every class - among them Moths, Snipes, Comets, Penguins, Jets, G-Boats, M-Scows, Lightnings, Class E Scows,

Flying Dutchmen, Lasers, and catboats of all sizes. It has produced national champions - Artie Lange, Hansi Bonn and John Applegate in the Jet 14 Class - and a United States' representative - Betsy Davis - in the Women's World Single-Handed Championship sailed in Spain in 1975. In recent years, Lavallette's own intra-club competition has brought out as many as 80 entries in a variety of classes, from Prams and Sunfish to Lightnings and Sanderlings, for the traditional Sunday races.

The Club's greatest growth came with the move to Swan Point. There had been suggestions as early as 1927 that it was time for the club to be up and about, sparked by the discovery that Joe Stillwell

had inadvertently set the Club down in the path of the Bay Blvd. The Boulevard, north of Washington Ave., existed only on paper except for the one-block stretch from Reese to President, but there was talk of beginning construction and it was clear that the Club even-



From 1915 to 1947, the Club was on the bayfront at President Avenue.



Originally, from 1901 through 1914, the Club was on the beachfront at Bond Avenue. Photo, courtesy of Charles Garibaldi, was taken in 1909.

tually would have to move. A depression and a world war sidetracked both projects, however, and it was not until the fall of 1947 that the Club was actually on its way to Swan Point. Regrettably, the legend that the move was accomplished by sliding the building across the ice must be dismissed. A mild winter foreclosed that option.

The ancient Annex had been demolished in 1933 and replaced by a much smaller, one-story struc-

ture. This made the Club a manageable, if fragile, package, and it made the journey on a four-wheeled contrivance. By summer, 1948, the Club rested more-or-less securely on pilings in its present location.

Gradually, and in the Club's necessity-born tradition of do-it-yourself, the dream of those who had advocated the move came true. The building was reshingled and re-roofed; bulkheading and slips were installed, first along the "Ducky." Eventually, a

marina with 35 slips, water, and power came into being. One by one, three launching hoists were erected, and that sine-quanon of the modern yacht club - a spacious parking lot - was constructed. This year, additional docking space is being provided.

Interior improvements included the installation and progressive expansion of kitchen and bar facilities, topped by a sun deck reached from the second floor and superbly

situated for watching races - or sunsets - beyond the westerly stretch of sedge known as Swan Point, Hank Bennett's Island, or Mosquito Island, depending on one's growing-up time in Lavallette. The second-floor porch, which had developed an alarming list, was restored to an even keel and made an integral part of the second-floor area. In 1985-86 the first-floor porch's width was doubled, and it became a popular adjunct to the indoor dining and drinking areas.

The growth in facilities was more than matched by the expansion of activity. For years, youngsters had learned to sail on a trial and error, sink or swim basis, and it had been pure

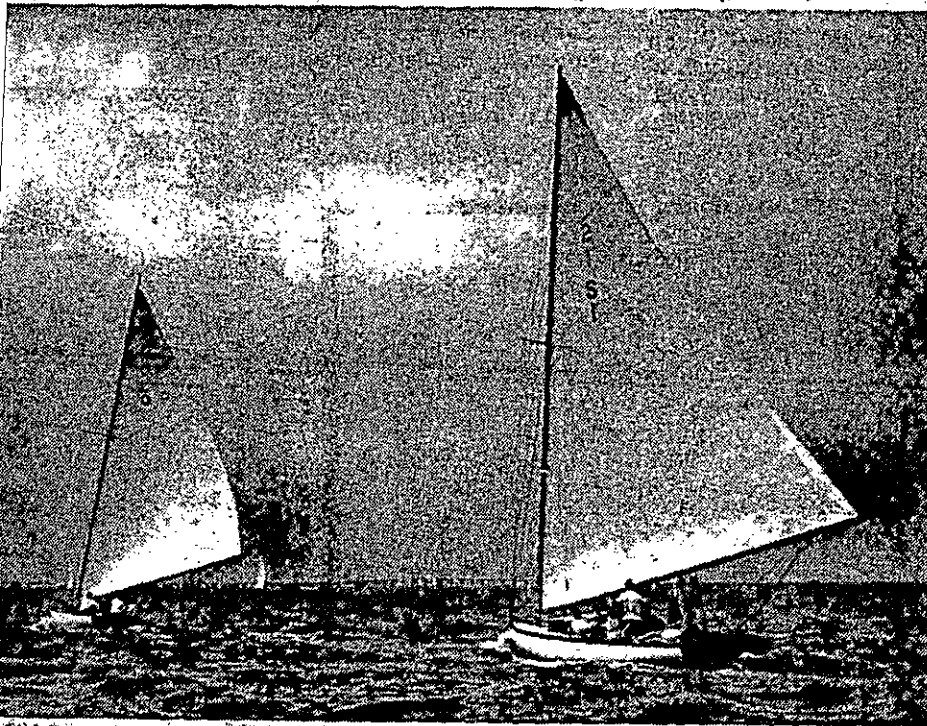
chance that all the submersions were only semi-permanent. On Swan Point, a full-fledged junior program was developed, with qualified instructors. A fleet of training boats was acquired, largely through the initiative and generosity of the late George Hoffman. Club launches were purchased to serve as tow boats, patrols, and committee boats, easing the burden on club members who had volunteered for those duties. The Club served as host to numerous regional Lightning, Laser, and Flying Dutchman regattas, and to national Jet championship.

