

Sam Cahoon and His Mae Win

John Valois

Samuel Thomas Cahoon was born in Woods Hole in 1878, at the Foster Farm House on Church Street. His father, Alden Cahoon, had been an offshore fisherman in the Grands' Banks cod fishery before coming to Woods Hole in 1870 to supervise the building of the steamboat dock. The dock is still in place although rebuilt many times over the years. Alden Cahoon married Rebecca Lewis Hinckley of Juniper Point shortly after construction started on the timber and stone dock. They moved to the Farm House a few years later.

At the age of 5, Sam was ready for his first single-handed sail. His father had bought a small sailing skiff and taught him the fundamentals of sailing at Little Harbor. Years later when talking about his first sail, he mentioned that he was tied in so that he could not fall overboard. These were very happy days when he was allowed to sail alone.

In 1893 Alfred C. Harrison came to Woods Hole with his family to establish a magnificent summer estate on the east side of Little Harbor which he enjoyed for 20 years. His wealth had been made in the sugar cane and tobacco industries in Cuba where he owned large tracts of land. Immediately small boat sailing captured his interest. He bought a 25' catboat, a 21' waterline sloop called *Quakeress* and a spritsail. Soon informal spritsail racing took place from Mr. Harrison's dock. His son Alfred became a very enthusiastic sailor, joining the Beverly Yacht Club where he raced *Quakeress*.

About this time Sam Cahoon began taking part in the Sunday afternoon spritsail racing. At the age of 15 he won a race competing against thirteen other spritsails.

The following summer he was offered a job as "boat boy" which consisted of maintaining the boats and crewing for the Harrison family. He was also playing tennis at this time and later taught the family's younger children to play.

Following his graduation from Lawrence High School in 1896, he became sailing master and professionally skippered many races at the newly commissioned Woods Hole Yacht Club. His parents moved to Monument Beach the following year and Sam moved onto the Harrison estate. In 1902, Mr. Harrison bought from the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company one of the finest designs of Nat Herreshoff, a New York Yacht Club 30 footer. These boats were 46' overall on



Sam Cahoon at the dock next to his fish market.

deck. They were powerful, graceful gaff rigged sloops that needed a crew of six.

She was christened *Quakeress II* and took part that year in the Beverly Yacht Club's challenge for the Seawanaker Cup at Newport, R.I. Captain Sam Cahoon skippered these races taking two firsts and a second in a three race series bringing the Cup to the Beverly Yacht Club. The class was very popular on Buzzards Bay attracting 13 new owners including Charles Richard Crane, owner of *Anita*.

Quakeress II was so successful that Mr. Harrison requested that Captain Cahoon have the boat prepared for shipment to Cuba for the winter regattas. Postcards and letters from Cuba to his parents tell more about his winter racing,

By 1913, Mr. Harrison's health had failed and he found less time for racing. The family sold the summer estate and did not return to Woods Hole.

At the age of 37 Sam felt that retiring from the tensions of yacht racing was a well earned change. He bought in 1915 from Walter O. Luscombe the Harbor View Fish Market next to the dock that his father built. Two years later he married Elsie Gardner who had been a classmate of his at Lawrence High School.

Sam Cahoon did not return to small boat racing until the Woods Hole Yacht Club was reactivated. His three daughters, Cynthia, Frances and Rebecca were all avid sailors by this time. They were taught to sail by their father in Eel Pond. He purchased the *Whiz*, a Cape Cod Knockabout and the old thrill and delight in winning races returned once again. In almost gale force conditions he won the Cape Cod Knockabout championship in 1935 with Cynthia and a crew from the Fish Market. This was his first regatta since 1912. He repeated as Class Champion in 1939 at Winaumet Bluffs Yacht Club (Pocasset) and again in 1941 and 1951 in regattas held at Woods Hole. It should be mentioned that business concerns at the Market prevented his competing on a regular basis.

He enjoyed heavy weather sailing knowing that his special talents could not be equaled by others. He shared very willingly his personal views on how boats should be sailed in various conditions.

In August of 1952 Sam T. Cahoon sailed his last race in *Mae Win*. He finished first in a close race without the ever present pipe in his mouth. He had suffered a fatal heart attack. His joy of sailing and his enthusiasm for small boat racing were his legacy to the many who thought him "simply the best."



Sam Cahoon in his *Mae Win*, Aug. 10, 1947. Cahoon Collection. Courtesy WHHC.



Knockabouts racing in Vineyard Sound. Cahoon Collection. Courtesy WHHC.