

# The Centennial History of the Woods Hole Yacht Club

*John Valois*

## PART I

### The Early Yacht Club 1896-1912

The summer of 1996 will celebrate the centennial of the Woods Hole Yacht Club which has enjoyed a hundred years of history richly connected to memorable occasions, deserved achievements and abundant pleasures that come only from yachting. Yachting in America was an outgrowth of Civil War prosperity along coastal urban areas. The deep water seaports of New York and Boston enjoyed extraordinary maritime growth during this period and shipping success rapidly established them as the financial capitals of the nation.

Both regions were fortunate to have many miles of surrounding coastlines. The natural beauty of these shorelines with their associated picturesque coves, harbors and bays encouraged the development of the "Summer Cottage," as a unique part of summer resorts in America. The yacht club was ideally suited for the leisurely life of summer.

The New York Yacht Club characterized the era of formal yacht club development in this country. Founded in 1844, the New York Yacht Club established a standard of yachting etiquette that has been generally accepted as a basis of yacht club protocol in this country.



Spritsail fleet readying for race at Yacht Club, ca. 1900. Crowell Collection. Courtesy WHHC.

The Boston Yacht Club was commissioned in 1866 as the first New England yacht club. Within a decade thirty-five additional clubs had been established along the New England coast. The growth of Buzzards Bay as a principal yachting center began at Wings Neck in Pocasset where the Beverly Yacht Club established its first clubhouse in 1872. Both New Bedford (1877) and Mattapoisett (1889) were commissioned before Woods Hole. Geographically, Woods Hole was an exceptional location for a yacht club. It had a sheltered deep water harbor, a newly active summer resort and was central to many of the finest cruising areas.

The *Falmouth Enterprise* reported in late July of 1896 as follows: "There is a movement on foot among the residents of this place who are interested in yachting which will soon result in the organization of the Woods Hole Yacht Club. Horace Crowell and Walter O. Luscombe are the prime movers in the enterprise. It is the intention of those having the matter in charge to build a 150 foot pier from Bar Neck wharf and erecting a modern clubhouse in the immediate vicinity. No better harbor for yachts can be found between Provincetown and Newport than the waters off Bar Neck wharf afford. The anchorage is of the best, and there is a sufficient depth of water at all times to allow the largest yachts to enter. The harbor is well protected by the hills from heavy winds. There are many fast boats here and all the boatmen have taken a deep interest. Commodore John Malcolm Forbes of Naushon will probably be identified with the movement." An exploratory meeting on July 10, 1896 to determine the feasibility of constructing a yacht club was held with excellent attendance and enthusiasm for the project.

Once assured that there was sufficient interest to proceed with an incorporators meeting, acting commodore James K. Purdom arranged a meeting for August 4 at the office of Horace Crowell on Bar Neck wharf. (The Bar Neck wharf property comprised all of the

present waterfront area owned by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Water Street.)

Many residents of the newly developed Penzance Point summer community attended the founders meeting. Alexander Ferris, Edgar Harding, Henry K. Dyer, and Henry Hibbard were early yacht club supporters. Attending from the village were Charles Grinnell, fisherman, John Veeder, boat captain, Brahm Norton, ship's carpenter and Franklin Gifford, painting contractor. This group made up some of the most skilled small boat sailors in the area.

Walter Luscombe and Horace Crowell were influential business leaders in the Woods Hole community. Mr. Crowell owned most of the Bar Neck Company property which included the site chosen for the yacht club. Edgar Harding was elected Commodore. His motor yacht, the 108' l.o.a. (length overall) *Montclair* was the most impressive yacht in Great Harbor and became the flagship of the squadron. Mr. Crowell offered a piece of property for the yacht club which was gladly accepted. The location of the property was directly across the street from the candle factory, a stone building which is owned today by the Marine Biological Laboratory. The financial arrangements for the operation of the yacht club were explained by treasurer Walter Luscombe. A Board of Trustees would act as shareholders and own the assets of the club. Members would pay an annual dues that would be held by the shareholders. The fiscal strategy was adopted and Mr. Luscombe was praised for his part in preparing the plan.

The construction of the yacht club was completed in the late spring of 1899. Commodore Dyer hosted a gala celebration attended by the Falmouth selectmen, flag officers from other yacht clubs and invited village residents.

The clubhouse featured a nautical motif. It was set out on pilings about 200' from the shore. Wide promenade decks led to the floats. An observation area

located on the second deck had a commanding view of the harbor.

The racing classes consisted of a handicap class for catboats. They raced on Sunday afternoons with the spritsails; these races were the main event for the large crowd that regularly came to the yacht club to enjoy the competition. Friendly rivalries developed adding more zest to the racing. In time, unforeseen problems developed within the handicap class and spritsails. Catboats were too difficult to handicap because of their major differences in design. The class eventually voted not to race and became a part of the spectator fleet. The spritsails were racing as a one-design class although there were very clear differences in their performances. As competition among the spritsails increased, the trend toward custom designs also attracted attention. Nat Herreshoff was commissioned to design a spritsail for Mr. Harrison that was called *Gee*. She was built to very light scantlings and was extraordinarily fast, so much so that the race committee decided to separate racing spritsails from those designed as working boats. The designated "fisherman's class" of heavier working boats raced in the second division. It was a temporary solution that eventually failed.

