

# SUFFRAGETTE

BY MARK REID

There was a time many years ago, 1905 to be exact, when just off the wooden planked piers of the ornate, elegant and often cigar smoke filled rooms of the brand-new Chicago Yacht Club (CYC) clubhouse, history was about to be made in a variety of different ways.

The Race Committees were stationed on was two starting lines just off the Van Buren Street gap as nine yachts gathered for the start of what was just the CYC's 3rd Race to Mackinac Island and at the same time 13 yachts were getting ready for the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club's Annual Cruise up to Holland, Michigan.

If that wasn't enough action on the Lake Michigan waterfront, power boats were lining up for the Chicago Power Boat Club Race to Mackinac Island as well.

What was missing in the Mackinac Race were the two heavy hitters of the day Vanenna and Vencedor who had raced neck and neck the previous year up to the Island and were sitting this one out after the fallout of an alleged \$500 bet gone wrong.

The weather forecast was set with optimal winds out of the west at about 12 knots, when just before the start it did an abrupt and dramatic turnabout when a wicked northerly came in whipping up Lake Michigan into a frenzy.

But that wasn't the news of the day that had made all the papers. It was two "plucky" young ladies would "double-hand" on a 32 ft. centerboard sloop that had become the center of attention.

Chicago Yacht Club (CYC) flag member Miss Evelyn Wright and her cousin Sarah Carey on Lady Eileen that shocked the yachting world and had the audacity to dare begin a 330 mile trip "which brave men fear".

The CYC Race Committee reserved "the right to reject the entry of any that they do not consider a bonafide cruising craft, or that is in their judgment unseaworthy or otherwise unfit to make the race" and did not do so in the lady's case.

Miss Wright, then 28 was described (very chauvinistically) as "a pretty, dainty little woman, with a slender little figure and soft brown hair that curls in the wet lake breezes and wistful brown eyes but, is strong and supple but with hands



that were calloused and hard as any jack tars." (male sailor)

Miss Wright was asked whether she was afraid. "Oh, dear no! I have sailed I have sailed for 10 years ever since I was a wee bit of a girl. I'm game alright, and I'll get to Mackinac if the boat holds out."

With Wright on the tiller and Carey "manning" the sails, Lady Eileen was adapting to the changing conditions when an unexpected puff 3 seconds before the start forced her over early as she received the dreaded second gunshot from the RC and had to come about to restart a few minutes behind the others.

In a written account in the Chicago News Tribune the next day the ladies got the analyzed treatment of their every move that Caitlin Clark "enjoys" today.

"Miss Wright showed the quality of her metal as she saw that the wind was lighter outside the Harbor and could easily carry more canvas and sprang up to the main undoing the reef points. When all the little lines fastened down the reefs were cast off, she crept out on the boom with the "agility of a boy" unfastening the lashing."

"As Lady Eileen swung into the wind and the two girls ran forward to the mast, where the halyards were fastened to the pin rail as they quickly made the sheet adjustments and in a heartbeat the full mainsail was spread to the wind."

"There had been no confusion, no messing up the ropes." These were not "damsels in distress" this was done as



sailor-like and as a matter of fact as any racing crew could have done in a difficult maneuver.”

“After ensuring all was right, Miss Wright clad in her yellow oilskins disappeared down the forward hatch into the “green room” to grab another sail and hauled it on deck as she climbed out on the bowsprit as Lady Eileen plunged through waves as she quickly fastened on the emergency jib halyard then springing back to the mast, she hauled up the big jib and hauled down the little storm sail under the duress of a freshening breeze as they made their way with the fleet towards the Michigan shore.”

Beforehand Miss Wright had commented; “that I would have liked to have another girl with me. It makes the work pretty hard on just two of us, especially if we were to handle the canvas much or if we run into bad weather. It means a long watch for both of us!”

“In bad weather I always have two on deck all the time. We had expected to have a third member of the crew with us, but she could not go. She was not afraid. She just couldn’t go.”

By this time of the race the schooners Mistrial, Hawthorne and Alice had made distance on the others, though the Hawthorne, somewhere between St Joseph and South Haven ran aground and lost 3 ½ hours before the crew managed to get her going again.

It ended up being the slowest Race to Mackinac in history as Mistral's elapsed time was 94 hours, 10 minutes.

“Around the Chicago Yacht Club members expressed no anxiety for the Lady Eileen and her fair crew,” said “Tommy” Atkin, who was once a candidate for Commodore. “There are a whole lot of sailors around here who don't know half as much about a boat or Lake Michigan as she does.”

“She's got nerve, knowledge and wonderful endurance. She brought Lady Eileen, which was originally a gift from her brothers over from Macatawa once in a gale. She'll get there, but the breezes will have to be kind to her little boat.”

As the race progressed and the weather worsened, Lady Eileen, Siren and La Rita made their way towards South Haven, Michigan, potentially to seek refuge from the storm. It was reported that Lady Eileen was in distress and needed assistance. Skipper George Peare on La Rita which was also disabled went out in search her and her crew. They found Lady Eileen “waterlogged and helpless a few miles offshore. The ladies had climbed on the cabin trunk and were sitting there waiting for rescue or for the boat to sink.”

Once in port at South Haven, the boat was bailed and dried out, as Misses Wright and Carey rested up. They then started back out for Mackinac Island as Lady Eileen finished the race, be it two weeks later to receive a trophy for finishing 2nd in their Class.

“We will stick in the race the whole month of August and reach Mackinac even if there is a stitch of canvas left to sail the boat,” said Miss Wright. “Since leaving South Haven we have had fair weather and we expect to reach our destination in another week.

Later that summer off Mackinac Island during a storm, Lady Eileen was being buffeted severely by the high wind, and Miss Wright was having difficulty in tacking toward the shore.

Sighting the girl at the helm in distress and fearing that her boat would be capsized Andrew Hey Crawford on his boat Nanine moved his 110 ft. yacht toward her in the hope of being of assistance as a favorable shift in the wind took the smaller craft quickly in towards the shore.

After the rescue the romance began, and they were married a short time later in St Joseph, Michigan. Evelyn was from Highland Park. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and part of the Suffrage Movement for Women’s Rights. After a few years of marriage and two children, she divorced Crawford in somewhat “sensational” fashion and moved up to Saugatuck, Michigan.

The Crawford Transportation Company was started with eventually 3 steamships including the Arundle and Tennessee which ran from Chicago to Saugatuck. She was a charter member of the Saugatuck Yacht Club in 1934 and her son Robert “Bob” Crawford was the first Commodore. The Club raced Papooses and Evelyn’s was named Ruth, she also owned a Lightning Thetis, a 39 ft. sloop Sun Dog II and Cabin Cruiser Shiawasee.

She certainly broke barriers as she lived her life in Saugatuck for more than 50 years, giving back to the community in many ways, on and off the water. She passed away in 1966 at the age of 89 and is buried in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago.

By the way, Erin owned and raced by Thomas H Bullock won the powerboat race to Mackinac Island in just over 38 hours and Vencedor which skipped the Mackinac Race, won the race to Macatawa. ★

\* Parts of this story are from accounts or content from the Chicago News Tribune, the Sun, the Chicago Sunday American, the CYC's The First Hundred Years, There will Always be a Mackinac Race, Chicago History Museum and the History of the Saugatuck YC.