Social functions also became more numerous and varied, and the season was extended at both ends. It had been customary to open the Club in late June and shutter it immediately after Labor Day (after a last-minute check to make sure no one was left over from the closing cocktail party). Today, the Club is commissioned on Memorial Day and is open, at least on weekends, until Halloween.

The town has long outgrown its dependence on the Club as a community center, but the Club serves 275 families and some 60 single members - as many as its present facilities can accommodate. There is a waiting list of prospective members, and the Club, after its years of precarious and peripatetic existence, appear to have put down roots and to be firmly established at last.

Regrettably, there is not space here to mention by name the men and women who have, over the years, made this possible. They are legion, and the Club's history, when written, will be testimony that each crisis tends to produce the leadership and dedication to overcome it.

LAVALLETTE'S HISTORIC "CATS"



The four surviving "Class A" catboats that have raced on Barnegat Bay since the early 1920's were approved for listing in the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in July, 1985. Three of the four - Mary Ann, Lotus, and Spy - have been owned and sailed by Lavallette skippers. Above, the Lotus, sailed by Russ Lord of Lavallette, is chased by the Spy, then representing Seaside Park, in a race in the early 1960's. Lotus was sailed to an unmatched string of victories by Fred Winkelmann from 1953 to 1958 before she was taken over, and later was owned briefly by Dick Macco. The Spy was owned and sailed earlier (1948-1954) by George "Shorty" Clark, Wayne Barr, and Bill Sutton. Mary Ann was the first A Cat to represent Lavallette, being sailed by Harry Newman from 1937 to 1947. Warren Law brought her back to Lavallette in the 1960's and sailed her until the 1970's. The long lives of these tall and lovely "grand old ladies of Barnegat Bay" have depended on the willingness of successive owners to devote time, talent and money to their preservation.

THE YACHT CLUB

The first meeting of the Yacht Club was held in the R to R Club house, on August 13, 1904. Just why the 13th was chosen as a date has never been determined, but with Charles Eareckson as chairman and Harry J. Barr as secretary the club got under way. The original roster of the club reads like a city directory, but of all the names therein, only H. J. Barr still remains on the list of today as an active member. Mr. Barr has probably done more to keep the club going than any other individual in Lavallette, and though he never acted as Commodore he frequently served on committees which did the hard work.

Mr. Eareckson, who was the first mayor of Lavallette, offered the club a building lot on the bay. Next he appointed John Plard and Messrs. Price and Sherman as a building committee and the meeting then adjourned at 8:10 P. M. Just why the early adjournment is not known, perhaps it was the kerosene lamps or maybe the blue fish were running.

The second meeting on August 20th elected Charles Eareckson Commodore; Dr. James W. White, vice commodore; James D. Ferris, treasurer; H. J. Barr, secretary; R. W. Conard, D. S. Roch, Mr. Sherman, trustees. This meeting adjourned at 8:45 P. M. By September 5th \$29 had been raised by a package party, \$48.05 at a drawing, \$56 by an entertainment, and a club house to cost no more than \$2000 with dock was authorized. The next meeting was held at 3940 Girard Avenue, Philadelphia, March 5, 1905, and W. S. Cornman became secretary. The first regatta committee consisted of B. Plard, Donald MacGregor and Joseph D. White, but just what regattas they ran off has been lost to history.

July 6, 1907, saw the establishment of the Club Championship Cup, as a permanent trophy, which was not permanent enough to survive to this day. It was also moved to stake the flats on the north side of the club dock. The flats still exist on the north side of the dock but the attempt to stake them has been given up as a bad job. T. K. Gramm and W. P. Tollenmann were admitted as the first junior members. In August 1907 Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Engelbert became members.

In July 1908, B. V. Plard was voted thanks for entering his boat in the Seaside Park regatta, and congratulated on position held at the finish. Here again the minutes fail of particulars. What was the name of the boat? And was his position at the finish a matter of sarcasm? August 29, 1908, brings the first mention of Labor Day races.

August 6, 1910, finds Dr. Clark reporting sneakbox QUICKSTEP of Forked River, first; LEMONADE of Bay Head, second. Again no details. Also offered to help Bay Head club stake channel from Bay Head to Good Luck Point, a sizeable job, and limited to an expense of \$35.00. July 1, 1911,



THE YACHT CLUB—1937

finds A. J. (Wishy) Kean joining and his boat was the WHITE SQUALL. September 1912, finds the Bay Annex being improved with porches and lockers, for it must be remembered that all this time the main building was located on the beach at Bond Avenue. The bay was steadily gaining in popularity, for August 2, 1913 finds the question of a water pump at the bay left to the discretion of the House committee.