Other problems arose among the membership concerning the dues structure. There were financial expenses that were attached to the general dues statements as assessments. Many members found this practice arbitrary and unnecessary.

The level of dissatisfaction grew to the point that all social and racing events were cancelled in the summer of 1910. Commodore Franklin Gifford offered many opportunities for conciliation without success. A motion was made by the membership to decommission the yacht club until such time that activities might be continued in a friendlier situation. It took another twenty years before that happened. Charles Richard Crane of Juniper Point generously accepted the

responsibility for the outstanding shares. In a move of good will, two-thirds of the Trustees offered their shares without compensation. Mr. Crane paid all invoices and in the following year, 1912, he gave the property and clubhouse to the Marine Biological Laboratory.

## PART II

### The Informal Years 1912-1930

"The war is over and everybody is prosperous," crowed *The New York Herald* in 1919. Those decades following World War I were years of continued enthusiasm for water sports. Canoeing, rowing, swimming and small boat sailing reflected the nation's growing recreational interests. Among the wealthy, a return to the building of magnificent yachts revived the golden era of yachting and crowned the social ambitions of the times.

Increased prosperity, combined with the nation's passion for leisure activities, prepared the way for development of small one-design sailboats. At an earlier time, there were strong prejudices against owning a boat exactly like your neighbor's. It was unthinkable for a person of means not to have a custom design. The new vogue for fast one-design sail boats had very definite advantages. Costs could be very much reduced though construction efficiency. If a custom designed boat performed poorly its owner could enjoy visits to his friendly naval architect. Serious disagreements involving the use of handicap rating systems had been a major factor in the decline of small boat handicap racing. The problem was much improved with the advent of one-design class racing.

Throughout the twenty-five year period of informal activities at the Woods Hole Yacht Club, there had been no loss of interest in maintaining a fashionable style of yachting. Edgar Harding's steam yacht *Montclair*, crewed by six professionals, set the standard for Great Harbor. In later years he preferred the peace



This picture of *Volunteer* is a fine example of the work of Boston Marine photographer Nathaniel Stebbins. She was a white cutter when she defended the America's Cup in 1887. Following a collision in 1891 she was lengthened a bit, rigged as a schooner and painted black. Courtesy the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

and quiet of sailing and purchased a hundred foot schooner yacht which was christened *Saxon*. After World War I service with the Navy, she was replaced by another lovely black schooner *Kwasind*, l.o.a. 84'.

The steam yacht *Elsana*, was owned by Gates McGarrah of Penzance Point who moored in front of his majestic boat house in Great Harbor. The boat house was lost in the hurricane of 1938, but Long House which had been his residence for almost twenty years remains the dominate summer cottage on Penzance Point.

The trend toward large schooners, built to yacht quality, peaked during the period of the "twenties." At

Naushon Island, Ralph E. Forbes' enormous schooner *Merlin* was a focal point for the small boat spectator fleet on a Sunday afternoon as she got underway from Hadley Harbor. The ultimate attraction for the spectator fleet was the 106' l.o.a. Sloop *Volunteer*. She had successfully defended the America's Cup for the nation in 1887. She was sold to John Malcolm Forbes by his close friend, General Charles Paine of Boston. *Volunteer* was a great favorite at Naushon and was kept by Mr. Forbes until his death in 1906.

Sailing emphasis shifted from Great Harbor and Naushon to Little Harbor, Woods Hole, with the arrival of Newcomb Carlton, the President of Western Union. His first yacht was a British cutter, *Vendetta*, which was of traditional English design . . . long and narrow. The American designed schooner appealed to Mr. Carlton for its beauty and sailing ability. In 1911 he brought *Sunshine*

to Little Harbor and sailed her until World War I when he bought *Charmian* a smaller schooner of the Seawanaka Class 58' l.o.a. He found her too small and uncomfortable. She was extensively sailed by his son, the late Winslow Carlton.

On Buzzards Bay, the Beverly Yacht Club had attracted the most avid sailors who enjoyed racing. Two families from Little Harbor raced successfully and regularly at Wings Neck. William Frazier Harrison's *Quakeress II*, usually skippered by her professional, Sam Cahoon, was a New York 30 class gaff rigged sloop. Anita was another New York 30 owned by Charles R. Crane and sailed by his son Richard.

This class of twelve boats at Beverly Yacht Club offered the most exciting and competitive sailing on Buzzards Bay.

Following Seward Prosser's purchase of the Harding estate on Penzance Point, yachting traditions returned to Great Harbor in the "grand manner." Mr. Prosser was a complete yachtsman who enjoyed all aspects and the whole ambience of sailing. In the minds of many, his two yachts, *Medora* and *Constance*, were unequalled for their exquisite lines and exceptional sailing ability. *Medora* was designed by William Gardner and built at City Island, New York. *Medora's* lines were similar to the New York 50 class; however, her subtle differences made her incomparable. She was sold back to Long Island Sound in 1924 where she entered the racing fleet. The sadness felt in Woods Hole was short lived, for in the following year a breathtaking black schooner named *Constance* appeared on *Medora's* mooring. She was a knockabout schooner of



Sam Cahoon, yacht captain for the Harrison family, Church Street. Cahoon Collection. Courtesy WHHC.



Black staysail schooner *Constance*, owned by Seward Prosser of Penzance Point. Courtesy WHHC.

