

Yacht Club Sprang From Keen Competition In Rowing, Sailing

By EDWARD O. MARSHALL
Post-Courier Reporter

Although not formally organized until 1883, the beginnings of the Carolina Yacht Club can be found soon after the Civil War.

Confederate soldiers returning to Charleston homes and harbor were happy to turn their energies to water sports. Shortly after the war, the Independent, Palmetto and Electric clubs were organized for rowing races of single sculls and four-oared boats.

Rowing competition in Charleston Harbor increased from year to year as interest grew. By 1874 the first interstate race was held in Savannah: H.C. Cheves, of Charleston's Palmetto Club, won the single sculls with ease and a four-oared boat, also of the Palmetto Club, manned by Nott Parker, William Lesesne, deSaussure Parker and Henry Bull took first place. In 1876, at the St. John's Rowing Club in New Orleans (on Lake Pontchartrain), Cheves took first place again when he outdistanced the best oarsmen of the Southeast. A four-oared crew representing Charleston placed second.

Charleston competitors soon realized the good-natured rivalry that had sprung up and the need for a centralized organization to serve as host for such competition. So, eight men — James H. Small, H.M. Tucker, F.F. Jones, R.M. Means, James Armstrong, E.O. Hall Jr., Augustine T. Smythe and Cheves — organized the Carolina Yacht Club. The first club was located near Adger's Wharf, but in 1906 the club moved to its present site, a pre-Civil War cotton classing office, at 50-54 East Bay St.

On Dec. 20, 1888, incorporation of the club was approved by an act of the South Carolina General Assembly. This act "constituted a body politic and corporate under the name and style of the Carolina Yacht Club for yachting, bathing, social, literary and aquatic purposes." Eventually, however, sailing would become a focal point of the club.

Do You Know Your Charleston?

By July 7, 1891, the first interstate challenge cup (for sailing) was held at Beaufort. The sailing craft were "limited to a length of from 27 to 39 feet load water line," reports a story in the June 26, 1933, edition of The News and Courier. "The Carolina Yacht Club entered the Manito, the Katrinka and the Flirt. Savannah entered the Ocean Queen, the Glace and El Diva." The Manito would win the cup.

On May 10, 1898, Savannah again would challenge Charleston yachtsmen for the cup. In the interim, Savannah had built two fast sloops — the Titania and the Dragoon — to race against Charleston sailors. The Titania took the honors. The next year, on June 16, the Carolina Yacht Club tried to regain the cup, but in vain. This time the Dragoon won, retaining the cup for Savannah.

The Charleston sportsmen, smarting from two defeats, had the Maris built to compete in the series. And the following year, on June 7 and 8, a series was held at Savannah. The fast Charleston entry completely outclassed the Dragoon in both races.

The rivalry between the two clubs developed into a building contest. As reported in the July 24, 1944, edition of The Evening Post, "First Charleston came up with the fastest boat. Then Savannah got up a purse, outbuilt the Charleston victor and challenged. Charleston then went one better than Savannah, with the natural result that the races soon petered out. The contest in 1900 was the last interstate series for 30 years," and it marked the end of the first phase of yacht racing at the Carolina Yacht Club.

But even though it was the end of the yachting series, another phase of racing history at the club was about to begin. In 1904 the July regattas began

and haven't missed a year, except during World War II. Club members acquired a fleet of 12 dories and raced these gaff-rigged sailboats for about 14 years, until the larger racing scows, began to appear in Charleston harbor.

By 1921 these large scows, measuring some 25 to 28 feet in length, had become a favorite of the club. Such names as the Betty B, the May B, the Nell from Mount Pleasant and, of course, an Undine from Rockville, sailed the harbor. "These boats had challenge races," reports The Evening Post, "particularly the Nell and the Betty B. And probably the most famous were the Undines. The town of Rockville always had an Undine and she was always a fast boat, with a wily skipper."

By 1923 a new group of sailing craft joined the scows on the water. Members had purchased four Star boats — long and narrow, sporting a heavy keel. "For some five years, the club sponsored sailing races — the scows, the Stars and larger boats, up to the 48-foot Naomi, all racing, either in classes or in one grand race with timed handicaps," reports The Evening Post.

Interest in sailing at the club vacillated between 1923 and 1932, but there was a regatta every summer, though many were small.

Eventually sailing would grow to much larger proportions. By 1938, more than 60 boats entered the annual regatta, with skippers from Beaufort and Savannah among the competitors.

Sailing hit an ebb during World War II, as many members of the club were in the armed forces. But, as in earlier years, an affection for water sports drew sailors back to the sea. First, with the addition of a new dock, costing some \$7,500, in the late 1940s, and, in the '50s, with the addition of new classes of boats such as the larger A, B, C, D and E scows, Moths and Snipes, sailing at the club experienced a revival, and kept growing.

During the 1960s and 1970s, large-scale use of fiberglass ushered in yet another era of sailing history at the club. Boats such as the Sunfish, the

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