On August 5th, 1914, Dr. V. L. Clark succeeded Commodore Eareckson, who received resolutions of appreciation. Commodore Eareckson still lives in Philadelphia at this writing and is a life member of the club. He purchased the north bay lot in June, 1915, for \$100 and added it to the club holdings. At this time it appears, by reading between the lines, that the club on the beach was wrecked during the preceding winter, and the idea of moving it to the bay was broached. This was carried out, and the beach building was moved down to the bay and the annex was removed to the rear and attached thereto in a rather casual fashion. A new upper porch and the side porch were added at this time.

August 5, 1916, found Adolph C. Schiellinger inducted as commodore. A. Q. Kean as secretary. August, 1919, finds Robert Young as Commodore. August, 1920, sees Dr. B. K. Wilbur inducted as Commodore. August, 1921,

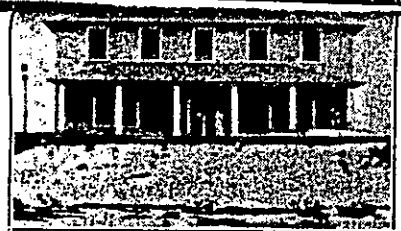
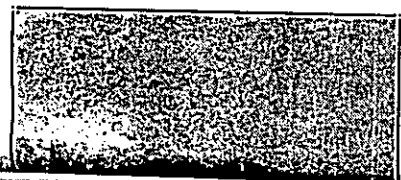
bur, and C. D. Bartholomew wrote the minutes. August, 1922, finds Dr. Wilbur wielding the pen. 1923 was a quiet year, the only fact worth note being the acquisition of the easterly lot for \$350.00. August 18, 1923, saw the entrance of A. B. MacGregor into the ranks of Commodores. 1925 Commodore Archibald; 1930, J. G. Kean. 1927 found W. H. (Bunny) James as secretary, and his minutes still stand as the most legible, most of the former secretaries being given to individualistic penmanship. 1927 also found running water installed in the clubhouse, and the suggestion made that the club remove to West Point Island, a suggestion which should not be allowed to materialize.

September 13, 1931, saw Dr. B. M. Howley and Raymond D. Hodge as Commodore and secretary respectively. August, 1933, Dr. V. L. King joined the ranks of commanding officers. During 1933, and '34, the ancient "Bay Annex" was demolished and the present renovated building constructed by R. L. Beck. In 1934 E. W. Adams took office as commodore and July, 1935, finds J. C. Esty joining the ranks of secretaries. 1936 brought the incumbent commodore into office, D. Vall Applegate.

The history of the club is at the best sketchy; if the members had available a stenographer to record the funny happenings this history would be a side-splitting account. Perhaps this hurried chronicle will stir some memories and a readable story will result. The Yacht club is an asset to the town, and all residents are invited to join. At various times the trustees and officers have become discouraged and contemplated giving up the whole affair, but the present membership have no such thoughts; they are only interested in selling the idea to the many people in the borough who should be in the club.

The primary purpose of the Yacht club is yacht racing, which is carried on by participation in the Barnegat Bay Yacht Racing Association and by the conduct of local races. The BBYRA consists of the Toms River, Seaside Park, Lavallette, Ocean Gate, Island Heights, Mantoloking and Bay Head clubs. Every Saturday during the season a regatta is held at one or the other of these clubs. Members of local clubs are eligible to enter their boats in the many events and ages of contestants run from eight or nine to 70 or 80. If you have never experienced the thrill of a sailing contest you have missed something that makes airplaning look tame, though the risk is considerably less. There is always a demand for crew members and many a present day fan gained his taste for the sport by acting as crew for some owner.

In addition to racing, the club maintains two of the finest tennis courts in the county, and a club house equipped with table tennis, horseshoes, shuffle board, pool table and other



THE YACHT CLUB

as it appeared when on the beach, near Bond Avenue.

In August, 1906, Dr. Kerr was thanked for a cottage on the bay. This was probably the old locker room which was torn down three years ago, but again the minutes fail of particulars. In September, 1906, William H. Eger became secretary and a dance was held with an expense of \$2.00 for music. In July, 1907, Misses Emma and Elizabeth Barr and J. H. Strawbridge and Thomas Berry were admitted to membership. The regatta committee reported progress (something they and all other committees have been doing ever since) and a "Sanitary Comforts Committee" was very busy, though limited to expenditures of \$20.00.

sports. During the season dances and entertainments are given weekly and there is an active Ladies' Auxiliary. The ladies hold weekly card parties and other entertainments and have long taken an active part in the maintenance and improvement of the club. One of the chief functions of the ladies is the feeding of the three or four hundred hungry skippers who descend upon the club on Regatta day, and to judge from the remarks of the youthful and not so youthful sailors, they excel in satisfying hungry appetites. Prospective members can obtain information by applying at the club house or writing to the secretary of the Lavallette Yacht club, Lavallette, New Jersey.