90' l.o.a. and with her came the same crew from Tollesbury, England which had served on *Medora*. All was well with the Woods Hole waterfront and Mr. Prosser was once again a hero.

Geoffrey Whitney owned a number of large yachts called *Gosling* of various designs. *Gosling II* was a large motor sailor with schooner rig which her owner preferred to power rather than to sail.

Nobody used his yachts more than Dr. George Jewett of Penzance Point. His 60' schooner *Marilyn* was a classic black Gloucester design. After many years of pleasurable sailing she was replaced by the cutter,

*Zaida*, once belonging to the famed sailmaker and yachtsman, Colin Ratsey.

After World War II Great Harbor continued to host, in a much more limited way, the opulence of the golden era. Richard King Mellon brought a revival of the times with two motor yachts called *Cassiar*. The second was a great tribute to the wooden boat building traditions of the Maine yard of Goudy and Stevens. Launched in 1968 as a magnificent example of a grand yacht, she stayed in Woods Hole until the death of Mrs. Mellon. *Cassiar* was Woods Hole's last worthy memory of an era of towering ambitions and majestic yachts.

## PART III 1930-1996

### The Years of Revival

The Woods Hole Yacht Club had never truly ceased operations during the two decades of inactivity. The yachts of Little and Great Harbors had frequently flown the burgee of the yacht club. Following the official closing of the clubhouse, in 1910, Mr. William Harrison of Little Harbor continued to sponsor the club's most popular annual events, the clambake and catboat race. Other events were conducted at the Anchorage of Henry K. Dyer and Gladheim, the estate of James P. Warbasse at the end of Penzance Point. It was quite apparent that yachting could be an activity without the need of Commodores and clubhouses. The essentials were boats, docks and a spirit of will-  
ingness.

By 1930, long smoldering interest in revitalizing the yacht club had become pervasive. All of the reasons for disbanding decades ago were now lost and forgotten memories of a previous time. At the request of Mrs. Murray Crane four past members agreed to meet at the Western Union office on July 12, 1930. Past Commodore Franklin Gifford chaired the meeting. Mrs. Crane explained the need for reactivating the yacht club. Speaking for the younger members who

were in the crowded office were George Clowes, Eric and Vera Warbasse, Frank Frost and Comstock Glaser, all excited by the prospect of a revitalized yacht club. Mr. Gifford made a motion to transfer all of the past assets, including the right to the Woods Hole Yacht Club name, to the new Officers and Governors. Mrs. Crane was elected to the office of Commodore and at her suggestion Mr. Edward Norman was elected Secretary/Treasurer, one of the most fortunate events for the yacht club's future development. Mr. Norman's vision for the yacht club was clear. It would be a vigorous racing and sailing club. Social functions would be of minor importance. Handicap racing would be discouraged and there would be a limit of just four one-design classes. His energy and dedication were indispensable factors in the rapid success and growth of the club. His strong position on how one-design classes were to be selected led to the acceptance of the S-boats, Cape Cod Knockabouts, Buzzards Bay Knockabouts (Herreshoff twelve and a half footers) and the seventeen foot Cape Cod dory. All of these classes were already sailing at Woods Hole in various numbers. The Herreshoff twelves were extremely popular throughout all of Buzzards Bay.

A letter of wonderful insight regarding the revival of the yacht club was written by Dr. George H.A. Clowes, Jr. shortly before his death in 1988. Dr. Clowes was one of the most ardent and capable young sailors in the middle thirties. His S-boat *Aeolus* was a frequent winner in the class. His strong imprint on cruising boat handicap racing in this area has had no equal to the present time. His ownership of *Sirocco* and *Golden Hind* convinced him that he was too committed to top level racing to own slow cruising boats. In 1957 he had *Aquila* built in Sweden with the hope of a successful Bermuda race. She was a superb boat but could not overcome the vagaries of that race. In 1972 he sailed the ocean race to Spain with *Shearwater*. She was dismantled en route and was forced to return for a new mast. Following repairs she contin-



ued the crossing and later that summer entered the famed British Fastnet Race. Always intrigued by the current trend in yacht design, Dr. Clowes had *Challenge* built in Finland from designs by his favorite firm, Sparkman and Stevens. His last boats were *Peregrine* and *Alacrity*, one for cruising in Europe and the other for racing in home waters.

His letter is as written: "In 1929 when I was twelve years old, my father purchased through the good offices of Captain Robert Veeder, a 17' dory. He brought a number of them from Wareham to Woods Hole. She was called *Dorine* and that summer was the start of real happiness. At a meeting in Mrs. Murray Crane's house, it was decided that the Cape Cod Knockabout and dory classes would race together. In the early days Dr. Raymond Montgomery and Charles Wheeler were my crew. Arthur and Wistar Meigs had a similar dory. We had many good races but the dories were slower than the knockabouts so that any win by a dory was a great triumph. Mrs. Crane made her motor launch *Limulus* available as a race committee boat. She was under the command of Captain Bosworth. Mrs. Crane frequently watched the races from the deck of *Limulus*, with her parasol if the weather were too sunny. Mr. Frost's boat house, with its large floats, at the entrance to Penzance Point was used for headquarters. Everyone tied their dinghies to this



Mrs. Harrison and son sailing with Sam Cahoon, their boatman, on left. Cahoon Collection. Courtesy WHHC.



Woods Hole 17' dory, designed for junior racing by Wareham Shipbuilding Co. John Veeder brought four to WHYC. George Clowes, Hugh Montgomery, Isabel Emery and Wistar Meigs raced them. Courtesy Woods Hole Yacht Club.

dock. Meetings were held at Mrs. Crane's living room or at Mr. Frost's boat house. As the years went by, the S-boats were owned by Mr. Norman, Dr. Harold Bradley, John Gifford, Francis Bartow and others in Woods Hole. In Quissett, Isabel Emery, Harold Keith, Charles Rogers and Lawrason Riggs of Naushon Island were owners. We raced with a few Wianno Seniors in the Wednesday series at Woods Hole. On Saturdays, the Quissett Yacht Club ran the more important races. One's lasting impression is that of sun, southwest winds and glorious good times."

Having the deserved reputation as one of the finest racing sailors in the area, Sam Cahoon had been prominently associated with the yacht club at the turn of the century as the professional racing captain for William Harrison. In 1915 Captain Cahoon bought the Harbor View fish market in Woods Hole and temporarily left yacht racing until 1932 when he joined the Cape Cod Knockabout class at the yacht club. He maintained the same professional standards that were the custom of an earlier time. It was a thing of pure joy to watch the preparation of *Whiz* or *Mae Win*

being towed to the fishing dock before an afternoon race. Sails were bent, all lines ready as Captain Cahoon left his desk at the fish market, placed a pipe in his mouth and had the look of a man in heaven as he walked to his boat.

Another long time Woods Hole resident, Prince Crowell, joined the yacht club in 1936 at the suggestion of Sam Cahoon. His sailing experience came from boyhood, mostly as a catboat sailor. He had a job delivering mail and ship stores to the Red Farm House at Tarpaulin Cove. His knowledge of local conditions related to tides and wind were immense. Messieurs Crowell and Cahoon were both close friends and arch racing rivals at Woods Hole. Memories of the two masters racing are precious to all who saw them race.

The Woods Hole Yacht Club had no official clubhouse for the first few years of operation. Mr. Frost and Mrs. Crane generously gave the club the use of their boats and docks. However, treasurer Norman recognized that the imposition to the families was a potentially serious problem and also that the growth of the yacht club could be hindered. At the annual meeting in 1932, he proposed the need for a yacht club independent of its neighbor's good will. He had searched for possible sites and found that property owned by the U. S. Government was not being used and possibly could be purchased. In 1883 Joseph Story Fay had made a gift of property between Bar Neck and Great Harbor to the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries in recognition of his friend, Spencer Fullerton Baird, Commissioner of Fisheries. Confident that this land could be bought, Mr. Norman began fund raising. It was discovered that in the Deed of Gift were stipulations to the effect that should the Government not use the land for intended purposes, the land would revert to the Fay heirs and their descendants. A Bill was prepared for the Congressional transfer of the property provided the heirs were willing. Approval was received through a waiver of the stipulations for a

twenty-five year lease. In 1958 the lease would have to be renegotiated. Mr. Norman felt that this arrangement was the best that could be done at the time. On June 25, 1935 President Roosevelt signed the Bill two days before he left for a long summer vacation.

While waiting for the President's signature, Mr. Norman was assured that there were no impediments in the land purchase, and immediate action could be taken in locating contractors and obtaining permits for building the clubhouse, parking lot and stone pier with attached floats. H. V. Lawrence signed as the principal contractor for building and designing the clubhouse and adjacent parking lot. Mr. Ames of Falmouth was hired to build the floats and Sidney Lawrence agreed to construct the stone pier.

Mr. Norman had envisioned a commissioning ceremony for mid-July if work proceeded as planned. He



Commander Edward A. Norman during his wartime years, ca. 1944. Courtesy Andrew Norman and Nancy Lassalle.





Hurricane Carol losses in Great Harbor, seen from Woods Hole Yacht Club. Photo by Dorothy I. Crossley.

was called away to Europe on business unexpectedly in March believing that all details had been properly delegated. Upon returning a few months later, he found little progress had been made. Rumors had been heard that there was no available money for the contractors. Mr. Norman went into action and within a few weeks had obtained all the necessary permits, while at the same time raising \$5,000 including a gift of \$1,000 from Charles R. Crane, which covered the full cost of construction. The grand opening was held on August 27, 1935 attended by the club membership with invited guests.

The surprise hurricane of 1938 was the most damaging storm of the century for the New England coast. Many lives were lost and property devastation was of a magnitude not seen since. The Woods Hole Yacht Club was moderately damaged compared to the damage incurred in 1954 from hurricane Carol. The 1938 storm came late in the month of September which was

fortunate for the sailing fleet. It has only been in very recent times that the sailing season has been extended to five months or even more for some dedicated yachtsmen. The typical launching of the sailing season a few decades ago was July Fourth, and haul out was around Labor Day. At Woods Hole most of the small boats had been put away for the winter and only a few larger sailing auxiliaries were still in the water. Completely destroyed were *Quo Vadis*, *Molly* and *Maprema*. Dr. Jewett's schooner *Marilyn* was found on top of his boat house. The total financial damage done to the yacht club totaled \$6,000.

During the war years from 1941 to 1946 the yacht club activities were very much restricted to harbor racing and sailing. All boats were required to have identification cards which included the owner's fingerprints and photograph. The majority of the membership was serving in the war, but occasionally a few were able to come on brief leaves to enjoy a few

days of sailing. Drs. Eliot Clark and Robert Paine Bigelow maintained the spirit and morale of the club during these years. They held races for those who were able to participate. Dr. Clark wrote of these years in a summary of WWII years: "Like all of the other yacht clubs, the W.H.Y.C. has contributed to the U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine, a considerable number of young men and women. Besides these contributions of man power, several of the large yachts have been loaned or sold to the Navy. It is hoped that it will be obvious that this yacht club is very much alive. It is urged that all continue their membership in order that when the war is over, full activities may be resumed at once."

Elected Commodore in 1940, Mr. Norman could not complete his term when offered a commission in the U. S. Navy. For the next five years, Lt. Commander Norman's duties were filled by Dr. Clark who served as acting Commodore through 1947. In 1950 Dr. Clark was elected to a three year term as Commodore.

One of the most damaging east coast storms was hurricane Carol in 1954. The catastrophic effects of this storm paradoxically brought some long term benefits to the yacht club. Commodore Anson Barker saw the damage as too devastating for rebuilding and directed his attention to alternatives that might be available for club members. Most of the repairs could not be funded through normal borrowing methods because of lease restrictions. The prevailing atmosphere was mostly one of defeat and depression, though this attitude was not shared by Robert Otis Bigelow, Commodore elect at the age of twenty-five. Standing on broken timbers and smashed floats, all in a single pile, he took over the duties of leadership by announcing that there were no plans to abandon the yacht club and return the property to the Fisheries. An agenda was prepared for the annual meeting to be held as scheduled in a few days. The message was clear that there would be no plans other than to accept the challenge of rebuilding. The revitalization plan gained



Hurricane rescue at Woods Hole Yacht Club. Photo by Dorothy I. Crossley.

strong support at the annual meeting, and changed the mood to a spirit of joint effort. The two most serious problems were financing the reconstruction and finding boats to rebuild the fleets, especially the Knockabouts which had suffered severe damage. Throughout the winter months of 1955 major progress was made. A well organized financial campaign produced the necessary revenues to cover construction.

The Knockabout class was brought back to its original strength by new purchases or professional repairs to badly damaged boats. In June of 1955, the yacht club was commissioned with a completely rebuilt clubhouse and all floats and docks in place. There was almost no recognizable reminder that hurricane Carol had ever threatened the life of the Woods Hole Yacht Club.

With the probability of future storms and the large investment of capital to rebuild the damaged property, Commodore Bigelow decided once again to explore the possibilities of a land purchase from the U.S. Government. The conditions had not changed from the earlier attempt of past Commodore Norman. The approval from the membership to begin action on the purchase was very favorable. Vice Commodore Walter Garrey was given many of the executive responsibilities to proceed with Congressman Donald Nickerson in preparing a Bill for Congressional action. Government lawyers advised the yacht club of critical risks that would have to be assumed should the yacht club wish to go ahead with the purchase. The purchase could not be completed under present regulations unless the property was auctioned to the highest bidder, and the Government would retain all rights to the property in times of national crisis. The yacht club decided to take all risks and file the Bill. In 1962 a Government letter informed the yacht club that the land would be sold to them at fair market value. The assumptions that no heir or descendant of Joseph Story Fay would object to the sale, and that no bidder

would be interested in property that could not be sold with a clear title were both correct. The Woods Hole Yacht Club had its property and only needed the signature of President John Kennedy to complete the transaction.

The financial reserves had been kept untouched for a number of years pending the outcome of the land purchase. It was time to begin the expansion of the waterfront facilities in an effort to accommodate a rapidly growing membership. The interest in boating surged during the fifties, principally due to fiberglass boats. The opportunity to own an inexpensive trouble free boat was an irresistible temptation. The Cape Cod Knockabout Class entered into agreements with builders of fiberglass boats to provide a quality reproduction of the wooden boat. By 1962 the pilot Knockabouts had demonstrated their ability to race evenly with wooden boats. Orders were placed at the level of more than ten boats annually for a number of years. The majority of new owners in the Knockabout Class came from the scientific community in Woods Hole.

The great benefit to the yacht club membership from this group was their active participation in yacht club administration and racing. Fifteen of the last seventeen commodores came from the Knockabout class, and of this group nine were from the scientific community. For many years the racing fleet of Knockabouts averaged about twenty-five boats for the Sunday series races. During the peak years of racing as many as seventeen races, including the special races, comprised the summer schedule.

The strength of the Knockabout Class dominated all aspects of the yacht club during these years. Dr. John Buck introduced a program for children's sailing which emphasized basic seamanship and eventually racing. His daily supervision of the program included direct participation in lectures and teaching. The present day sailing programs are well attended and highly regarded.

Commodore James Mavor, although an early member of the Knockabout class, turned his attention toward the development of a high performance class. As a trained naval architect, he was very much aware of the search for speed through light construction. He demonstrated the ability of such boats by the purchase of a Jolly boat and later a Flying Dutchman. Neither class appealed to the average sailor. While in England Commodore Mavor noticed a small boat called a Mirror which had great appeal to him. He had a kit shipped to Woods Hole. The design of this boat favored the sailing conditions of the area and was an outstanding small boat for racing. The class membership in Europe had soared to an incredible 10,000 in the first few years of building. For a while it was the largest class in the world with numbers over a 100,000. Woods Hole had been waiting for an appealing small boat class that could be a children's boat as well as one suitable for adult dinghy racing. The Mirror class was a recognized success and in a few brief years about 25 boats were being sailed off the beach at Great Harbor. The racing enthusiasts organized a Saturday morning series which remains very popular.

Lasers, Thistles and Javelins have also enjoyed periods of success over time. Past Commodore Tom Browne (1980-1981) promoted the Thistle Class expecting that its excellent sailing qualities and strong national organization might attract high performance sailors to Buzzards Bay conditions. For a number of years the class prospered enjoying new interest from invited guests, but in spite of all the dedicated effort to offer an alternative class, the sailing conditions controlled by the strong prevailing southwesterlies favored the Knockabout as the long term survivor.

Jonathan Leiby became Commodore during the period of transition from a small family yacht club to one representing a wide range of yachting interests. There were those who enjoyed living on their cruising boats and others who travelled long distances to sail

## COMMODORES 1896-1996

1. Edgar Harding	1896-1899
2. Henry K. Dyer	1899-1902
3. Franklin Gifford	1902-1903
4. Henry L. Howes	1903-1905
5. John Veeder	1905-1910
6. Robert N. Veeder	1910-1911

Yacht Club decommissioned: Franklin Gifford elected principal Trustee for duration of Club's inactivity. John Milligan Acting Commodore for this period. Subordinate Trustees elected were Walter Luscombe and Charles Grinnell

7. Mrs. W. Murray Crane	1930-1932
8. Frank Frost	1932-1935
9. Harold Bradley	1935-1939
10. Edward Norman	1940-1947
11. Eliot Clark (Acting Commodore)	1941-1946
12. Eliot Clark	1947-1950
13. Anson Barker	1950-1954
14. Robert O. Bigelow	1954-1958
15. Walter Garrey	1958-1962
16. Sears P. Crowell	1962-1964
17. James Mavor	1964-1966
18. Jonathan Leiby	1966-1969
19. John Valois	1969-1973
20. Harlyn Halvorson	1973-1976
21. John Darling	1976-1978
22. Bertram Silver	1978-1980
23. Thomas Browne	1980-1981
24. Peggy Clark Kelley	1981-1983
25. Barbara Garrey	1983-1986
27. Moise Goldstein	1986-1988
28. Paul Spens	1988-1990
29. Allan Gordon	1990-1993
30. Brian Switzer	1993-1995
31. Kate Foster	1995-

on the south side of Cape Cod. Commodore Leiby had the energy and ability to see what needed to be done and the skills to do it. The principal problem that needed fixing was the complication caused by population growth. There had been no attempt to limit membership although the subject had appeared a number of times on the agendas of the Board of Governors. Commodore Leiby's proposals were

greeted with a mixture of acceptance and concern. His recommendations for an enlarged parking area, a newly constructed cruising boat dock, relocation of floats and docks and the building of a marine railway for larger boats were of major significance to the treasurer. About the same time that the Board gave its final approval, the bulldozer was digging a larger parking lot, a steam crane was hammering piles, new materials were being off-loaded on the street and the redevelopment program was underway. Not since the days of Commodore Norman had there been such a crescendo of noise and activity.

The most amazing feature of this construction was that Commodore Leiby did it himself. He ran the bulldozer, repaired the steam crane, arranged for the waterfront permits, spread the concrete and occasionally rested. There were times when Dan Clark and his professional crew of dock workers came over to share in the spirit of fun. The achievements of Commodore Leiby solved a problem of increasing congestion and should not be forgotten.

In 1973 Commodore Harlyn Halvorson took office and promptly turned his attention to enlarging the sailing school, especially establishing programs for teenage sailors. He acquired a fleet of "420 college dinghies" for instruction purposes. The program was successful until the need for extensive repairs and other costs led to the cancellation of the program. His belief in the importance of social events inaugurated the Commodores Cocktail Party that continues as the club's most popular event.

For the next twenty years the progression of twelve commodores recognized that the yacht club was in a very favorable stable condition and needed a rest from further land transactions, hurricane devastation and building construction. These commodores, led by their Board of Governors, who were in turn advised by their membership of over six hundred individuals, became mainstream managers of policy and social

events. All of the commodores have been active sailors in both racing and day sailing.

In the present decade the most noticeable trend in yachting has been the preference for cruising over racing by many successful skippers. About seventy cruising boats are registered at the yacht club. Cruising has been the owner's principal use of the boat. A number of members have enjoyed successful cruising and racing: Albert Wilson, Nicholas Newman, Jim Clark and others. Albert Wilson has owned a succession of classic designs including a Pilot, Cal 40, Grand Banks and Pearson 35. Nicholas and Kathy Newman have raced their Morgan 38, *Katrina*, and cruised her to Europe and back.

The mysterious fleet of house boats that moor in an area referred to as "Sampan Village" are members loosely connected with the yacht club. They are waved at and spoken to on Saturday mornings during the Mirror dinghy races which use the water around the village. They are very curious about racing terms such as "You have no rights!" and "Do your circles!" It is a community of sublime thinkers and friendly members even if their boats are houses.

The distinction of being the centennial commodore of the Woods Hole Yacht Club goes to Kate Wilson, who is, in the present tradition of commodores, a Knockabout sailor. She is also the fourth woman commodore.

With pride, this centennial may be dedicated to the almost two thousand members who found some of their happiest memories in sailing at the yacht club. Deep appreciation must be given to the hundreds of committee members and officers who have served the yacht club. We owe much to the vision of the founders while we wonder if they ever thought there would be a centennial celebration.

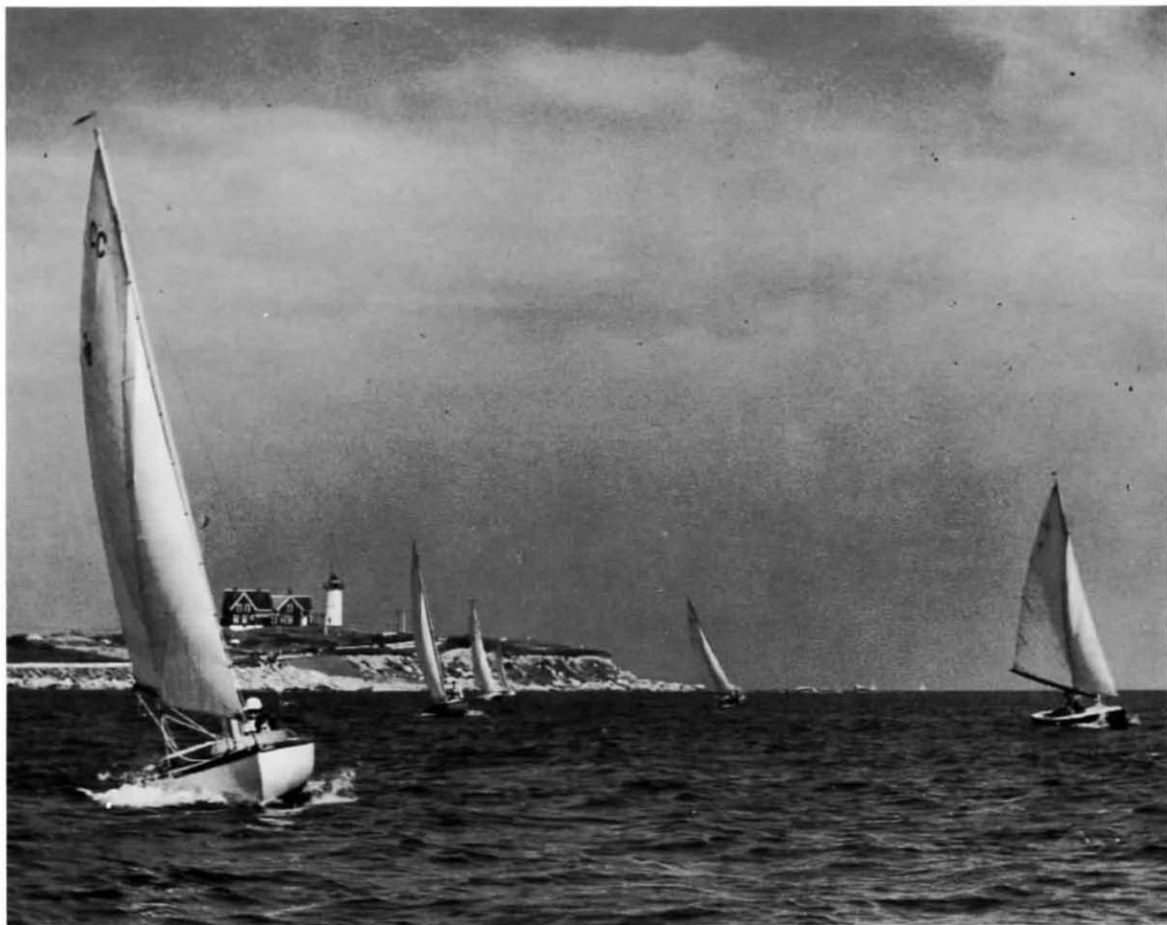
Looking into the future we know from life's experiences that changes will come from the most unex-



pected sources at the most unpredictable times. Boats today are certainly different from those boats that created Woods Hole Yacht Club history during its first century. We can predict that boats in the future will be sailed by computers with sails of a fabric yet to be invented using technical equipment that cannot be imagined. Technology will always find acceptance even as we honor tradition. The ocean will continue

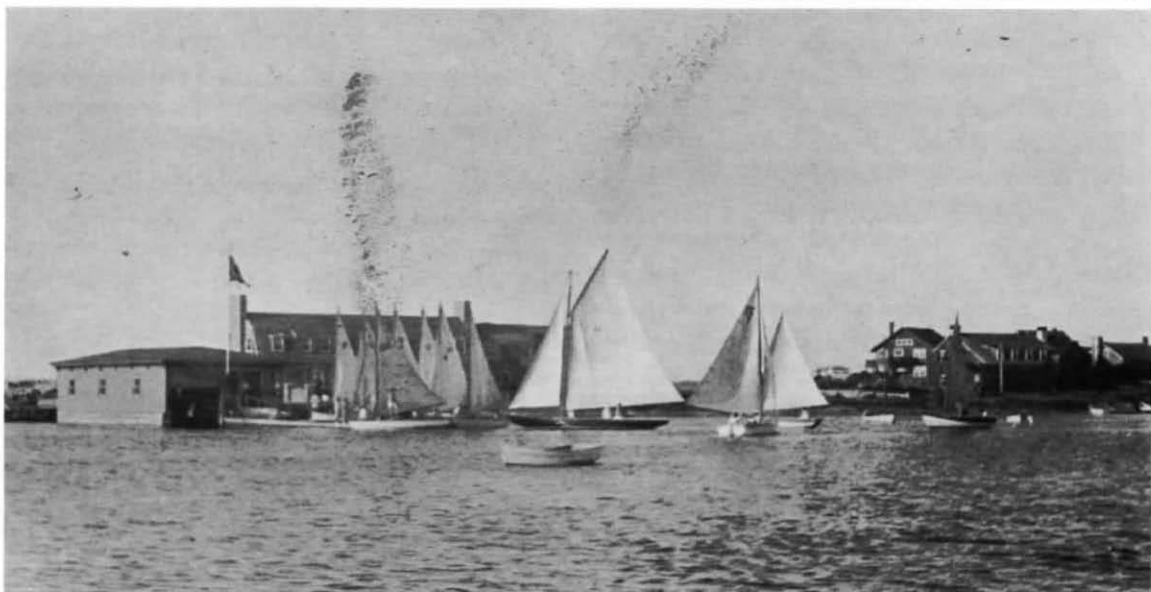
to impose new challenges and create great pleasure for all sailors. HAPPY BIRTHDAY LITTLE YACHT CLUB AND MANY MORE!

John Valois has lived, worked and sailed in Woods Hole for almost fifty years. His fascination for all aspects of the sea, especially its animals and plants, developed in early childhood. He is recently retired from the Marine Biological Laboratory where he directed the Department of Marine Resources for twenty years.

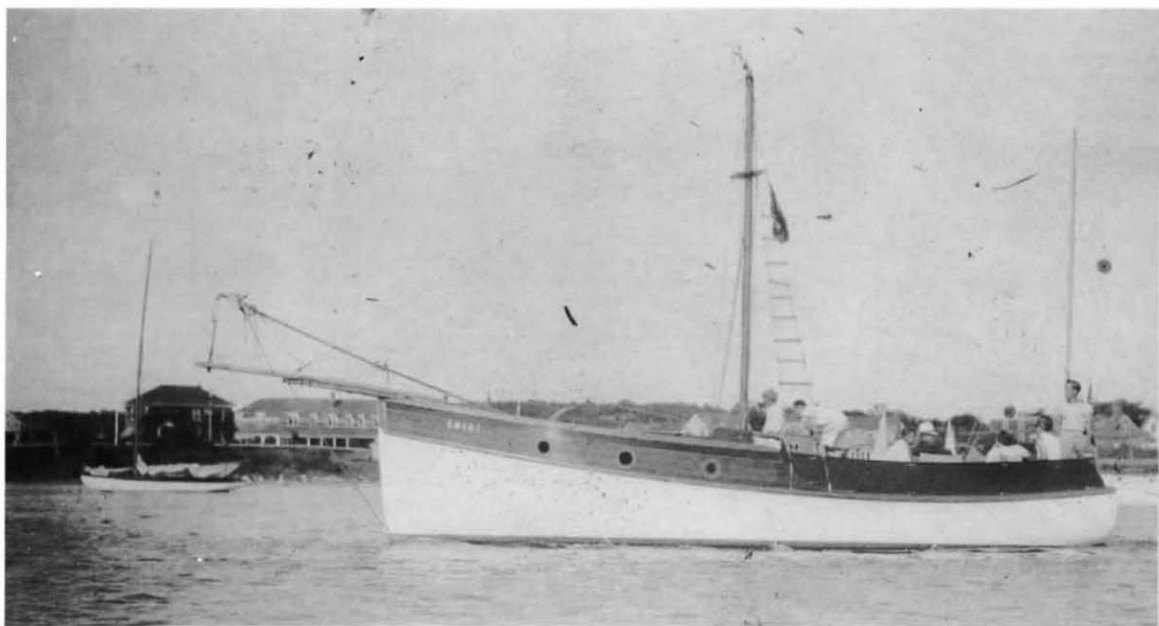


Cape Cod Knockabout race off Nobska. Photo by Dorothy I. Crossley.

## Woods Hole Yacht Club



Mrs. W. Murray Crane's boathouse, 1933. Gaff rigged sloop in center of picture is Eric Warbasse's Manchester 17'. Courtesy Woods Hole Yacht Club.



Committee Boat, *Limulus*, owned by Mrs. W. Murray Crane, coming in after a small boat race, 1933. Photo by Ralph Shein. Courtesy Woods Hole Yacht Club.

## in the '30s, Photo Essay



Water sports, Frost Boathouse on Penzance Point, August 30, 1933. Photo by Ralph Shein. Courtesy Woods Hole Yacht Club.



New York Yacht Club in Great Harbor. Tentatively identified boats are: schooner on left, *Roseway*; Seawanhaka class schooner next to her, Newcomb Carleton's *Charmian*; dark schooner is Dr. Jewett's *Marilyn*; white schooner, Phillip Case's *Onward III*; and the white schooner on the right is Russel Leonard's *Kelpie*. Courtesy Woods Hole Yacht Club.